

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 3: THE BATTLE WITHIN ME

Inherently, we have a selfish nature which conflicts with the nature of God's Spirit in us. It is important to dig deeper into our conflicting natures to understand why we have this struggle even after our salvation.

As we read further into the lesson, we will get a biblical understanding on this constant conflict within us and what is involved in the battle.

There is a constant battle within us: good and bad, right and wrong. Let us read and find out what the Bible says about the battle within us and how God can help us.

It is very important in our Christian lives to turn away from the cravings of our flesh. In the Bible, Paul even uses strong words like 'to cut away and 'to put to death' when he talks about our sinful nature.

God commands us to flee from our sinful nature. So it is also our act of obedience to God to not succumb to the cravings of our flesh.

There is a North American folk tale that talks about the struggle inside each one of us. This story, told to the younger generation, talks about two dogs which are within each person. These two dogs, one good and the other bad, are constantly in battle with each other. The good dog, which represents generosity, goodwill, love, joy, sacrifice and honesty, tries to win over the person just as much as the evil dog representing hate, vengeance, lust, dishonesty and selfishness. The story continues in this manner until one of the dogs wins over the other. A child might ask, 'Which dog lives?' to which an elder responds, 'The dog that you feed the most'. The more evil a person does, the more the evil dog gets fed. Similarly, the more good a person does, the stronger the good dog gets. This story provides a perspective about the constant war between good and evil within us. Looking to the Bible can give us more insight about this internal struggle.

After salvation, a believer has two natures: the physical sin nature (often referred to as 'flesh') and the Spirit of God. The conflict within us arises because of this battle between our flesh and the Spirit of God within us. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:17, '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.' Our flesh, having the innate nature to sin, is in constant conflict with the Spirit of God which desires holiness and to be free from sin.

Even though Christ's death frees us from the slavery to sin, we are not separated from the sinful nature, which we were born with. As a result, we continue to have sinful desires. But the good news is that the Spirit of God, which has given us our new nature, is continually working within us. When we are born again as a child of God, the Holy Spirit within us desires to follow God's will. Paul mentions in Romans 13:14: 'But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires'. In the same way, 1 John 3:9 says 'no one born of God makes a practice of sinning'.

As believers in Christ, we need to know how to overcome this battle in us; how to avoid feeding our sinful nature and how to feed our Godly nature. First let's look at the sinful nature: what things would feed our sinful nature? Indulging in sin, making decisions only for our own benefit, glorifying ourselves instead of God, or making decisions we know that God dislikes. In contrast, feeding our Godly nature is partly the same idea: making

decisions that honour God, glorifying Him with our actions, doing the right thing in all circumstances. We must practice asking ourselves what God would have us do, and then do that, no matter how difficult it is.

But there's more to feeding our Godly natures than just doing good. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit's help and feed our Godly nature with actions that help us know God's will – prayer, Scriptures, Christian fellowship where possible, worship, and leaning on God's strength to help us. Philippians 3:3 says, 'For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh'. The phrase 'no confidence in the flesh' refers in this case, not to 'flesh' as our sinful desires, but to our ability to keep God's law on our own strength. It is not possible to resist the evil within us merely by human strength. If it were possible for us to be perfect on our own, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ would not be necessary. However we have God's power within us through the Holy Spirit.

We must not forget that we need to rely on this powerful Spirit to aid us in this transformation and that our God will come to our rescue when we call. As long as we are on this Earth, we will continue to struggle with our old nature and our new, Godly nature. Yet as we mature in Christ, this battle will become increasingly victorious as we learn to rely completely on His strength.

IN REVIEW

- The battle within us is the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. That is, the old and the new nature.
- Our flesh is our carnal nature or our nature to sin. This nature still exists after salvation, although we are no longer slaves to it. We need to make a conscious choice not to gratify our sinful nature.
- Our tendency to sin or not depends on whether the sinful nature or the Spirit of God controls us.
- Only with the help of the Spirit can we overcome this constant battle within us.

But there's more to feeding our Godly natures than just doing good. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit's help and feed our Godly nature with actions that help us know God's will – prayer, Scriptures, Christian fellowship where possible, worship, and leaning on God's strength to help us.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Make a list of the desires of your sinful nature that you find yourself struggling with.
- In the past week how many times have you allowed the Spirit of God to take control rather than gratifying your sinful desires?
- List two ways in which you can feed and strengthen the Godly nature in you?
- Compare a time when you actively sought help from the Holy Spirit to overcome a conflict and when you didn't. How was it different?

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