

# Christian Study

Lesson 244

## Be Light

*Focusing on Church beyond Sunday*

### How Can I Know and Understand What the Bible Means?

#### Understanding the Basic Gospel

##### The Conflict Within (continue)

As we have come to the conclusion that when we come face-to-face with our indwelling sin, the answer is found in looking to our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most concise biblical presentations of God's answer to the conflict within us is found in **Galatians 5:16** "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh." Notice first what this verse does not say. It does not say, "If you will clean up the flesh, you will become spiritual." You could work your whole life and never get the flesh cleaned up. Yes, you could restrain your external behavior, but God is looking at your heart. Jesus said in **Matthew 15:19** "For it is out of the heart that evil thoughts come, as well as murder, adultery, sexual immorality, stealing, false testimony, and slander."

Therefore, it is an exercise of no useful result to dedicate oneself to "cleaning the flesh" in the hopes of becoming spiritual. This is exactly what the Galatians were trying to do, and that is why Paul exclaimed, **Galatians 3:3** "Are you so foolish? Having started out with the Spirit, are you now ending up with the flesh?" Using this term very loosely, "Galatianism" is an attempt to attain spirituality through self-efforts and dedicating oneself to it is an impossible task. It is absolutely necessary that we note the order of **Galatians 5:16**. If we will walk in dependency upon the Spirit of God, we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. It doesn't say that the desires of the flesh will go away; it says we will not go with them. Even though in this world we will never be free from the presence of sin, we can genuinely grow in grace as we focus on what God is doing in our lives

The apostle had the same idea in mind when he wrote to the Romans in **Romans 6:10-13** 'for the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **12** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for

Unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

It reminds me of an AM/FM radio. I can have the switch on AM and listen to AM programming if I choose, or I can switch to FM and listen to FM programming. AM stations do not play on FM, nor do FM stations play on AM. I cannot determine the programming that is being broadcast; but I can choose the one I will tune to.

In a similar way a Christian can give his mind to the influences of end philosophies of the world: His emotions and desires will predictably respond to that programming, and his actions will be characterized as the "works of the flesh." However, having been born again by the Holy Spirit, he can present himself to God for the "renewing of his mind" through the Word of God... Then he can choose to walk by faith in that truth and total dependency in God. He will then be walking by the Spirit. **Galatians 5:16** gives us the promise that if we make the choice to present ourselves to the Spirit of God in this way, we cannot at the same time be fulfilling the desires that are brought to our minds. We will be growing in grace as we present our minds and bodies to the indwelling Christ, letting Him live out His life through us. Immediately after telling us to "present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness," Paul goes on to encourage us with this reminder: "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

#### **Romans 6:14**

When we face the truth that we can choose to walk in dependence on the Lord or walk independently, we can look at our reactions to circumstances in a new light. External events do not put sin into me; they draw fleshly reactions out of me. Therefore God uses circumstances of our lives to show where we are walking at a point in time, and as reminders to return to dependency upon Him.

The apostle Peter having a full understanding of the conflict within the human heart even after we have become born again, being converted and a believer in the final work of Jesus Christ was appealing to God's people who are scattered like foreigners in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. It is also true of us today in different parts of the world and in our different stages of trust and maturity in the grace of God **1Peter 1:23-25** "since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; **24** for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, **25** but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

Unfortunately, I have found that many Christians have expectations regarding spiritual growth and the nature of indwelling sin that are the exact opposite of the truth. In my opinion, these misconceptions not only keep them in bondage to failure,

but they set people for a greater and more guaranteed fall. One of these wrong assumptions is the notion that a Christian's flesh improves and becomes less sinful over time. This is a tremendous and dangerous error, and will effectively prevent a person from growing in grace.

You have to remember something about error; it does not have to be clearly defined in one's mind in order to cause damage. Many times the most dangerous errors are those that sit quietly in the back of our minds, but at the same time form expectations that mold our thinking and actions. They can be ideas that we have never thought through logically. The errors regarding spiritual growth are usually of this type.

While no one would say he thinks this way, there is a particular mindset that many Christians hold. It goes something like this; "At the time I was born again, I obviously had no Christian maturity, so I needed 100 percent of Jesus. Later, as I grew in character, I became 20 percent mature, so then I needed 80 percent of Jesus. At some point, if I keep growing, I will be about 65 percent mature; then I will only need 35 percent of Jesus."

I know most of us would not make the following comment out loud, but it is the logical conclusion of that kind of thinking; "Someday I will have achieved such a level of Christian character (100 percent) that I will not need Jesus at all." Alongside this belief in the "growth of Christian character" comes the corresponding thought that the flesh is becoming less sinful. Therefore, the person believes, I am less temptable to sin. I can't think of a more dangerous situation than to be going through life thinking you are becoming immune to temptation. I guarantee that if you believe this you are being set up for a serious fall.

People would always ask, "Where do you see evidence of this?" There are many situations where this hidden expectation shows through. You will see this in counseling offices where dozens of times a man or a woman has sat in a chair with their mouth and eyes wide open in disbelief saying; "I have been a Christian for 15 years, and I can't believe what I just did," or "I can't believe I am wrestling with this temptation." The same thoughts can be seen in Christians' response to other believers' sin. Some well-known Christian falls, or a pastor is revealed to have given in to temptation, and people say, "He was a man of God; He taught the Bible wonderfully and led many people to Christ. I can't believe he did this.

What do those comments reveal? The expectation that a Christian who has shown marks of maturity and of being used by God (and I do not doubt either) somehow gets to a state where he is not capable of responding to the same sinful desires that are common to man. We simply will not accept the biblical teaching that, as Paul said, "Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" **Romans 7:18**

Christians who believe that they are less temptable or that they have achieved some kind of permanent victory tend to take foolish chances. They play with fire, thinking that they cannot be burned. These are the ones who find themselves blindsided by a sudden temptation, and end up in a counseling office saying; "I can't believe what I did." If they had understood the evil in their own flesh from the start, they would have known not to play around with potential trouble, and could have avoided a great deal of personal misery.

The hard truth is this: The sin in our flesh was absolutely rotten the day we came to Christ, and after fifty years it will still be rotten. Jesus' words will never change: "Apart from me you can do nothing." Therefore our need for total dependency upon Christ was 100 percent the first day, 100 percent after 50 years and if we walk faithfully with the Lord for a full 100 years, our need for total dependence upon the living Christ will still be 100 percent.

The Bible teaches that we are engaged in spiritual warfare: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" **Ephesians 6:12**. Though most Christians would readily agree to this statement, I find that many are confused as to the nature of the conflict.

When you say the word "spiritual warfare," it is common for people to visualize Exorcists type of encounter of demonic possession and the like. While I admit these as a biblical possibility, they are certainly not the normal. In my opinion, the real issue in spiritual warfare is truth versus error, and the battle ground is the mind of men. As Jesus said, **John 8:31-32** "Then Jesus said to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, truly you are My disciples. **32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

If it is truth that sets us free, then it is error that binds us. That is why the devil's primary attack to frustrate the spread of the gospel is to keep Christians living in bondage through error. In speaking with Christians of all backgrounds, denominations and geographical areas, I have the unique chance to observe the prevalence of fear. People are full of fear in their personal problems about their marriages, how their children will turn out, about their job security, about world events. And tragically many Christians still live in object fear even though they have become reconciled, redeemed, justified, holy children of God

I am convinced that Satan's primary weapon against the Christian is fear. We often tell people, "Satan is a toothless wonder. He may be a "roaring lion looking for someone to devour" 2 Peter 5:8, but he has been detoothed and declawed at the cross. 1 John 4:4 "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because

greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world." This is an effective attack because people who are motivated by deep fear tend to do very foolish things. They do not think clearly nor do they act wisely. You lost perspective when you are afraid.

The devil's lies are practically effective when they are aimed at our identity. Let's say that we have stolen something. Satan is not satisfied when we commit the theft. He tries to infect our minds with the thought, "You are a thief." It is not enough for us simply to admit having told a lie. The devil whispers "You are a liar He is not satisfied that we admit committing a sin. The last thing Satan wants is for a Christian to think that, he or she is a child of God who has committed sin. Why? Because the very next step would be, "This makes no sense! If I am a saint, a holy one of God, then this behavior is entirely inconsistent with who I really am. A believer who see himself this way, which is how God sees him, will get up, return to dependency on Christ and go on with his life. That is why the love and acceptance of God is not only the foundation of our Christian lives it is the center around which we must orbit as we grow in grace. Grace is not only how we were saved, it is how we live.

*It is no secret, what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you.*

Our mission is to help people find strength and security on the foundation that can never be shaken, cracked or shattered. This foundation is the remarkable truth of God's unconditional love and His indisputable grace experienced in a relationship with Jesus Christ. The critics of Christianity have launched a full attack to discredit the person and works of Jesus Christ and the reliability of His word. We cannot be silent anymore. Let us as children of light, stand firm in the faith, because He who has taken us this far will never forsake us. You are called Christians, be careful of that name. Let not our Lord Jesus Christ be blasphemed on your account

**Believe this,** "Jesus did not come to make bad people good, He came to make dead people live."

### Keep It Simple

**Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.**

If you have any questions, comments or you know anybody else who will benefit from this study please feel free to give us their email address and they will be added to our mailing list to receive weekly lessons. The email address is

[santigiemandol@yahoo.com](mailto:santigiemandol@yahoo.com),

**Remember:** A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle (Ephesians 5:8)

Let's go light another candle!