

Learning to Fight the Flesh

Intro

Three battle fronts: the world, the flesh, the devil

- The Bible is the story of a raging battle for the heart of man.

“Every square inch of creation is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.”

-C.S. Lewis

- Our faith attacked by **world system** that stands opposed to God as He has revealed Himself in His Word.
- Working in concert with that, fueling false religion, promoting rabid materialism is a personal being that is himself the embodiment of evil. The animating force behind all evil is **Satan**.

The Enemy Within

- The most frustrating thing about spiritual warfare in the life of a Christian is not the out-there battle. It's the in-here battle.

Gal 5:16 “But I say walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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.”

The Spirit lusts against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit throughout the whole course of a Christian's life. Were there no devils, you would still have your hands full resisting the corruption of your own heart....Satan comes to the battle as an ally of the flesh and launches a massive attack....This knowledge should make every one of us diligent to keep our lusts unarmed.

-William Gurnall, *Christian in Complete Armour*, March 3rd

James 1:13-15

Jas 4:1-2 “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.”

- Relational conflict fires up because we crave something and are willing to fight and even damage relationships to get it.
 - We crave ... the good opinion of others. So when someone talks to me as though they perceive a weakness in my life ... conflict.
 - We crave ... peace and quiet. So when the kids come home from school or practice my anger suddenly shows up too ... conflict.

- James tells us, if we don't fight the flesh, the flesh will grow up and kill us.

Living between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’

Indicatives (already)

You have died to sin (Ro 6:2, 6-7)

Not slave to sin (Ro 6:20-22; Tit 3:3)

You were sanctified (1 Co 6:11)

You were cleansed (2 Pet 1:9)

Made righteous (Ro 3:21-22)

You have mind of Christ (1 Co 2:16)

Imperatives (not yet)

→ Put sin to death (Ro 8:13)

→ Don't be enslaved (Ro 6:12-13)

→ Pursue sanctification (Ro 6:19-22; 1Thes 4:3)

→ Be cleansed (2 Co 7:1)

→ Pursue righteousness (1Ti 6:11; Heb 12:14)

→ Renew your mind (Rom 12:2)

Phil 2:12b-13 “... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Fistful of Truths for Fighting the Flesh

I. Don't shrug off the warnings

Heb 3:12-15 “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

- We are saved by faith alone, but genuine faith is never alone.

“You know the flesh has made a breach in your defenses when your heart is hardened by its deceitfulness (Heb 3:13) so that you are careless about sin. You will look at your life and think about how often you need God’s forgiveness, and so think of it as something common, nothing to worry over or take pains about. You’ll know you are hardened when you begin to extend the boundaries of Christian freedom to include indulgences that in the past would have shocked you. Your flesh will whisper to you that strictness and anxious care about obedience are *legalism* – the gospel came to deliver you from such things! And besides, if you really do commit a sin, you can be forgiven later.” -Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, 65

I Tim 6:9-10 “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

Rom 8:13 “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.”

“It is not necessary to plan to murder or lust or steal or lie in order to give your consent to sin. All you have to do is willingly neglect the means God has given to put an end to sin.” -Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within*, 102

2. Put the “indicatives” to work

I Cor 6:9-11

► Brief word about the law and our sanctification

- The gospel indicatives remind us of what God has done already, and assure us of what He will yet accomplish in us!

3. Rely on the Holy Spirit

Rom 8:13

“All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless, it must be done by the Spirit.”

-John Owen

- As we commune with God in prayer, as we open His Word, the Holy Spirit is there to shape us, to renew our minds, to increase our affection for God, to make war on the sins that we struggle with.

Gal 5:16 “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

4. Pursue growth at home

- Our Christian maturity is not simply measured by number of temptations resisted in a year. What positive growth have you pursued?
- Spending time communing with God in prayer for your soul and in His Word will lead to everyday growth in the fruit of the Spirit and obedience to God’s Word.

5. Persevere to the end

“Your state is not at all to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by the opposition you make to it.”

-John Owen

“Let no man think to kill sin with a few easy or gentle strokes. He who hath once smitten a serpent, if he follow not on his blow until it be slain, may repent that he ever began the quarrel. And so is he who undertakes to deal with sin and pursues it not constantly to death.”

-John Owen

Application Questions

1. What is one truth that you can start applying to your life as a result of what you heard?
2. A distinction was drawn between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’. How is that distinction helpful? Do you tend to lean more heavily on one side? What tendencies come when we lean too far one way or the other?
3. Has God shown you any ways in which you may have been fighting well in one area but neglecting another, perhaps more mundane or everyday sort of area? (e.g., passionately and regularly interceding for the sick but not giving due attention to what’s happening in your relationship with your roommate, child, spouse, etc.)
4. Do the warnings of Scripture make you think carefully about your Christian faith and everyday practice? Do you find yourself to be casual where Scripture urges caution?
5. What patterns of sin are you currently struggling against? Is anyone else aware of this? Who will you share this with so that you can be prayed for and encouraged to persevere?