

The War Within

Galatians 5:16-17; 1 Kings 1:5-8

Who has been your greatest rival—your fiercest opponent?

Concerning what happens when our passions within go unchecked, James writes: *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?”* (James 4:1-2)

Our greatest opponent is not our boss, it's not our spouse, it's not our neighbor or anyone else. It's not even the devil. Our greatest rival is not without, it's within. It's our sinful desires at war within us.

When we fail to recognize that our number one opponent is within, the focus that we need to live the Christian life will be in the wrong place. And sadly, many believers are not only failing to identify their greatest opponent, they are unfamiliar with the only person who can conquer the rebel, namely the Holy Spirit.

Main idea: Jesus wins the battle over opposing desires within through our communion with and dependence upon the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This morning we are going to examine the battle of desires within us, as explained in Galatians 5:16-17. To illustrate this internal battle, we are going to consider the rivalry that took place for the throne of David recorded in 1 Kings chapter one. By examining this account in the life of David, we are going to glean some lessons about dealing with the rivalry within our own hearts.

1. Acknowledge the rival/rebel king within

Lesson number one: acknowledge or be cognizant of the rival to the throne of your heart. Before diving into our text, it's important to see that Paul was writing to the Galatians about how to exercise their freedom in Christ. There were false teachers in the church who were teaching that one had to be circumcised, as the law of Moses instructed, to be justified before God.

Paul wrote to refute this false teaching and to remind the church that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus. But as Paul explains in verses 13, to be saved by grace doesn't mean that believers are free to indulge the sinful desires of the flesh.

Grace is not a license to sin. Rather, we have freedom in Christ by the power of the Spirit to serve God and one another in love (Galatians 5:13b). Freedom in Christ is not the liberty to do whatever we want, but the power to do what we ought to do through the Spirit.

Considering this context, Paul writes: *"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:16).

Again, to help illustrate what Paul is teaching here, I want us to look to the life of David in 1 Kings chapter one. While the aging and ailing David was confined to his bedchamber, Adonijah, one of his sons, conspired to usurp his father's authority and make himself king.

In verse five we read: *"Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.' And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him."* (1 Kings 1:5).

It's important to note that in addition to making himself king, Adonijah was also opposing God who already declared to David that Solomon would be the heir to the throne. Additionally, the rightful heir to the throne is significant both in David's time and for us in our day.

According to God's promises, David's kingdom would be established forever. This is true because Jesus will one day sit upon His throne to rule and reign forever (Luke 1:31-33).

So, there's a bigger picture here besides Adonijah's rivalry for the throne of David. He was also a rival to the throne, which by divine decree, belongs to Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Beloved, Jesus will one day sit on the throne of David to rule and reign on the earth. But until then, Jesus, through the indwelling Spirit,

already resides in the hearts of those who have received Him by faith as Savior and King.

Do you know that although the Holy Spirit is one of the three distinct persons of the Godhead, He's referred to as the Spirit of Christ in the New Testament (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:9). He's the Spirit of Christ because His primary ministry in us is to glorify Jesus (John 16:13-14).

As we will see more in a moment, to have victory over the flesh—the self indulgent life—the rival to the throne of our hearts, we must be intimately acquainted with the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force that we use or control. He is Christ in us and His presence is very personal. What's more, He is the rightful King to the throne of our hearts.

Like the rebel Adonijah, are you aware that there is a rival to the throne of your heart? The bible calls this rival the flesh, which speaks of our old sinful nature. “The word flesh in the New Testament is a term that goes beyond bones, blood, and muscle. It's a word—especially in Paul's writings—that speaks of life apart from God. The flesh is everything you were minus God. The flesh is everything you were before Christ became your Savior” (David Jeremiah). If you're saved, you have a new nature that wants to please God, but that old nature is still there.

When writing about how to deal with that old nature that wants to raise its ugly head in us all, Paul explained in Galatians 5:17: *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”* (Galatians 5:17).

In Romans 7, Paul also describes this struggle within when he wrote: *“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”* (Romans 7:21). In these two passages of scripture, the Apostle Paul described a war raging in a believers' body. He said that the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit within are in opposition.

And his own personal testimony was that when he wanted to do right, evil was present within him. Do you know the struggle that Paul is talking about? Are you aware of the rival and rebel in you that wants to control your life? Are you cognizant of the fact that your old nature still wants to be king?

In a sense, to be aware and acknowledge this struggle, is evidence that you've been made alive unto God through the regenerating work of the Spirit (Titus 3:4-5). Contrary to the notion that you're not supposed to struggle with sin when you come to Christ, the truth is this is when your struggle truly begins.

Before I came to Christ, I didn't give a second thought to the sins I committed. There was no contest in my life or a tug of war. But when I received Jesus by faith as Savior and Lord, that's when the internal struggles began. "When the Spirit of Christ took up residence in my body, He set up a kingdom that was opposed to the kingdom that was already there. And suddenly there was a war between these two kingdoms." David Jeremiah

Now before we look more into the victory we have in Christ, let's examine further the insight that God's word gives us about Adonijah's rebellion.

After explaining that Adonijah had exalted himself to be King, the word of God adds this significant commentary: ***His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?"*** (1 Kings 1:6a).

What does this significant insight into David's relationship with his rebel son mean? It means that David allowed his son to do whatever he desired. He never wanted to displease him—he never said, "no you can't" or "no you shouldn't."

Rather, it appears that David indulged his son or looked the other way and consequently he grew up with a sense of entitlement and coveted what didn't belong to him. How many of you know, like Adonijah, the

more you feed the desires of your flesh, the more your sinful appetites will increase.

It also appears that David not only failed to correct and discipline Adonijah, he didn't attempt to cultivate a loving and meaningful relationship with his son. Children need loving discipline to help bring moral restraint to their lives.

However, the ultimate goal of Christian parenting is not developing disciplined children, but to make disciples of Jesus. More than rules, children need a relationship with Christ—they need to know Him as the rightful King so that they might give Him the preeminent place in their hearts and lives.

And the same is true in our own personal lives. As the Apostle Paul exhorted believers in Romans 13:14: *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”* To keep our flesh, the old nature, in check, we must be decisive and even warlike. We must be severe. Jesus said, *“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away”* (Matthew 5:29).

We must not feed the flesh. We must not put ourselves in compromising positions where we can be tempted to engage in sexual sin. We must flee fornication. “He that would not fall ought not to walk in slippery places.” Rather, we must crucify the flesh through the Spirit and by our relationship with Christ.

2. Align with the rightful King within

So in addition to acknowledging the rival and rebel king within, we must also align with the rightful King within. Have you ever felt like the flesh has more pull in your life than the Spirit of God—that the old nature is getting the better of you?

Pastor David Jeremiah tells the story of a woman that walked into his office with a request that he said he would never forget. She walked up to his desk where he was working and handed him her bible. “I want you to take this,” she said with a sigh. “Why,” he asked her.

“What for?” “I’m turning it in,” she replied. “I’m quitting.” It was like a Police Officer turning in his badge and quitting the force.” She said, “You take this, Pastor. There’s no way I can live this life. I’m giving you my Bible back, and I’m not going to do this anymore.”

Have you ever felt that way? *Living the Christian life is too hard. It’s too much. I can’t do this anymore. No matter how hard I try, I keep falling into my old habit. I just can’t measure up.* I can understand that response. The demands of the Christian life are extremely difficult. In fact, they’re impossible. You can’t do it in your own power. And if you try to, you will get discouraged, disillusioned and you will burn out.

I’ve met a number of burned out- Christians. Maybe you’re one of them. Christians get burned out by trying to live for God or serve God in their own strength. For this reason and more, Paul wrote: *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”* Galatians 5:16

I know what it’s like to walk from my house to the church on Sunday morning, but what does it mean to walk by the Spirit or in the Spirit? In verse 25, to *walk in the Spirit* is translated, *keep in step with the Spirit*, which means to be aligned with the Spirit.

It’s important to note here that keeping in step with the Spirit doesn’t mean to keep up with the Spirit as if He is the pace setter in a marathon race. Rather, as verse 18 explains, walking in the Spirit has to do with being *led by the Spirit*. And when we are being led by the Spirit, we are walking in the light, in the truth, and in the power of the Spirit.

Remember, the Holy Spirit is not a force or an energy in the atmosphere that we use or control. He’s the third person of the Godhead who we must align with and give our allegiance to. He not only leads us in the way we ought to go, He gives us the strength to follow and to overcome the contrary desires of the flesh as we consciously depend on Him.

Now, if we are going to be led by the Spirit, we must know His voice. Remember, the Spirit is Christ in us and Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”* John 10:27

The primary way that the Spirit leads us and speaks to us is through His word. To become more and more familiar with the voice of the Spirit, we must become more and more familiar with His word. We cannot walk by the Spirit, unless we are immersed in the word of God through which the Spirit leads us, comforts us, corrects us, and convinces us.

Only as we walk by the Spirit can we overcome the pull of the flesh. But this will not happen if the word of God does not dwell richly in our hearts, if we spend more time feeding the flesh, and little time nourishing our souls in the scriptures.

In 1 Kings chapter one we learn also that after hearing of Adonijah’s rebellion, the prophet Nathan instructed Bathsheba, the wife of king David, to implore him about the rebellion. In verse 13, Nathan advises Bathsheba saying: *“Go in at once to King David, and say to him, ‘Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, “Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne”?’ Why then is Adonijah king?’* **14** *Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words.”* (1 King 1:11-14).

Nathan understood that the only measure that could be taken to overthrow the rebellion was for king David to install the rightful heir to his throne. The rightful king would have the power and authority to deal with the rival to the throne.

Similarly, there is a selfish nature present within each of us—a rival to the throne of our hearts, which must be dealt with prayerfully, strategically, and decisively.

When the rival within is not dealt with by aligning ourselves with the Spirit, as we are strengthened by His word, we will be controlled by our self-fish desires and inflamed emotions. Rather than helping to

bring harmony to our homes or the church, our self-centered desires and ambitions will be a constant source of strife, division, and conflict.

But when we walk in the Spirit, when we hear and our being led by the voice of the Spirit of Christ, in addition to overcoming the desires of the flesh, we will be the voice of calm in the storm, we will be the instruments that God uses to bring healing to fractured and broken relationships.

3. Adore the Reigning King within

Lastly, in addition to acknowledging the rival king within, and aligning with the rightful king, when we walk in the Spirit, we will adore the reigning King within. Besides being led by the Spirit, Paul's exhortation to *walk in the Spirit*, is associated with serving others in love (Galatians 5:13-15). Just two verses before, Paul writes: *"For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*
Galatians 5:13

I want to suggest to you that to walk in the Spirit is to walk in love. In fact, Paul gives that specific exhortation in Ephesians 5:2. He wrote, *"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* Ephesians 5:2

As we already noted, to walk in or by the Spirit means to be aligned with the Spirit. We must know the Spirit's voice through the word and rely on the Spirit to put to death the desires of the flesh. But we must do more than simply avoid making provision for the flesh, we must know the love of the Spirit. When we know His love personally, we will not live a self serving life, rather we will live a self sacrificing life of love for God and others.

Again, the Spirit's work in dealing with the rival within is illustrated in the life of David. In 1 Kings chapter one, David took the advice of the prophet Nathan and had Solomon installed as king. When Solomon, the rightful heir to the throne of David began to reign, his first order of business was to take care of the rival king and put him in his place.

After pleading with Solomon not to put him to death, Solomon spares his life but orders him to be confined to his house (1 Kings 1:49-53).

But sadly, Adonijah didn't stay quiet for long. Remember, what Adonijah needed most—what our children need most, what we all need most is not behavior modification, but a changed heart, a heart with new affections, loves and desires.

In 1 Kings chapter two, we also learn that although King Solomon appears to have confined Adonijah to his house, his heart remained unchanged. He was still conspiring to fulfill his evil and selfish desires and consequently, Solomon, had Adonijah put to death. Adonijah initially yielded to the king out of fear. But he did not reverence, honor, and love the king.

Likewise, receiving discipline and correction can bring a certain level of moral restraint to our lives. But true and lasting change comes when Christ through the Spirit becomes our life, when He becomes the object of our affections—when we love Him and adore Him above all.

When Christ in the person and power of the Spirit takes up residence in us, which is true of every believer, we are enabled to wage war against the flesh. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Romans 8:13).

The problem with us sometimes is that, like David with Adonijah, we are often too passive when it comes to dealing with our sinful flesh. We spend more time on social media sites, like Face Book, than we do seeking God's face in His book.

But we must not miss the fact that more than disciplining our flesh by avoiding compromising situations, we need to know the love of Christ through the Spirit. Remember, to walk in the Spirit is to walk in love. The Spirit is God and God is love. And the more communion we have with God through the Spirit, the more our affections for God and the things of God will increase.

Many are looking for immediate deliverance from their struggle with sin, when what they need is ongoing discipleship so that they come to know Jesus through His word. Remember, Adonijah had rules, but he didn't have a relationship. He feared Solomon but he didn't love Him.

Beloved, we need to know more than the rules of the Christian life through the Spirit, we need a relationship with the Spirit and know the love that only the Spirit can give. Unless we come to know the love of Spirit, who is Christ in us, we will not overcome the desires of the flesh.

I heard Pastor Adrian Rogers share once that the enemy is not trying to get a mature believer to do a bad thing, but to do a good thing in the flesh. The enemy is not going to come at me at this stage of my life and try and tempt me to commit adultery against my wife. Can I tell you, I rather be tortured than to be unfaithful to my wife.

But what he will try and do is to get me doing good things in the flesh. He wants me busy doing ministry, counseling, and even preparing and preaching sermons in the flesh. He wants to get me so distracted with good things, that I neglect the best thing. The best thing is my relationship with Jesus through the Spirit that I must cultivate on a daily basis in prayer, in the word and in close fellowship with others believers.

When we get to operating in the flesh, when we are depending on our own abilities and our own strength to do even good things, whether it's preaching or leading worship, we become more susceptible to the temptations of the enemy, like adultery, like fornication, like pornography, like greed, like pride, like losing our temper. When we get in the flesh because we are relying on ourselves and not serving out of the outflow of our love relationship with Christ, we will start making little compromises that over time lead to big disasters.

But when we are cultivating intimacy with Christ day by day, we will be more sensitive to the correction of the Spirit and will keep a short account with God. That is to say, we will be quick to seek God's

forgiveness so that we maintain close communion with Jesus through the Spirit. Immediate confession of sin to God and even to others who can speak truth into our lives, is key to walking in the Spirit and defeating the rival within.

Conclusion

Beloved, don't get in the flesh by relying on your own strength. Don't make provisions for the flesh. Walk by and align with the Holy Spirit. Get to know His voice in the word and in prayer so that you will be more able to detect the wrong voice.

The more you get to know Christ through the Spirit in the word and follow Him in dependence upon the Spirit, the more you will adore Him. And the more you know His voice and adore Him, the more you will be able to identify deceitful desires, overcome them and walk in the freedom of Christ.