

**Living By The Spirit**  
**The Spirit's War**  
**Galatians 5:13—6:10**

In various places, the Spirit is described as being at war—with the world, the flesh and the devil.

- ▣ The Spirit is at war with the devil. We fight against him and many unseen spiritual powers and the only offensive weapon we have is the sword of the Spirit—the word of God (Eph. 6:12, 17). Receiving the Holy Spirit as God's gift of new life has launched us into a realm of spiritual warfare far greater than our immediate circumstances. We are the Lord's servants or prophets and draw fire from unseen quarters. Only the word of God wielded by the Holy Spirit can prevail against him. This is true of attacks made on us personally or of broader ministry.
- ▣ The Spirit is at war with the world, convicting it of sin (John 16:8-11). He also hides himself from the world (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 2:12-14)—a withdrawal of much needed services that could be construed as hostile.
  - It is preferable to see pangs of conscience often occurring in unbelievers as a general confusion that is inevitable when there is no gospel (Rom. 2:15-16)—we know the Spirit works in relationship with the church's witness.
- ▣ The Holy Spirit, represented as 'the seven Spirits of God' before his throne are 'sent out into all the earth' (Rev. 5:6) and this may relate to the judgements that follow.
- ▣ The Holy Spirit may wage war against a church—if they do not repent. Jesus says he will come against defectors at the Pergamum church with 'the sword of his mouth'—and this is what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev. 2:15-17).
- ▣ The Holy Spirit is at war with the flesh and we will focus on this—particularly in Galatians. Similar material is found also in Romans and 1 Corinthians.

As with any war, it is important to understand the battle, and listen to those responsible for its progress. This is particularly significant when we are the battleground. We lack objectivity and need to be told what the points of contention are, how that battle is being conducted, what resources are available, and what hope we have of success.

The whole of Paul's teaching to the Galatians on this matter is eminently practical, so it is important to get this battle plan right.

- ▣ It is conducted under the heading of being free from law's reign and condemnation and of serving one another in love (Gal. 5:13). It concludes with 'do good to everyone' (Gal. 6:8, 10).
- ▣ The alternatives are 'biting and devouring' (5:15), conceit and provocation (5:26) and all the works of the flesh listed in between. (Cf. Jam. 4:1-5).
- ▣ The world legislates to help us live together, but we need a power to do it.

The issue is about desire—strong desires.

- ▣ The war here is about what the Spirit within us is wanting, and what our flesh is wanting (5:17)—and they are different.
- ▣ Our flesh does not give up and the battle remains until we are glorified.

- What we may miss here is vital—the Spirit does not relent either!
  - The Spirit within us still wants what he wants! He wants to give us all the life of God. Herein lies the war.
- The battle between Spirit and flesh is ‘to keep you from doing the things that you want to do’ (v. 17).
  - Translating this is difficult but it is intended to support the confidence of walking and being led by the Spirit (vv. 16, 18).
  - The best option (summarising Gordon Fee) recognises that becoming Christians has put us in an embattled position. From now on, we will always be choosing between flesh and Spirit, not just making up our own mind.
- This passage (as with the similar passage in Romans 7—8) shows us the way in which the flesh is overcome. It is full of hope.
  - We are alive to God because the Spirit has come (5:25; also 3:2-3, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5). We have received forgiveness and new life.
  - So, walk by the Spirit and you won’t fulfill the desires of the flesh (5:16, 25). Simple! Be led by the Spirit (5:18). The Spirit bears fruit (5:22).
- Here are the resources—the ‘big guns’—available.
  - We are not under the law (5:18) and therefore, not under the curse of that law (3:10, 13; 4:5-6) but under a gracious Father whom we love. Guilt keeps us cowering; grace makes us bold.
  - We belong to Christ and, as such, have (that is ‘we have’) already crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (5:24). The practical nature of this is stunning. Being joined to Christ in his dying, witnessed to us by the Holy Spirit, spells death to passions and desires.
  - We understand this better when we see that regulating the flesh doesn’t work (Col. 2:23); crucifixion with Christ does.
  - The ‘body of sin’ is disabled through crucifixion with Christ (Rom. 6:6). Knowing that Christ has taken our sinful self to his cross and borne its shame, its horror and its death is liberation from sin—as a practical fact.
  - We need to learn to walk in this Spirit conveyed truth.
- The Spirit’s fruit arises naturally when our ‘tree’ is healthy. It happens slowly but surely if we trust the ‘microbiology’ and ‘nutrients’ in the soil. You can’t make fruit; it has to grow.
- What the Holy Spirit produces aligns with God’s law. Only what comes from God as a gift can fulfill what God requires.
- In contrast to this, the flesh works—that is, it produces what it is capable of producing and nothing more. It produces people who don’t like God, and given time, can’t stand each other! There is much good in human society without the gospel because we were made to be servants of each other and it ‘feels good’ to do that, but it cannot be maintained without a Spirit who conveys life from above.
- Living our lives under the grace of the Spirit is described as sowing seed (6:8). We may put our energies into satisfying the cravings that are always present when we are out of fellowship with God, or, we may put our energies into cultivating faith, hope and love as children of the Father, sharers with Christ and recipients of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is at war, within us, because he desires what is for our life and salvation. He is against (Gr. *kata* = a variety of meanings including ‘against’, as in 1 Cor. 4:6) the

desires that arise from the fallen humanity we have and our attachment to this present world.

This battle takes us to the heart of our faith—Christ has come to take away the sins of the world, and he has included us in his victory. When the Spirit conveys this to us, he takes us to the heart of God's battle with the world, and with its present incumbent prince.