

**16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

**19** Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, **21** envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In virtually all religions, the motivation for morality is fear based – if I knock on enough doors; if I win enough converts; if I obey the law to my best ability; if I defend by faith with enough zeal. But in gospel Christianity the motivation is LOVE. My God has so loved me, that I long to reflect that love back to him and to others. This is God's supernatural “agape” love that is unconditional and selfless. This is a breath of celestial, fresh air to our world – LOVE, not law!

But how do I grow in that “agape” love, if it's not by knocking on doors or zealously defending my faith? In today's passage, Paul answers that question with this answer: **I grow in LOVE as I BATTLE for the Spirit in control of my life.**

## **THE WAR WITHIN**

There is a battle going on within every person between the Spirit of God and his natural fleshly instincts. Now the non-Christian does not yet have the Spirit of God living within – but everyone is born in the image of God, meaning we bear much of His likeness. We all are created with a God-consciousness, called “conscience.” Paul teaches about this in Romans 2:14-15:

**Romans 2:14-15** *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.*

Try as he might, the non-Christian routinely loses the battle to self. Why? – not because he lacks the will, but he lacks the supernatural power. The natural fleshly instincts always win. That's what Paul teaches in Romans 3:

**Romans 3:10-12** *There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good.*

## **THE SPIRIT WITHIN**

But when one turns his life over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life, he becomes a believer – a Christian. And the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within that life.

**Romans 8:9** *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

And for the FIRST TIME that new believer has the POWER to win the battle within!

Before, he was a “slave of sin” – meaning he could only do what the flesh wanted, losing the battle for righteousness every time. But now, he has been set free from bondage to sin and the law, and he has the POWER by the indwelling Spirit to become a slave to a new master – the Lord Jesus. And by “walking” in that Spirit, he can win the battle over the flesh. It is not a continual “win” for the Christian, because he still has that fleshly nature within. The battle still rages.

**Romans 7:18-21** *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.*

But as we learn to give control to the Spirit within, we find victory in winning the battles for what is right.

**Romans 8:2, 6** *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.*

## **THE SARX WITHIN**

Now let's examine that which is at war with the Spirit. It is what the Greeks called “SARX” and which is translated “flesh” or “sinful nature” in most of our English Bible translations (KJV, New International, New American Standard, etc.). The SARX is that part of my heart that is not yet renewed by the Spirit.

You must understand that the WAR WITHIN is not the physical self vs. the spiritual self. Nor is it the "person I was" vs. the "person I am." Rather is the war between my new spiritual nature – the Holy Spirit within, vs. my natural sinful nature – the SARX within. Specifically, it is the war between the DESIRES of the Spirit within me and the DESIRES (Gk: epithumia) or better, "over-desires" of the SARX within me. And that war will wage until I am taken home to be with Jesus, made like him in perfection. So until that time, I must learn to win as many battles as possible, in the power of the Holy Spirit. So we have this key verse in Galatians:

**Galatians 5:16** *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire (over-desire) of the flesh (SARX).*

OK – so HOW?? Well, let's look on.

**Galatians 5:17-18** *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*

### **3 CLUES TO WALKING IN THE SPIRIT (v. 17-18)**

Here we have the WAR WITHIN described. But we also have **3 clues** to our question of "how do we walk in the Spirit?"

1. **OPPOSITION** We are taught that the Spirit and Sarx have desires in OPPOSITION to one another. This is a practical clue. When we find ourselves wanting something but there is a voice saying "no" or "go the other way" we can be sure this is Spirit vs. Sarx. As we wait upon God we can determine which is the voice of the Spirit. Is my "desire" inordinate? Is it "over-desire?" Or is it something that God allows for me in my freedom? If we're still not sure, we can proceed cautiously in what we believe is the best direction and watch for God's "stop signs." If we get one, we turn the other direction quickly. If not, we proceed.

2. **MY GODLY DESIRE** We are taught that in this fight my inner being really WANTS to do the Godly thing, since the Spirit is in me. Therefore, practically, I determine which is really more the desire of the Spirit and which is the desire of the flesh/sarx. And then I follow the direction of the Spirit – that which my inner being confirms is the right course. Be careful, thought, that the strong desire of the SARX doesn't drown out the "still, small voice" of Godly reason.

3. **JUSTIFICATION** We are taught that when I am following the Spirit I will not be operating by any man-made rules (I won't be "under the Law.") So, I I find myself trying to justify why I should have this desire of mine, finding reasons and rules that make it feel more right and acceptable, I must learn that this is not of the Spirit but of the Sarx. The Spirit does not have to "justify" the truth. It's just right.

### **THE WORKS OF THE FLESH (SARX)**

Lastly, in our passage today we find a list of the works of the flesh (sarx).

1. **WORKS, NOT FRUIT** Note that it is the FRUIT of the Spirit, as opposed to the WORKS of the flesh. Life in the Spirit produces growing, healthy FRUIT. Reverting back to the slavery of the flesh produces WORKS, founded in Law.

2. **THERE ARE LAWS AGAINST** Note that at the end of the list of the fruit of the Spirit (v. 22) it says that "there is no law against such things." You get that correct meaning when you invert the two phrases. And it makes sense – there is no law against love, joy, peace, etc. So this implies that there ARE laws against the works of the flesh – some God's moral laws and some our government's judicial laws.

3. **THEY OPPOSE GOD, OTHERS & SELF** Note the list starts with sins that violate God's morality and sovereignty (immorality, idolatry, etc.) and continue with sins that violate others (strife, anger, dissention, etc.) and conclude with sins that harm and diminish myself (factions, envying, carousing, etc.).

4. **SPIRITUALLY FATAL, YET REVERSABLE** The conclusion of v. 21 make it clear that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Gladly, the verb form for "practice" indicates an ongoing and continual action.

See what Paul teaches the Corinthian church in a parallel passage:

**I Corinthians 6:9-11** *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

"Such were some of you" is one of the most refreshing and hopeful phrases in our Bible! It means that by "walking in the Spirit" we can reverse the pattern of fatal, fleshly desires and become WASHED, SANCTIFIED and JUSTIFIED before God.

May we be ever ✓ AWARE OF THE WAR WITHIN  
and ✓ ACTIVELY FIGHTING THE WAR WITHIN  
by ✓ ACCESSING THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT  
✓ **AMEN!**