

## **Spirit Versus Flesh**

### **By David Feddes**

What do I mean by Spirit versus flesh? In Galatians 5:16-18, the apostle Paul writes, “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).

We'll see a bit more of what that means, but first I want to give you some examples of Spirit against flesh.

### **Good intentions**

Most of us go through life with a lot of good intentions, but we find that our behavior is very different from our good intentions.

When you're little, you may tell yourself, “I'm going to be nice to my sister today,” but instead you fight and yell, “I hate you.” You started the day intending to be nice, but you ended up saying, “I hate you.”

You may be trying to watch your language and clean it up: “I'm not going to say that bad word anymore.” And then you say it.

Or you may tell yourself, “I'm going to be gentle and considerate to my family. I'm not going to lose my temper.” Then the next thing you know, you're exploding in anger towards your family members.

You say, “I'm going to eat responsibly, and I'm going to lose weight.” You really intend to do that, and then you're eating an extra helping.

“I'm going to stop smoking” or “I'm going to stop drinking,” but the addiction continues.

“I'm going to read the Bible, and I'm going to pray every day,” but you don't. You intend to, you want to, but something keeps you from doing what you want.

You might say, “I'm going to invite my neighbors for dinner, and I'm going to share Jesus with them.” But the time is never right.

“I don't want to look at pornography ever again. I'm not going to do it.” But you do.

“I'm not going to lie to my parents.” You might be a teenager and say, “I've got to start being more honest with them.” But then you're still sneaking around and covering up.

Or you know your words aren't helpful to people: "I'm going to be an encourager. I'm not going to gossip." But then you're gossiping about somebody, running down their reputation, or saying mean things about them even though you said you were going to watch your mouth.

"I'm not going to worry about money. I know that worry is foolish, and it doesn't do any good anyway. So 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 what other people have." But soon you're envying and asking, "Why do they have it better than I do?"

We could go on and on with areas where we know we should improve our life, where we have a strong sense that we want to change our behavior or our attitudes. There are certain things we want to stop doing, other things we want to start doing. Somehow part of us wants to do it, but the other part seems to win out—the part that does the wrong thing or doesn't do the right thing.

### **Doing what I hate**

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7 about doing what I hate and not doing what I want: "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 in me" (Romans 7:15, 18-20).

There's a part of him that says it's not really me. There's this sin thing in me, or this flesh, and nothing good dwells in that. But the real me doesn't want what that flesh or that evil self wants to do. So there's this frustration of doing what I hate and yet knowing that it's not really I, but something sick and wicked that he labels my flesh.

When Paul speaks of the flesh, we need to understand that he's not talking about just the body. He's not saying the body is bad and the invisible part of you is good. That's not what he means by Spirit versus flesh. The flesh represents the self-centered, sinful identity which is in conflict with the real identity that comes to us when the Spirit of God lives in us.

### **When conduct and conscience collide: Three options**

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

When your conduct and your conscience collide—when what you want is not what you do—you have three main options. One option is self-improvement. You say, "Conscience is right. It's in tune with the right thing to do," so you try to force conscience to take control of your conduct by sheer willpower: "I'm going to try harder. I'm going to do my very best to obey what I know God's law tells me." So you have a project of self-improvement.

An opposite approach is self-indulgence. You say, “This really bothers me, that my conscience is always fighting with my conduct. I’ve got to get rid of that stupid conscience and learn to ignore it and drown it.” So you try to drown your conscience in a flood of sinful conduct: just give in, do whatever you feel like doing, let yourself hang loose and run free. After a while, your conscience might get quieter and quieter, deader and deader. So you don’t have this collision between conduct and conscience anymore because you’re just letting your flesh do whatever it wants to do.

A third option is Spirit indwelling. You trust God’s grace in Jesus Christ to forgive all of the failures that you commit, and you depend on the Holy Spirit’s power to battle against the remaining influence of the flesh.

Let’s look at each of these three options in a little more detail. Self-improvement is not a healthy option. The apostle Paul, when he writes to the Galatians, is especially upset that some people who learned the gospel of trusting in Jesus and living by the Spirit are now going back to an idea of self-improvement—of living life in their own strength: “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, by self-improvement, 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).

So he identifies the flesh with this attitude of trying to improve yourself and make yourself measure up to God’s requirements by your own efforts. Self-improvement is foolish. He says self-improvement tries to live up to God’s law, but God’s law was never given as a ladder to heaven or as a means just to improve ourselves and make ourselves right and acceptable with God. Instead, God’s law shows us sin. Again, in Romans 7:7, Paul explains, “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). So the law shows coveting—wanting other people’s stuff—to be wrong. And there are other things that we wouldn’t know were wrong. If you live in a certain era, you begin to find certain behaviors are common.

For example, in many cultures now, it’s common for a man and a woman to live together without being married—just live together, have sexual relations, and think nothing of it. “Nothing wrong with that. It’s normal. It’s healthy. It’s right.” God’s law says that sex is for marriage and for marriage only. In some cultures, homosexuality has become widely accepted, but once again God’s law makes clear what’s right.

Once we accept what’s right and say, “Yes, God’s law is right—that my sexuality is intended only for the person I am married to, and it has to be a person of the opposite sex,” believing that and living by it are two very different things. Many a person who has accepted that marriage is the right context for sexuality has nonetheless committed fornication or adultery or homosexuality, or looked at pornography, knowing full well that it’s wrong.

God’s law shows the sin, and when you take God’s law seriously, you believe it—but it doesn’t fix you. You might know that coveting is wrong, but you still want what other people have. You

might know that pornography is wrong, yet you still look at it. The list can go on and on. The point is that God gives his law for a purpose: to make sure we know very clearly what sin is. But it can't fix sin. In fact, God's law stirs up sin and makes it even worse.

Paul writes, “Did that which is good, then, bring death to me?” Is God's law the thing that brings death? No. “By no means! It was sin producing death in me through what is good” (Romans 7:13). Sin is the cause of death and trouble. But the law is given so that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

What's he talking about? He's saying that sometimes when you know what's right, it makes you do wrong even more. I've told before the story of a guy on my dormitory floor in college. He was a chemistry geek who loved to play around with chemicals. One day he concocted a horribly smelling potion. It wouldn't kill you—just make you wish you were dead. He put it in a jar, screwed the lid on very tightly, placed it in the hallway of the dormitory, and wrote just a few words on top: “Do not open.” It wasn't long before it smelled terrible in the hallway. Somebody, seeing that sign “Do not open,” just had to open it.

If you instruct children, “Now, don't touch this honey,” it's almost like an invitation for them to touch it, because the moment they're told not to, they want to all the more. When we're given orders to do things, it stirs up our desire not to do it: “No, you don't tell me what to do.” So God's law stirs up sin. It often makes us even worse.

Unfortunately, with addictions and other kinds of sinful patterns, the more we know what's right and the guiltier we feel about it, the more driven we may be to do it again. A person who has a problem with gluttony or overeating—often the guiltier they feel about it, the harder time they have controlling it. And so it goes with one kind of sin after another.

What that means is that self-improvement—an attempt to live up to God's law, earn God's favor by keeping his law, or change our behavior by sheer effort—is not going to work because God didn't give his law to accomplish that. God's law shows sin. God's law stirs up sin. But God's law does not overcome sin.

So taking God's law as a way to self-improvement is a sure way to defeat and self-destruction. When conduct and conscience collide, you can try self-improvement, but it won't work.

## **Self-indulgence**

You might just give up and say, “I'm tired of fighting. I'm tired of that.” And so you go from one end—self-improvement—to the other: self-indulgence. You try to drown your conscience in one sin after another, doing whatever you feel like doing. Instead of trying to live up to God's law, you say, “I've had enough of that law. I don't want the law. I don't want God. I want what comes naturally to me.”

Self-indulgence is not any better option. In Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul deals with the opposite error. One kind of error is legalism, where you try to earn everything by law—that's the first thing he deals with in writing to the Galatians because that was a great error some of them

were making. But then he also deals with the opposite: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

He doesn't mean that anybody who's ever done one of these things can't go to heaven. He does mean that those who live in these things, who indulge in them, who do not fight against them, who do not seek to be set free from them, who instead say, “That's who I am. That's how I'm going to be”—this is hellish living. You are living as someone who is not ruled by God or governed by God. And so you would spend eternity without God if that's the way you continue. You will not inherit the kingdom of God. Self-indulgence is not a healthy option, to say the least.

### **Self-centered morality and immorality**

We may think of self-indulgence as the opposite of self-improvement. In one sense it might be, but notice something they have in common: they both have the word “self.” It's all about self. You can have self-centered morality—that's your self-improvement project, trying to live up to God's law. Or you can have self-centered immorality, where you ignore God's law and say, “I'm going to do my own thing.” But either way, it's a matter of self.

John Piper comments, “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 [who rejects the law]—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.” It may sound strange to say that people who are very straight-laced and strict have something in common with those who live in wild wickedness, but Piper says that they are operating out of the very same motive: self-assertion. Some want to be self-righteous, others want to be self-indulgent, but it's all about self.

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, the younger son runs into another country and lives in all kinds of wickedness. The older son always stays close to dad, always tries to be the perfect son, but he doesn't love his dad and is resentful and angry toward him. Piper says, “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.”

So whether it's self-morality or self-immorality, either one keeps us very far from God. And both—get this—are actions of the flesh. The person who is trying to use God's law as a way to earn eternal life and improve himself is acting just as much out of the flesh as somebody who goes from one orgy to another or from one drunken bash to another. Sin is basically anti-God egoism, self-centeredness.

Dr. J. I. Packer writes that sin is “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.”

We need to get rid of the guilt and be forgiven, but we also need to get rid of the filth and get cleaned up—and we can’t do it. Our efforts to keep God’s law can’t do it. Our rejection of God’s law and plunge into the filth certainly can’t do it. We need to be rescued from our sinful self—that is, from our flesh.

Galatians 6:7-8 tells us that if we’re going to live by the flesh—whether it’s the flesh of trying to earn God’s favor through legalism and moralism, or the flesh of immorality and ignoring God—either way, the flesh will kill us. “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature [flesh], from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7-8).

### **Spirit-indwelling**

If you want to reap eternal life, then somehow this thing called sowing to the Spirit has to happen. That’s the third option—not self-improvement, not self-indulgence, but giving up on self altogether and experiencing Spirit indwelling, where you trust God’s grace in Christ to forgive you and depend on the Spirit’s power to battle the flesh.

That’s Paul’s emphasis in Galatians, with a very strong edge. Paul is very upset when he writes Galatians, and it’s the upsetness of the Holy Spirit himself. In Romans, he presents much the same teaching, but in a calmer mode because he’s simply letting them know how these things are. He’s not directly fighting against a big error that many of them are making. But either way, Spirit indwelling—this trust in God’s grace in Christ for forgiveness, and this dependence on the Holy Spirit’s power in the ongoing battle with the flesh—is the way of Christian living. Not self-improvement, not self-indulgence, but Spirit indwelling.

That’s what Paul is talking about in Galatians 5:16-18: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law” (Galatians 5:16-18). You’re not condemned by God’s law if you’re led by the Spirit because the Spirit leads you to trust in Jesus, crucified and risen, to take away all your sins and give you eternal life as a free gift. You don’t need the law to make you right with God because Christ has fulfilled the law and made you right with God. And you don’t need your own effort to change yourself because you walk by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These words can only be said of someone who’s already a Christian—someone who’s born again and has the Spirit of God living in him or her. When that’s true, there is a conflict going on where the Christ-life, the real reborn you, is fighting against something that’s really not you anymore, which Paul labels “the flesh,” or as some translations put it, “the sinful nature.”

In Romans 7, after saying, “I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing,” Paul asks, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (Romans 7:24-25). How does he resolve that tension? “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2).

There’s no condemnation if you’re in Christ. You can be free of that guilt right from the start—and that is a tremendous relief, to know that Jesus has paid for it all. “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4). God condemned sin in Jesus Christ—it was our sin laid on Jesus, and that sin was condemned. Then he gives us his Spirit so that we more and more begin living in the pattern of his law.

Dr. Packer again: “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.” So more and more we count on the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power that’s within us, and we don’t indulge the desires of the flesh.

Packer continues, “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.”

It’s going to be an ongoing struggle in this life where our flesh is never completely gone, and we need to depend every moment on the fact that Jesus forgives—that his blood covers it. We never perform perfectly. There’s always a stain on our motive or in our performance, and we fall short. So we always need the grace of Christ, and we always need the Spirit to help us keep going, keep moving, and keep moving upward in the Lord.

We’re never at a point where we can say, “Okay, Jesus has cleansed my sins, and I don’t have any more to cleanse. So glad that’s taken care of, and I’ve pretty well got this thing licked. I’ve defeated all my bad habits. I’ve got it all together. I’m in great shape. I don’t think I need the Holy Spirit to take care of me anymore because he’s already perfected me.” No. The Spirit and the flesh will be in conflict throughout this life. Our calling as Christians is to keep depending on Jesus’ grace and forgiveness, to keep drawing upon the Spirit’s guidance and power, to keep up the struggle against the flesh—knowing that the flesh is not our true self, and that our true self is the one being created in Christ Jesus.

John Owen, one of the great Puritan writers of the 1600s, said, “The chief way by which the saints have communion with the Father is love—free, undeserved, eternal love.” That’s really the message of Galatians: free grace. You’ve got to live by this free grace. Don’t let yourself become a slave again. Don’t fall away from that gospel. It’s free love. Owen goes on: “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.”

God wants you to know that he loves you. God wants you to live by that free grace—not think that at every moment it depends on you to earn your way to him. You have to give up on that whole “self” thing, that idea that God is just watching your performance to decide whether he loves you or not. Once you accept his love, the amazing thing is your performance will begin to change and improve because you know that you’re surrounded and supported by that love.

### **Connected and corrected**

Even when you recognize something you’ve done wrong, it can be a blessing to you. I’ll give one example from my own life that happened a while ago. We were riding in the car, talking and joking as a family. My college-age daughter was telling us about a math course she was taking and about her professor. Then she said, “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.”

Sometimes I can be overly demanding on my kids or overly arrogant in the way I handle myself. My daughter wasn’t trying to be disrespectful—she was kind of laughing as she said it. It was just one of those things she knows about her dad. Maybe that was her only intent, but I took it as a rebuke from the Holy Spirit—not one where I felt totally defeated (“Oh, I’m such a rotten father”), but one where I thanked God that he showed me, “You are too arrogant in the way you behave toward others, Dave. You sometimes expect things of others that they’re not ready for. Some people are better at math than others. Some people are more mature than others.”

The Bible says of the Lord, “He knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). He knows our weaknesses. I needed to be corrected. I could say to the Lord, “Forgive me for that. Forgive me for the ways I do that wrong.” And also, “Lord, I can’t make myself a less arrogant, more kind person on my own. Help me make more progress in that area of my life.”

As we live with this constant conflict, the flesh can take many forms. Sometimes it’s things where I have to be careful what I look at on a computer or the things I avoid. Sometimes it’s the way I relate to others in ways I’m hardly aware of until the Holy Spirit brings it to my attention. You may have things in your life right now that you have no clue are offensive to God and wounding others. But the Lord will show you, little by little, more and more of your flesh that needs to be crucified, changed, and dealt with.



When that happens, don't feel defeated or overwhelmed. Throw yourself on the mercy of God and say, "Thank you, Jesus, for your blood, and thank you for your Spirit who changes me."

### **Fruit of the Spirit**

As the Lord continues to work in our lives and as we walk by the Spirit, here's what happens more and more fully: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Galatians 5:22-26).

We live by the Spirit, and more and more his fruit becomes fuller and more beautiful in our lives. That flesh part of us is identified, crucified, and left at the cross of Jesus. This is what the apostle Paul—especially in Galatians and Romans—wants us to know, and what the entirety of God's Word shows us: that Jesus Christ, and he alone, pays the penalty for our sin; and Jesus Christ, and he alone, by the power of his Holy Spirit, gives us the ability to change.

So no more self-centered self-improvement, no more moralism and legalism. At the same time, no more saying, "I give up. I can't resist sin." Instead, keep on fighting—because just giving in to the flesh is no answer. Live by the Spirit, crucify the flesh with its passions and desires, and always hold on to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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### **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.
- "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.
- "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

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### **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.**

### **When conduct and conscience collide**

- **Self-improvement:** try to force conscience to control conduct by sheer willpower (law)
- **Self-indulgence:** try to drown conscience in a flood of sinful conduct (lawless)

## **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**

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## **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)

## **When conduct and conscience collide: Three options**

- **Self-improvement:** try to force conscience to control conduct by sheer willpower (law)

- **Self-indulgence:** try to drown conscience in a flood of sinful conduct (lawless)
- **Spirit-indwelling:** trust God's grace in Christ to forgive you and depend on the Spirit's power to battle the flesh

### **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)

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)