

Spirit Versus Flesh

David Feddes

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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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

Good intentions

- “I’m going to be nice to my sister today.”
Instead, you fight and yell, “I hate you.”
- “I’m not going to say that bad word anymore.” Then you say it.
- “I’m going to be gentle and considerate to my family. I’m not going to lose my temper.” Then you explode in anger.
- “I’m going to eat responsibly and lose weight.” Then you eat an extra helping.

Good intentions

- “I going to stop smoking/drinking.” But the addiction continues.
- “I’m going to read the Bible and pray daily.” But you don’t.
- “I’m going to invite my neighbors for dinner and share Jesus with them.” But the time is never right.
- “I don’t want to look at pornography ever again.” But you do.

Good intentions

- “I’m not going to lie to my parents.” But then you’re sneaking and covering up.
- “I’m going to be an encourager. I’m not going to gossip.” But then you gossip.
- “I’m not going to worry about money.” But you worry all the more.
- I’m going to be content; I’m not going to covet. But soon you’re envying and asking: “Why do they have it better than I do?”

Doing what I hate

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. (Romans 7:14-20)

When conduct and conscience collide

Three options

1. **Self-improvement:** try to force conscience to control conduct by sheer willpower (law)
2. **Self-indulgence:** try to drown conscience in a flood of sinful conduct (lawless)
3. **Spirit-indwelling:** trust God's grace in Christ to forgive you and depend on the Spirit's power to battle the flesh

Self-improvement

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)

God's law shows sin

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Romans 7:7)

God's law stirs up sin

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (Romans 7:13)

**God's law shows and stirs up sin;
God's law does not overcome sin.**

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Self-indulgence is hellish

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (5:19-21)

Self-centered morality and immorality

Legalism means treating Biblical standards of conduct as regulations to be kept by our own power in order to earn God's favor... For the legalist, morality serves the same function that immorality does for the antinomian or progressive—namely, as the expression of self-reliance and self assertion. The reason some Pharisees tithed and fasted was the same reason some university students take off their clothes and lie around naked. (John Piper)

Legalists: self-improvement

Prodigals: self-indulgence

The moral legalist is the elder brother of the immoral prodigal. They are blood brothers in God's sight because both reject the mercy of God in Christ as a means to righteousness and use either morality or immorality as a means of expressing their independence and self-sufficiency and self-determination. And it is clear from the New Testament that both will result in a tragic loss of eternal life, if there is no repentance. (John Piper)

Sin: anti-God egoism

Sin: “an irrational energy of rebellion against God—a lawless habit of self-willed arrogance, moral and spiritual, expressing itself in egoism of all sorts... Scripture views it not only as guilt needing to be forgiven, but also as filth needing to be cleansed” (J. I. Packer)

Reaping what you sow

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

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Not self-improvement nor self-indulgence but Spirit-indwelling

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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are **not under the law**. (Galatians 5:16-18)

Who will deliver me?

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. **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. (Romans 7:24-8:2)

Son takes penalty, Spirit gives power

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. (Roman 8:3-4)

Spirit versus flesh

There are two opposed sorts of desire in every Christian's makeup. There are desires that express the natural anti-God egoism of fallen human nature, and there are desires that express the supernatural, God-honoring, God-loving motivation that is implanted by new birth... The desires of the Spirit, felt in the believer's own spirit are to be followed, but the desires of the flesh are not to be indulged. (J. I. Packer)

Ongoing dependence

The Christian's present quest for purity of life means conscious tension and struggle and incomplete achievement all along the line... The Christian who thus walks in the Spirit will keep discovering that nothing in his life is as good as it should be... so that **he has to depend every moment on God's pardoning mercy in Christ**, or he would be lost; and **he needs to keep asking that the Spirit will energize him** to the end to maintain the inward struggle. (J. I. Packer)

Embraced and rebuked

The chief way by which the saints have communion with the Father is love—free, undeserved, eternal love. Jesus, in effect, says, “Be fully assured in your hearts that the Father loves you. Have fellowship with the Father in his love. Have no fears or doubts about his love for you. The greatest sorrow and burden you can lay on the Father, the greatest unkindness you can do to him is not to believe that he loves you.” (John Owen)

Connected and corrected

“My professor is just like you, Dad. He brags that he’s smarter than everybody in the class. When they can’t see what he is showing them, he looks frustrated and breathes funny and says, ‘Can’t you see it? How can you not see it?’ He’s just like you, Dad. If kids don’t do well on tests, he blames them. He thinks everybody could get an A if they would just try harder. Yeah, Dad, my professor is just like you.”

Fruit of the Spirit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:22-26)