

War

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Hello, welcome back to session three of spiritual fruit and gospel fiber. If you have your Bibles again, turn them to Galatians. If you remember in session one, we talked about the freedom that we have in Christ in a sense, the thesis of Galatians that Christ came to set us free—free from living according to the law and legalism, freedom from living according to the flesh and the spiritual powers of evil. But on the other side of that coin, freedom to live according to the Spirit, which produces the fruit of the Spirit, which God wants to produce inside of us. He wants us to be imitators of Him. He wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son. He wants us to walk according to the Spirit. And what does it look like to be an imitator of God? What does it look like to be conformed to the image of His Son? What does it look like to have the freedom to walk according to the Spirit? It is the fruit of the Spirit.

So we moved from the first session to the freedom that we have in Christ, looking at the thesis and the umbrella of all of the letter, of the context. And then in our last session, we moved from freedom to power. Paul understands that we can't obtain this freedom on our own. And even though the new age has broken through, we're in the already-not-fully age of that, that we're still under the present evil world. We're still living in that even though we've been set free from it. And so Paul shows us how we are conformed to the image of Christ. Paul shows us how we are imitators of God, how we can produce the fruit of the Spirit—it is by walking according to the Spirit, living in the Spirit, with the Spirit, by the power of the Spirit.

Paul told us that if we do that, then we no longer have to fulfill the desires of our sinful nature, which Paul not only says here, but he also will say later on in Galatians, I'm sorry, in Romans chapter 8, where he's going to say that now those who are in Christ are no longer obligated to fulfill the desires of the sinful flesh.

Now this may sound like triumphism, like, "Okay, wow, we've

got this, we've got freedom and we've got power." But, the third session here I've labeled as "war." What is it good for? Absolutely. Actually, there's a war, there's a battle that's waging here. And I love what Martin Luther once said. He said, "You know, before I understood the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I would just have these battles and I would wake up and the flesh would come and would call to me and I would just be, just always racked with it. But now that I understand the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, whenever I see the sinful desires and the flesh and Satan coming at me, I can just say, 'Oh, it's just you.'" Now, Luther also understood that even though we have the freedom and the power, there's still a war that's involved. And as long as we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can win that war. But we have to show up in that battle.

And this is what we're going to see, still looking at the context of the fruit of the Spirit. Moving from Galatians 5:16, now let's look at verses 17 and 18. Look at what Paul says. Paul is a realist. He understands that the flesh, the sinful desire, is still knocking on our door. He says, "For the flesh desires the things that are against the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit [the Holy Spirit] desires the things against the flesh, so that these two are in opposition to one another. In order that you do not do the things that you desire," look at verse 18, "But since or if you are led by the spirit, you are no longer under the law." And so here Paul says that "I realized that the flesh inside of us, this sinful desire, it goes against the desires of the Holy Spirit."

I mentioned Romans 8 earlier, especially if you look at Romans 8:1–14, Paul is going to spell this out in a very similar manner, but he's going to say, the flesh goes against the Spirit. Now there's a debate among New Testament scholars. We get really geeky and say, "Well, what does it exactly mean?" And the debate here is how do we translate flesh or sinful nature? Should it be like a little "f," in a sense, almost anthropological, that just our desires, according to our biological desires, goes against God's design for us?

And this is often how we take it. But if we put Paul back in his original context, flesh wasn't just anthropological, but it was cosmological. I know I'm using big words here, but cosmological is that it would be a big "F," in the sense of the power of Flesh. So it's not just our flesh, but instead this demonic power that is fighting against the Spirit of God for us, very similar to what we would see in Romans 5, where Paul talks not about sin, a little

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Author's Translation

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σάρξ – sark

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bitty sin and a little bitty death, but sin and death as powers. He will say this in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 as well—that death is not just something that we face, but it is this demon power. And so it could be that here Paul is drawing upon his—showing his Jewish underwear, if you will, going back to his roots to say that flesh is not just this desire that we have, a biological desire, but instead, there's an evil power that's working with our flesh.

But Paul is going to be honest. He realizes that this present evil age, even though we're in it, is still fighting against us. And he says, “The spirit goes against the flesh and the flesh goes against the spirit. So these two are at odds with one another.” Polycarp—who was in the second century, kind of the first of the interpreters of the New Testament—he paraphrases this. It's not just that the Spirit goes against the flesh and the flesh goes against the Spirit, but instead he says, they war with one another. Polycarp sounds like a bad fish, but he really was a pretty good church father.

I think he gives us a good paraphrase of this because many of us know that war, we hear the promise of the freedom that we have of Christ. We know that God has given us His Spirit. But the reality is that we're facing this battle, this war that wages inside of us, and so Paul says, “I know that flesh and spirit are still at war with one another.” Very similar to what 1 Peter would say. Peter says, “I urge you as aliens and strangers in this world to abstain from the sinful desires that wage against your flesh, that wage against your life.” So very similar to this, Peter and Paul realized that the battle is still raging, that life is a battlefield, a battlefield, a battlefield.

Notice what Paul says. Because the flesh goes against the Spirit and the Spirit goes against the flesh, because they're at war with one another. They do this so that you do not do the things that you desire. There's a lot of different ways to interpret this last phrase “in order that you do not do the evil, the things that you desire.” Some are going to translate this “in order that you do not do the good things that you desire,” because the Spirit and flesh are at odds with one another. You want to do good, but you can't; you try to do holiness, but you fail. This is one way to interpret this, and probably the way that many of you have read this. On the other side of this, it could be so that you do not do the evil things, the fleshly things that you want to do.

The first one seems to resonate with our experience. We want to do good, but we fall down. We try to hit the mark, but we miss so often. But the second one actually fits better with the context. If

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we look at the context, Paul has said earlier, “It is for freedom that God has set you free. This is your freedom, but I don’t want you to use your freedom, your forgiveness, in order to indulge the flesh.” And if I remember correctly, that’s in verse 15 that Paul says this, that he says, “You have the freedom, you have forgiveness, but don’t use the freedom that you have by the Spirit, that you have in Christ, in order to indulge your flesh.” Again, some people see this as a stalemate—that the Spirit and the flesh, they’re both in it, so we’re at a stalemate. Or some see that as long as the flesh is there, it’s going to overcome the Spirit. But I don’t think this is what Paul is saying. I think Paul is saying, as long as we give access to the Spirit, as long as we take care of that control, even though it’s not going to be easy, we’re going to win in the end. The Spirit of God is greater in us than that flesh, than that sin, than that power is that is in the world.

Now we don’t have this overconfidence, like what Paul would say in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, that we have this temptation—and no temptation has seized us, except what is common to everyone. So we don’t need to get to the point of thinking that we stand and we’re never going to sin again, because that’s when we fall. But Paul says, when we do face this temptation, God is faithful and He provides a way out. So, we don’t continue to sin. We don’t use our freedom to live like we want to, knowing that God has already forgiven us. But now we access the Holy Spirit so that we live the holy life that God has called us to, that we walk according to the Spirit.

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Going back to Martin Luther, I love what he said when he talked about the sinful desires and the flesh, he said, “Before I understood the gospel of Jesus Christ, I thought that every time sin knocked on the door, I had to open the door. But now that I understand the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I realized that when sin knocks, I no longer have to answer the door. And so now when it comes to those sinful desires that I’ve struggled with all of my life, those things that marked the present evil age that I used to live in and be in bondage to, now I make sure that I shut the door, and not only do I shut the door, but I avoid the door. I don’t go around it anymore. And not only do I shut the door and avoid the door, but I put a guard at the door to make sure that I can’t go to it. And not only do I do that, but I realized that I no longer have to open the door. I no longer have to go by the door and I can begin to ignore the knocking over time.” It’s a freedom that Christ has set us free. He comes and says, “But if we are led by the Spirit, then we are no longer underneath that law.” The law of legalism or this law of

having to live according to the flesh. Now we walk according to the Spirit.

It's interesting that often when we talk about holiness, we think we want a plan, we want a system. We want five points for how do I become holy? But what we see with Paul is that he doesn't give us a system. Instead, he gives us, in a sense, the art. The answer is living according to the Spirit. And so, we realize that we can live according to the Spirit as long as we have each other. We're going to talk about the community of living according to the Spirit because now Paul's going to say that, "We need those guards that we're going to set at the door." So in the next session, we're actually finally going to get—now that we've looked at the context—we're going to get to the verse of the fruit of the Spirit. And then from there, we'll move on and talk about how that leads to community. Thanks for being with me.