

Principle #4

The Ongoing Battle

why we still struggle



Principles of Discipleship

Although salvation is something which occurs immediately in a Christian's life, sanctification takes some time. Sanctification is the process of becoming holy, and it is definitely a struggle. The transformation of a sinner into a saint is instantaneous. But it takes a while before the saint really looks like one!

At the center of this battle, there are two enemies: the flesh and the Spirit. Christians disagree about exactly what the "flesh" is. Some believe it represents the finite, mortal, fallen aspects of man. Others believe it is a synonym for "the old sin nature". But regardless of which view you take, everyone knows that the flesh is an enemy of the Spirit.

Two central passages contrast the flesh and the Spirit. When you are finished exploring them, you should be able to describe the flesh, the Spirit, and their relationship to the Christian.

Galatians 5:16-26

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 shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying

Main Passage: Galatians 5:16-26

What is the "flesh"? (see article on next page) Write your own definition.



What is the relationship between the flesh and the Spirit? What contrasts do you find here?

How does a Christian choose to do the deeds of the Spirit?

What is the role of faith in this battle?

(hint: read Romans 6:8, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 11:6)

2 Other Major Passages:

- **Romans 8:1-8**
Contrast the flesh (NIV = “sinful nature”) with the Spirit. What are their abilities? Their results?

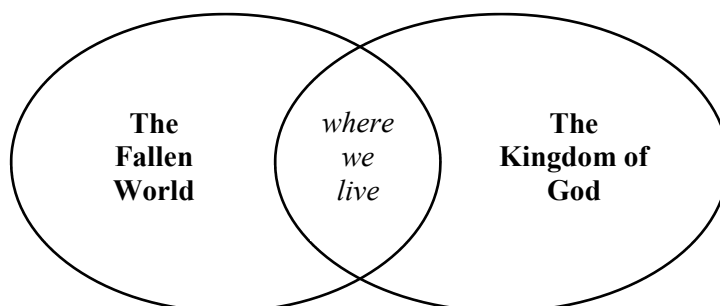
- **Romans 8:9-17**
According to this passage, what is the relationship of the Christian to the Spirit?
...to the flesh?

The “Now” and the “Not Yet”

Many who teach about the Christian life talk about finding some “secret” that will suddenly produce instant maturity or reduce all of our spiritual struggles. It’s somewhat like dieting; standing in the checkout lane of the grocery store, while you’re buying all kinds of food, there always seems to be some magazine with a miracle diet staring us in the face! The whole idea of simple discipline and controlling what we consume, while balancing it with healthy exercise, seems too hard. Certainly there must be a quicker way to getting the body we know we could have! But down deep we suspect that’s not true.

Beware of “quick-fix” spirituality, or “secrets” to the Christian life. Why would God keep something a secret if it would bring us closer to Him? Actually, one of the major cults in the first few centuries claimed just that; the “Gnostics” (knowledge is “gnosis” in Greek) said they had a special knowledge that made them a better class of believers. They intimidated many Christians, but their claims were unbiblical and false.

The diagram below shows a picture of where we live our lives. The world is fallen, and yet the kingdom of God has invaded; we experience a mixture of both: hence our struggle. Nothing will be perfect until Jesus returns.



“Flesh”

Summary. In both Testaments, “flesh” is a complex word with many meanings. Most significant is the way that *basar* in the OT and *sarx* in the NT are used to make statements about human nature.

The OT emphasizes the frailty of human beings. Because of our weakness, we must look to God for everything good. He alone is the source of our help. To recognize his power brings us release from fear of other persons, who are ultimately as powerless as we are.

The NT emphasizes humanity’s moral inadequacy. When they are isolated from God, human beings are energized by evil desires and guided by perceptions that distort God’s will and his nature. The word “flesh” reminds us that we are caught in the grip of sin. Even a desire for righteousness cannot enable us to actually become righteous.

God deals with our flesh in a surprising way. He does not free us now from the fleshly nature. Instead, he provides a source of power that will release us from the domination of the flesh. Jesus has paid for sins generated by our flesh, whether sins of our past or those yet in our future. But Jesus has also provided us with his Holy Spirit. The Spirit lives within us, and he is the source of new desires and a new perspective. Even more, the spiritual power unleashed in the resurrection is made available to us in the Spirit.

The bonds of our mortality and all that mortality implies can be shattered if we live according to the Spirit, with our desires and motives shaped by him, with his power enabling us to do what is truly good.

*from Larry Richards’
Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*



The New Testament leaves no doubt that holiness is our responsibility. If we are to pursue holiness, we must take some decisive action. I once discussed a particular sin problem with a person who said, "I've been praying that God would motivate me to stop." Motivate him to stop? What this person was saying in effect was that God had not done enough. It is so easy to ask God to do something more because that postpones facing up to our own responsibility.

The action we are to take is to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13). Paul uses the same expression in another book: "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature*" (Col. 3:5) What does the expression put to death mean? The King James Version uses the term mortify. According to the dictionary, mortify means "to destroy the strength, vitality, or functioning of; to subdue or deaden." To put to death the misdeeds of the body, then, is to destroy the strength and vitality of sin as it tries to reign in our bodies.

It must be clear to us that mortification though it is something we do, cannot be carried out in our own strength. Well did the Puritan John Owen say, "Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness is the soul and substance of all false religion." Mortification must be done by the strength and under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Owen says further, "The Spirit alone is sufficient for this work. All ways and means without Him are useless. He is the great efficient. He is the One who gives life and strength to our efforts."

But though mortification must be done by the strength and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it is nevertheless a work which we must do. Without the Holy Spirit's strength there will be no mortification, but without our working in His strength there will also be no mortification.

The crucial question then is, "How do we destroy the strength and vitality of sin?" If we are to work at this difficult task, we must first have conviction. We must be persuaded that a holy life of God's will for every Christian is important. We must believe that the pursuit of holiness is worth

the effort and pain required to mortify the misdeeds of the body.

We must be convinced that "*without holiness no one will see the Lord*" (Hebrews 12:14).

Not only must we develop conviction for living a holy life in general, but we must also develop convictions in specific areas of obedience.

These convictions are developed through exposure to the Word of God. Our minds have far too long been accustomed to the world's values. Even after we become Christians, the world around us constantly seeks to conform us to its value system. We are bombarded on every hand by temptations to indulge the sinful natures. That is why Paul said, "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed*" (Romans 12:2)

Jesus said, "*Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me*" (John 14:21). Obedience is the pathway to holiness, but it is only as we have His commands that we can obey them. God's Word must be so strongly fixed in our minds that it becomes the dominant influence in our thought, our attitudes, and our actions. One of the most effective ways of influencing our minds is through memorizing Scripture. David said, "*Thy Word I have treasured in my heart that I may not sin against Thee*" (Psalm 119:11).

To memorize Scripture effectively, you must have a plan. The plan should include a selection of well-chosen verses, a practical system for learning those verses, a systematic means of reviewing them to keep them fresh in your memory, and simple rules for continuing Scripture memory on your own.

Of course, the goal of memorization is application of the Scripture to one's daily life. It is through the application of Scripture to specific life situations that we develop the kind of conviction to see us through the temptations that trips us up so easily.

SCRIPTURE

Which verses significantly impacted you and why?



ARTICLE

What did you personally glean from this article?



PRINCIPLE

Summarize the truth you've learned in a concise statement:



LIFE APPLICATION

1. *Do you think you are to see yourself as “in the flesh” or “in the Spirit”?*
(hint: read Romans 8:9)

2. *How do we not carry out the desires of the flesh?*

