



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG
WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Winning the Battle Within

Romans 8:1-4

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

I want to talk to you today again about this spirit led life and, more specifically, about what this means: God pouring out His Spirit upon us for the battle that exists within each of us, the spiritual battle on the inside.

We're talking about learning to live in the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit. As we walk with God and His Spirit reveals to us more and more about the nature of God, we're born into, Peter says, a living hope, an unquenchable optimism, because we start to understand the revelation of who God is. He is the God of the impossible. Nothing is too hard for him. No matter what our circumstance, no matter what our situations, there is always hope because of God, his kindness, his goodness, his nature.

So God is trying, by His Spirit, to birth into us a great faith, a great hope in him so that we're free from worries and fear. And then we can do the greatest thing: love him and love one another, and then give testimony so others can come to know the goodness of God, the power of God, the grace of God in their lives.

This is the spiritual work going on, birthing us into a new creation, an unquenchable hope, faith filled life that's free to love and share with others about the good News. And that's why we're here. God has determined the exact time and place where people should live so that we might reach out to him and get to know him, though he is not far from us.

The Bible says, but we know him in the spirit sense. Now, today we're digging a little deeper into the work of the spirit. And I would call this maybe a level 200, 300 talk about the work of the spirit. He's doing those things, and so we might do those things more and more fully. He is working to free us from our sinfulness so that we can do more spiritual work in the world, free us from our flesh.

Now, we believe around here that the truest thing about us is what the Bible reveals to us about ourselves. There are a lot of philosophies and ideologies about life, but we have the belief that God has told us what we need to know and understand about ourselves to be right and live right with him.

In first Thessalonians chapter five, God has told us that we are three part beings. We have a body that we walk around in. We have a soul that's implanted in that body, made up of our mind, our will, and our emotions. And deep inside of us, when God fashioned us together before he formed us, he knew us. And then he breathed life into us. And he did that with his breath, the breath of his spirit.

And there is a spirit in the inner sanctum, in the secret place of each of us. We have a spirit in the center of who we are. Then we have a mind, a will, and emotions that makes up our unique souls. And then it's animating our bodies while we're alive. We live inside of this body.

Now the body and the soul are stained with sin. We have a propensity in our body and soul to exalt ourselves above God's law, to ignore God's law. This is the part of the human nature that Jesus refers to as our flesh, and the flesh is spiritually dead.

There's a spirit inside of us that is entangled with the skin and flesh. Again, we're diving a little deeper. In the very core of you and I, God has placed a spirit that is sort of rioted by the sinful human nature, the flesh. And when we understand that our flesh is rebellious against God, sinful against God, we would understand our need for forgiveness, cry out for salvation, for forgiveness. And in revelation of the Good News hidden for the ages, we would, the spirit would help us understand, Jesus died for our sins. So through faith in him, we can be forgiven and stand completely clean before God.

Paul writes about it this way. Ephesians chapter one. You and I were included in Christ when we heard the message of truth, the good news of our salvation.

We believed. Then we were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, put in our spirit as a guarantee of our eternal life. The witness of the spirit. It's a beautiful gift from God.

This is called regeneration. This is called being born again in the spirit, where the Holy Spirit, when we believe, makes us alive in Christ and quickens our spirit to have the strength to overcome our flesh.

Paul asked the believers in Corinth this: do you not know? After coming to a knowledge of Jesus and trusting in him, your bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. He purchased you with a price.

The Old Testament way was the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God dwelled in the Ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies inside the temple. But it's no longer that way. The Book of Acts tells us that God does no longer live in buildings built by human hands. We are the temple of God.

The temple had a holy place, a Holy of Holies, and an outer court. You have a Holy of Holies inside of you. The spirit is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God. Your soul is the holy place in the temple. You are a priest that has access to the presence of God in your spirit. And the outer court of you and I can be animated, and we can communicate then what we're sensing from the spirit.

It's such, it's a deep understanding of human nature. There is a point of you and I being saved. And then there is a process. The point of salvation is when you and I are, when we're made right with God. And the theological word for this is justification. We are justified before God. No longer are our sins being counted against us. We're in his family. We're secure. They're completely forgiven, God's children forever.

But then begins the sanctification process, the cleansing of our souls from that sinful flesh so that we might more and more live by the spirit and led of the spirit. This is why Paul prayed for the believers in Thessalonica after they had been justified and adopted into God's family. He prayed this: may God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. Clean you up. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord.

And this is something we can't do on our own. He says, he who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Now Jesus described this flesh and spirit inside of us in our gospel reading. He did it in other places as well. When he was speaking to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said to them this: watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation and the flesh takes over in your life.

He said, this is a real challenge for human beings. And he said, this is why the spirit inside of us is willing to do what's right, but the flesh is weak. It doesn't join the spirit, our soul, our mind, our will, emotions, our body.

He is acknowledging the existence that could be illustrated and is sometimes illustrated by two wolves inside of us. One wolf that wants to do what's right, live purely, live holy, obey God, live under his reign, illustrated with a white wolf for purity. There's another wolf inside of us that is a dark wolf.

Now you and I come in. These are spiritual realities the Bible speaks of. We come into church, we don't see this. We see each other's bodies. And we're dressed up nicely here. Inside of us, though, the Bible says there are these two natures. They exist. One wants to do right. One wants to do wrong, constantly pulling us in a way of self-destruction.

And the scripture says they're not just there in neutral. Paul says this about them. The desires of the bad dog, the black wolf, the desires of the flesh, are against the desires of the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh. These two natures inside of us are opposed to each other.

That's what the Bible tells us. This makes sense of all the evil in our world, all the selfishness, all the greed we have inside of each of us, a propensity towards deception, the lust for pleasure, exalting ourselves above God. And that desire is warring against the spirit that God has put in us that wants to do right, and the flesh in us is working to keep you and I from doing the things we want to do, the good things we want to do.

I don't know if you've ever decided to change your life and take out some things that were not serving you well and add in some things that would give you more life, but we have every year New Year's resolutions. And when people go in their human effort to stop doing self-destructive things and do things that give life, it only lasts so long.

And the Bible is saying why. Paul says this. I know that there's nothing good that dwells in me, that is in my flesh. I have the desire to do what's right, but I don't have the ability to carry it out. I can't keep doing it over the long haul.

And he just throws up his arms and says, what a wretched man I am. And he cries out, in a sense, for continued salvation, continued help towards wholeness, for victory in this internal battle.

Who will rescue me or save me from this dilemma, this fight within this body of death? And then he answers it again. Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He's talking about the power of the spirit delivering us from ongoing enslavement to sin. The power is there. The justification has happened, but the sanctification, you and I learning to walk in that freedom, is something that comes to us by the spirit.

No matter how much we've sinned, no matter how many times we've given way to the flesh, Paul understands in this battle sometimes we have shame, sometimes we have guilt. And he says then some good news. No matter where you're at, there's no condemnation. If you're in Christ, you're forgiven. You're still right with God. If you've been sinning along the way, you're not condemned. You're forgiven.

But he has put his spirit within you to help you have victory, to be free, to live beyond the sin and its enslavement. So he says, how to do this? I say to you, walk in the spirit. Walk by the spirit, in the strength of the spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

We're down at the very core of who we are as human beings, dear friends. And God is saying to us, if you want the spirit to win in your life, if you want the spirit to dominate the flesh, you need to walk in the strength of the spirit.

And in a sense, he's going to describe how to feed the spirit and starve the flesh, to feed the spirit, to get it stronger within us so that we have continued ongoing victory over sinfulness in our lives.

The Bible gives us spiritual disciplines. The idea of prayer, the idea of how do we starve the flesh? Prayer fuels the spirit. Fasting from some fleshly thing that has control of us starves the flesh. These are spiritual disciplines that God invites us into to know more and more victory. Prayer, fasting, exposing ourselves to the judgment of God's Word that divides our soul from our spirit so our spirit can be fueled and live in victory over the flesh.

Worship is a discipline. Solitude, withdrawing from the things of this world to quiet ourselves so the spirit can be in harmony with God. Fellowship with his people who are seeking him. All of these things help fuel the spirit inside of us so you and I can live the victorious, spirit led life and not give way to the flesh.

And then Paul says, this is our obligation to do this. We have an obligation not to the flesh. The flesh is power has been dealt with through the cross. So let's stop feeding it, he says.

We don't have an obligation to fuel our lust there. The obligation is to fuel the spirit, to live according to it. If by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you're going to live more. The spiritual life will surge through you. You'll come more and more alive.

I was talking with the children about this. The way the children can bless their parents is come more fully alive in the power of Christ in their lives, fueled by his spirit. But this is a transition from a sinful nature that we're born with into a new birth where we learn to live in a new nature fueled by his spirit.

Those who live according to the flesh, here's our responsibility in it, have their minds set on what the flesh desires. The world is filled with messages for our flesh, greedy messages, sensual messages, lazy messages, easy life messages. These messages, if we fuel our flesh with these things, the flesh grows.

And then there are messages to the spirit. Those who live in accordance with the spirit have their minds set on what the spirit desires. This is why the apostle Paul said, I buffet my body. I make it my slave so that I won't be disqualified in the spirit life.

Now notice he didn't say I buffet my body. He said I buffet it. I bring it under control of the spirit.

Now, it's nothing against a nice buffet we had this morning. We do have to fuel our body, but we master our bodies and our flesh so that our spirit can surge by fueling our spirit with the things of the spirit: peace, joy, hope, faith, those things that fuel these things in our lives, the disciplines.

And as we do this, we start to leave the prison of our sinfulness, confused, thinking corruption of the flesh, and we move into the glorious freedom of the children of God. But it takes great faith, great courage to move out of the cage and into freedom.

And so we are encouraged, when the spirit is working in us, three things to abstain from. Number one, we should not resist the spirit when he's working in us. The Bible speaks of us being stiff necked and stubborn and prideful and resisting God when he puts his finger on something.

It also speaks of you and I trying to ignore the spirit or suppress the spirit when he's calling us out of our comfort zones. We say, not now, God. Not today. And we try and suppress what he's doing in us or or just abstain from it, or in outright rebellion we might just go indulge the flesh in some way when God is working on us. And that would be quenching the spirit or grieving the spirit, making the spirit sorrowful.

The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within us. He's very personal. He's very loving. And he's wanting you and I to live the most abundant, free, empowered life possible. So to resist him or to quench him or run from him and grieve him doesn't make sense. But oftentimes in our flesh, it's exactly what we do.

Jesus often said in his teaching, those who have ears, let them hear.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your word, which teaches us not only what to believe, but also how to live. And you have made it clear that there are two natures inside of us, one that wants to do right and one that wants to do wrong. And this side of heaven, they're constantly opposing each other.

But you have given us a way to victory. We can know forgiveness completely through Jesus. And then we can know an ever increasing and maturing spiritual life of faith and hope and love by the power of your spirit.

Give us ears to hear, father, deep in our hearts. Give us a sensitivity to listen to your spirit, to not resist your spirit, not oppose your spirit, not grieve your spirit, but welcome your Spirit's work in our hearts and our souls so that we can more align with you and know the life that is truly life.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.