



**LESSON 1:** "Winning the War Within"

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TEXT:** Galatians 5:16-25

### INTRODUCTION

There is an inward battle that continuously rages within the life of every believer. It is the conflict between good and evil, right and wrong, the flesh and the Spirit. This war is unremitting and fierce. The flesh and the Spirit are locked in active conflict with one another and neither will surrender. As a Christian, we can readily identify with Paul's words in Romans 7:23-24, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members". And we cry out with the Apostle, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He immediately gives the glorious answer, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Our text in Galatians 5 echoes and even expands the truths of Romans 7 & 8. We will learn from this text is that walking in the Spirit guarantees spiritual victory within and spiritual fruit without for every believer. Before we discover God's provision for spiritual victory, we need to get a contextual overview of this power packed book of Galatians.

### BACKGROUND TO GALATIANS

The churches of Galatia were filled with young Gentile believers. Paul had preached the gospel of justification by faith alone and many had trusted Christ. However, the Judaizers had come in and begun to teach something distinctly different than Paul that was deadly to these new believers' walk with God. They were being taught that salvation was through justification by faith plus works. In order to have eternal life,

they were being told, you must also be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic Law. So Paul writes this letter/epistle to denounce this deadly, false doctrine. In chapters 1 & 2, he vindicates his apostolic authority and the Gospel message he preached. In chapters 3 & 4, he explains and defends the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Salvation is not Jesus plus anything, it is Jesus Christ alone! In chapters 5 & 6, he gives practical instructions for our sanctification (Christian living). This is the section of the book we are looking at today.

The first 15 verses of this 5<sup>th</sup> division are Paul's explanation of the positional and practical truth of the liberty believers have in Christ. Galatians has been called both the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty" and the "Christian Declaration of Independence." Through salvation in Christ we have been set free from the bondage of sin and the law. But Paul quickly points out that Christian Liberty must always be defended from its two great enemies – legalism and license. Legalism (by its strict definition) is adding works to salvation. It is man's effort to keep the law so God will accept him. Christian liberty frees us from the bondage of legalism. We are not accepted of God because of anything we have done, but solely on the merits of Christ. The other enemy of liberty is license. This is the carnal mindset that says, "in Christ I am free to do as I please and live anyway I want." It is the "anything goes" attitude. Liberty should not be construed as license to do as one pleases; rather, one has become free to love one another. Liberty is not an excuse to indulge in the deeds of the flesh; rather, it provides the privilege of bearing the fruit of the Spirit by walking in dependence upon Him. Real liberty comes when Christ frees me *from* sin, not *to* sin. "Where legalism demands responsibility without freedom, license grants freedom without responsibility" (Philip Ryken). Christian liberty frees us from the power of sin and the law so that we might be free to serve in love (5:13). Paul tells us that by using our liberty to love and serve we are fulfilling the law (5:14). He warns that an abuse of Christian liberty, whether by legalism or license, results in Christian "cannibalism" (5:15). So in verses 16-25, we are shown the path to victory and peace, within and without, and that is by "walking in the Spirit" (5:16). The only way to be free from fleshly desires is to be sanctified by God's Spirit. His influence alone can prevent liberty from degenerating into license. He helps us hold on to our liberty without becoming either legalistic or licentious.

## THE CONFLICT (v.17)

There is a civil war being fought over slavery (to sin) and freedom (in Christ) within the heart of every believer. This battle began at the moment of salvation when the Spirit of God took up residence within you. An immediate conflict arose because there was already a prior tenant dwelling within. It is your flesh, that part of man that is always in opposition to the things of God. With the Spirit's indwelling us we are given a "new nature" that longs to please God, but our "old nature" is not completely eradicated and it desperately works to impose its will upon us. In essence, there is a vicious, internal battle for who will have the power and control of your life. Our text says the flesh "lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." This word *lusteth* is not here referring to sexual sin but is a broad term for a strong desire. The desires of the flesh and Spirit are polar opposites. Like two giant sumo wrestlers trying to push each other out of the ring or a giant, internal tug-of-war. The flesh desires to enslave you to sin, but the Spirit desires to free you to serve.

Scripture warns of three enemies of the believer – the **world**, the **flesh**, and the **Devil**. Someone has called them the external foe (world), the internal foe (flesh), and the infernal foe (Devil). Two are outward (world, Devil), one is inward (flesh). If the enemy and battle were only external the Christian life would be much easier, but there is the internal enemy that is relentless. It is our flesh.

**Illustration:** Cartoonist Walt Kelly had an old comic strip named "Pogo" (the Possum). He was famous for saying, "We have met the enemy and he is us." This is true of our spiritual experience as well. Our flesh is often our own worst enemy.

**Illustration:** C.H. Spurgeon told of a preacher boy who was very arrogant in his deportment yet gifted behind the pulpit. One Sunday this young man was preaching on the Armor of God. He spoke of the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet shod with gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit. Toward the conclusion of his sermon he boldly announce, "I am wearing the whole armor of God, where is the enemy, bring him on!" Spurgeon whispered, "He is inside the armor."



### A. *The flesh (v.17)*

The flesh is mentioned five times in these verses 16-25 (16, 17, 19, & 24). The flesh (*sarx*) is not referring to your skin and bones or hide and hair, but rather to that old sinful nature that still lives within. It *lusteth* against the Spirit (5:17). In other words, my flesh strongly desires the opposite of what the Spirit wants. As Ryken has said, "the flesh is the part of me that does not want what God wants, my corrupt human nature in all its weakness and depravity." And while the flesh has positionally been dethroned, it still fights to usurp its will on you and me. If we do not yield ourselves to the Spirit, the flesh naturally takes control of our lives. So much so, that "ye cannot do the things that ye would" (5:17). In other words, we do not do the good things we ought to do and in our best moments would like to do.

### B. *The Spirit (v.17)*

Thank God we are not without help and hope in this internal conflict. As a believer there is a greater power that resides within us, this power is the person of the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned seven times in verses 16-25 (16, 17, 18, 22, & 25). The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who comes to indwell us at the moment of salvation. His ability to rout the flesh is constant and sure, but will only be experienced as we yield to His control on a daily basis. As we learn to "walk in the Spirit," the flesh becomes increasingly subdued. We must learn to "walk in the Spirit" so we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (5:16).

**Transition:** Although the war within is invisible and secret between the old and new nature, the words and deeds which erupt from within are outward and evident. In verses 19-23, Paul displays a dramatic contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. If you want to know who is in control of your life, "the proof is in the pudding."

## THE CONTRAST (vv.19-23)

Ancient authors often created lists of vices and virtues, and here Paul gives a list contrasting the vices of the flesh (vv.19-21) and the virtues of the Spirit (vv.22-23). He says the “works of the flesh are manifest” (Gal. 5:19). The word *manifest* means they are outward and obvious.

### A. The works of the flesh (vv.19-21)

Puritan William Perkins said this list of vices is “a mirror to reveal the corruption of our own hearts”. Notice these are “works”. The word *works* points to effort, strain, labor, and toil. This is a list of deeds practiced by a person that has the flesh in control of their life. They are each ungodly actions and attitudes. But they are “works of the flesh”. Remember the *flesh* is that natural man, meaning these are the natural way in which the old nature manifests itself. This list seems to be chaotic in its presentation, much like the fleshly way of living. The word *works* is plural demonstrating the many ways in which the flesh can evidence itself. **Adultery** – sexual unfaithfulness to spouse, marital infidelity; **fornication** – broader word for any sexual sin, immorality; **uncleanness** – any thought, word, or deed of impurity or lewdness; **lasciviousness** – acting without restraint, animalistic desires, “a party animal”; **idolatry** – the worship of anything or anyone other than God; **witchcraft** – practice of evoking spirits, sorcery, also drug abuse; **hatred** – the expression of dislike or detest for another; **variance** – causing discord or dissension among others, a quarrelsome person; **emulation** – a constant desire to excel over others, an over competitiveness or rivalry caused by jealousy; **wrath** – violent fits of anger, raging resentment; **strife** – self ambition, always competing for superiority; **sedition** – factious commotion, sectarianism, rebellion; **heresies** – teaching contrary to God’s truth; **envying** – jealousy and discontentedness; **murders** – unlawful, intentional killing; **drunkenness** – intoxication, inebriation, “under the influence”; **reveling** – carousing, unruly boisterous behavior. **And such like** – there are many other ways for the flesh to manifest itself in our lives.

He dogmatically states, “ they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (5:21). The verb *do* is referring to habitual practice rather than an isolated lapse. Individuals who live a lifestyle defined by the works of the flesh do not have the Spirit of

God residing within and will not experience the wonders of eternal life. This is what it looks like when the flesh is in control – dark, dirty, and hopeless!

### B. The fruit of the Spirit (vv.22-23)

With the black backdrop of the works of the flesh in place, the Apostle now displays the beautiful facets of the Spirit’s fruit. Like a jeweler who places a single diamond on black velvet to display the beauty and facets of that precious gem. We have trudged through the mire of fleshly works, and now we get to enjoy the Garden (Orchard) of God with its bright sunshine, vivid colors, and lush fruit. He begins “But” (v.22) – a stark contrast is going to be presented. The “fruit of the Spirit is”...immediately we notice that these are not “works” but rather “fruit.” The works of the flesh are naturally practiced by us, but the fruit of the Spirit is supernaturally produced in us. It is the fruit *of* the Spirit, meaning these ninefold characteristics flow from Him. He alone is the source, we are but the channel. They are His work produced in and through us. Spiritual fruit cannot be manufactured by us, it must gradually and supernaturally be grown in us. The word *fruit* is intentionally singular in contrast to the plural *works* of the flesh. This points to the unity of its purpose. The Spirit has but one goal – Christlikeness! When the Spirit is in control of our lives it looks like **love** (self-sacrifice for others), **joy** (contentment in Christ), **peace** (tranquility of soul), **longsuffering** (patience with others), **gentleness** (kindness), **goodness** (integrity), **faith** (faithfulness), **meekness** (strength under control), and **temperance** (self control).

The question is which would you rather see in your life - the destructive “works of flesh” that ruin your relationship with God and others, or the productive fruit of the Spirit that nourish your relationship with God and others? Obviously, we all desire to see this spiritual fruit in our lives. In fact, one of the reasons God reveals the “fruit of the Spirit” is so that we might understand it what it is and deeply desire it in our lives. Fruit is simply irresistible! Many (not all) will pass up dessert for a fresh bowl of sun-ripened fruit.

**Transition:** The next big question is – how? How do I avoid living in the flesh and allow the Spirit to control? How do I come to experience this fruit in my life? The answer is to follow the command of this text: Galatians 5:16 – “walk in the Spirit.”

### THE COMMAND (v.16)

It is tempting for us to look at that list of nine virtues and so desire them that we purpose to create these through self-effort. We may be able to establish good habits that appear to manufacture fruit. It might look good from a distance and fool some, but upon close examination it will be found to be plastic and phony. Have you ever gone to someone's home and seen what appeared to be the brightest, most attractive basket of fruit as the centerpiece on the kitchen table only to discover upon closer inspection that it was fake fruit? It quickly loses its appeal. Only God can produce this spiritual fruit. Understand good habits do not produce Christian character, but rather Christian character produces good habits. The Christian life is not a work, it is a walk. It is not what you do that makes you who you are, it is who you are (in Christ) that should dictate what you do. You do not evidence true love, joy, peace through self-effort. **The secret to spiritual victory and spiritual vitality is the Holy Spirit of God.**

To win the war within, God has given us a scriptural command that must be faithfully carried out. It is found in verse 16, “Walk *in* the Spirit” or “walk *by* the Spirit”. The word *walk* is a present active imperative – meaning we are commanded of God to “keep walking.” That phrase sounds ambiguous to us. What does it mean and how do you walk in or by the Spirit? **Bible Study Tip:** When things are unclear in one passage, compare Scripture with Scripture. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible.

**Teaching Note:** You may want to take a small excursus at this point. Have the class turn to **Ephesians 5:18-6:9**, make careful note of the phrase “be filled with the Spirit”. Then walk through the evidences of being filled with the Spirit [singing (5:19); thanksgiving (5:20); submitting (5:21-6:9); notate order – wives (5:22), husbands (5:25), children (6:1), fathers (6:4), servants (6:5), masters (6:9)]. You will find the exact same “results” in **Colossians 3:16-4:1** [singing (3:16); thanksgiving (3:17); submitting (3:18); notate order – wives (3:18); husbands (3:19); children (3:20); fathers (3:21); servants (3:22); masters

(4:1)]. Where Galatians says “walk in the Spirit”, and Ephesians says “be filled with the Spirit”, Colossians says “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). The verb *walk* in Gal. 5:16 is a present, active, imperative; the verb *be filled* in Eph. 5:18 is a present, passive, imperative; the verb *dwell* in Col. 3:16 is a present, active, imperative. When we put these passages together, we realize that “walking in the Spirit” being “filled with the Spirit” and allowing “the word of Christ to dwell in us richly” are synonymous. We further understand from the verbs that there is an **active** as well as **passive** part to this. We must actively fill our minds with God's word, we must actively walk in the truths of God's word, and we must passively allow the Spirit to control, guide, and direct us by His word. The Spirit of God will never lead us to do something that contradicts the Word of God! In other words, being “Spirit-filled” and “Word-filled” are one in the same. “Walking in the Spirit” is allowing the Spirit of God to take the Word of God to make me more like the Son of God.

The flesh (old man, nature) is what resist and opposes that spiritual work of God at every turn. So we must live in the reality of Galatians 2:20 – “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” At salvation, our old nature was nailed to the cross and left for dead. We are reminded of this truth again in Galatians 5:24, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” Crucifixion was a slow, agonizing death. It was possible for a person to remain alive for days even after being crucified. The problem with our “old nature” (flesh) is that even though it has been crucified, we keep helping it get down off the cross and nursing it back to health. To win the war within and bear spiritual fruit, we must put a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) on the flesh. It has been crucified with Christ – let it die! **This is not speaking of a daily decision to get up on the cross, but a decision not to come down.** As John Stott writes, “What must we do in order to control the lusts of the flesh and to bear the fruit of the Spirit? The brief answer is this: We must maintain towards each the proper Christian attitude. In the apostle's own words, we must ‘crucify’ the flesh and ‘walk by’ the Spirit.”

Galatians 5:25, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” The word walk in this verse is different than that of verse 16. This word literally means to keep in step with. It is like running on a treadmill.

Once the pace is set, you must keep up or you will fall off! The Spirit is actively working in your life as a believer – keep up through obedience to His Word, dependence on His strength, faithfulness in Bible reading and prayer, and fellowship with believers.

**Transition:** We have seen the reality of internal conflict (flesh against Spirit, Spirit against flesh). We have contrasted the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit. We have understood the command to “walk in the Spirit.” Finally, I want you to rejoice in the conquest!

## THE CONQUEST (vv.16, 25)

### A. *The promise of victory (v.16)*

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can rejoice in a sure and sweet conquest over the flesh. In verse 16 it says, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Here is a promise of victory. When we are walking in the Spirit (yielding control to Him by submission to His Word), we are assured that we will not yield to the strong, sinful desires of our fallen nature. In fact, Paul uses a double negative in the Greek to emphatically announce this truth. He is saying, when you walk in the Spirit it is impossible, there is no chance, of fulfilling the lust of the flesh. What a wonderful promise from God! The way to spiritual victory is not by will-power but through the Spirit’s power. It is not solely by an abrupt stop in living in the flesh, but an about face and choosing to “walk in the Spirit” (5:16), “be led by the Spirit” (5:18), and “live in the Spirit” (5:25).

### B. *The production of fruit (vv.22-23)*

The promise of victory is sure, but the product of victory is sweet – as sweet as a South Carolina peach. When we “walk in the Spirit” there is the production of fruit. Living surrendered to the Spirit’s control through obedience to God’s word brings about the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. This nine-fold characteristic of the Spirit’s fruit will be our focus for the next few weeks.

## CONCLUSION

As you examine your life do you find the fruit of the Spirit growing there? When the Spirit enters at salvation, He begins to produce that fruit within your life. It may be slow and gradual growth, but there will be growth. If there is not fruit it is because there is no root. You cannot bear the fruit of the Spirit if you are not a child of God.

Christian, if you would see a great harvest of spiritual fruit, if you would realize spiritual victory, if you desire to win the war within – you must walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).