

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY  
Man and Spiritual Warfare  
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We are doing a series on spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are what? We have been at this now for 10 weeks, does anybody have any word on spiritual disciplines? They are what, habits that we develop in order to help us do what? Grow spiritually or in sanctification or grow in discipleship, become more Godly. To become more of the men that we really want to be.

This morning we are going to be talking about the discipline of spiritual warfare. This is going to be a topic we will have to make very realistic to us. So we are going to start by trying to figure out what is the problem, that the discipline of spiritual warfare solves.

Let's say that you have a woman in your life. You are married to her or maybe just in a relationship with her. You criticize it, not only for her weaknesses but also her strengths. You are constantly harping on things that she has no possibility of changing. Freckles, you don't like her freckles. She has wrinkles and you don't like those. She has fat ankles and you want her to do ankle exercises. You are prickly when you are home, but fortunately you are gone a lot. You are moody, pouty, proud, self righteous and angry. Sometimes you boil over in rage and spout out a venomous stream of things you regret later.

You take out your frustrations on her and rarely praise her for the good she does. Even though you would be devastated if she were to leave, you still can't stop acting dissatisfied with her. It comes through, you are driving her away. You know what, she has grown cold and is going to leave you. And you already know this. You have children, perhaps, you are neglectful, you don't hug your children enough or tell them often enough that you love them. You are missing their childhood so that you can help this company, that you work for, go over the top. You know what, your daughter is about to fall into the hands of the young man that is overdosed on testosterone. He is going to tell her that he loves her and he is going to hug her and she will hate you for the next 20 years. And you already know this, don't you?

Parents, you have parents perhaps that are alive? You don't appreciate their sacrifices. All the sacrifices that they made for you. Instead of looking at how far they've come, you only look at how far they didn't go with you. You know what, pretty soon it will be too late. They will be dead and you won't be able to tell them anything. And you already know this, don't you?

Your work, you are totally stressed out and you can feel yourself burning out, you know that you are in the process of burning out. But you are a workaholic and you love this work. In fact, you get a great deal of your identity from this work that you do, and you have your identity wrapped up in the work and you are acting like the ones you work with are your loved ones. And you know what, it is all going to come to an abrupt end and they will not return your phone calls any more. And you already know this, don't you?

To say nothing of lust, pornography, pride, envy, slander, jealousy, stealing, cheating, materialism....need I go on, you already know these things.

Your struggle is a much deeper struggle, than anyone you know can imagine that you are going through. I know this. Because my struggle is much deeper than anybody would ever possibly dare imagine. The problem is that, the flesh in us is very powerful and must always be managed. And the 2 great errors is to: 1) publicly pretend that you have conquered the flesh, men there is a great deal of pressure on you to publicly pretend that you have conquered the flesh. The second great error is to privately deny that you can conquer the flesh. To privately stop believing the voracity of the scripture, that you can conquer your flesh. Two great problems: to publicly pretend that you have conquered that which you have privately denied you have any ability to conquer.

There is not a man here, this morning, who doesn't want to do the right things. That is why you are here, right? Because you have in your heart the desire to do the right thing. But, you don't.

Why do we keep doing the things that we already know are going to destroy us?

That is the problem. Now let's take a look at how we can find some power to solve this problem, and then we will take a little look at how you can make some progress or some practical applications at the end.

What happens when you become a Christian? What are some of the things that happen. You become saved, you get eternal life. You become a new man, a new creation. What else? Regenerated and forgiven. See, you already know all the answers. That is what happens when you become a Christian. What does not happen when you become a Christian? Let's look at Galatians 5:16 and following: (New Living Translation)

*So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil. Which is just the opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants and the spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires.*

So the Holy Spirit gives us desires. And the flesh gives us desires. The desires of the flesh/sinful nature, are evil and our flesh loves to do these things. The spirit gives us desires to do good, the opposite from the flesh.

Reading on:

*These two forces,( the flesh and the spirit, are two powerful forces that are both within every Christian.) are constantly fighting with each other. (Not occasionally, but constantly) and your choices are never free from this conflict.*

Is this some strange teaching, this is no strange teaching, it is basically the core of the Christian struggle and that is why there is a discipline of spiritual warfare that Christians are encouraged to make into a habit of our daily lives.

Romans 7

*I do not do what I want to do. Now, the evil I don't want to do, this I keep on doing. When I would good, evil is right there with me.* Yes? And so we have this conflict going on inside of us. Let's read on and I will show you here what the next little section here we might call How to tell if you are losing the battle.

*Galatians 5:19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature your lives will produce these evil results. Sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry.... this is so depressing. Participation in demonic activity, hostility, quarreling, out burst of anger, selfish ambition, envy....and other kinds of sin. Let me tell you again, Paul says, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

Sometimes, good idea, just to let the word of God sit there and do it's work. Let me tell you again as I have before, anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God.

That is how to tell if you are losing the battle. Now how can you tell if you are winning?  
*Verse 22: But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives he will produce this kind of fruit in us, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.*

And so if you see that going on in your life, you should be encouraged. Now because we do each have this battle in us between the flesh and the spirit, would it be a reasonable expectation that you are never are going to do anything that would give evidence that you are losing the spiritual battle? No, it would be a wrong teaching to say that you are never going to do any of these things. But if there is no fruit in a persons life, if that little ditty I did at the beginning is all that you have to give as a report for you life, then you have lost, or are losing the battle.

Where do you get the power to win this battle, back up to the very top of the verse, verse 16, so I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. NIV says, live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature... and that is the Big Idea.

Live By the Holy Spirit and You Will Not Gratify the Desires of Your Sinful Nature.

If you try to pretend that you have conquered the flesh, or that you are conquering the flesh, you have made a great error. Because only through the Holy Spirit can you not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

So don't go around pretending to the men at your table. Don't go around pretending in your church, don't go around in your family pretending that you are not a sinful man, that you don't struggle against the flesh. Even if you usually and mostly are conquering, you still are in a struggle and a conflict in every single decision that you and I make. Every single decision that you and I make there is a spiritual struggle going on between the flesh and the spirit.

Do I pout.... you know guys, that don't know Christ, you watch them and sometimes don't you wonder, how could anybody be that blind to how arrogant they are. How is it possible that anybody could have that arrogant and not know it?

Well, men, guess what? A lot of us have that too. And it is fool hardy to publicly pretend that you are conquering things, especially when people around you can see that you are not. But equally, dangerous is to, because you have failed so many times....I don't know about you but I will be honest, there have been times where I have been reduced to tears, weeping uncontrollably because my sins are so grievous to me. Why can't I get any victory over this? Why do I keep losing my temper? Why, when I'm losing my temper at my wife over the thing that attracted me to her in the first place? What's that all about?

So, we have these experiences, where we fail and sometimes repeatedly fail and let's be honest, we read the bible and we think what? This is the ideal life not the real life. Am I right? That we tend to often look at the bible and we say that our experience is so much less than this that the bible must be describing something else other than what I am going through. It is very dangerous to begin to privately deny what the scriptures teach about our ability to conquer the flesh through the power of the holy spirit.

What's the text say? So, I say live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of your sinful nature. Well, how can we make some progress in this? There is a great movie, A Beautiful Mind, I'm sure many of you have seen this movie. John Nash, plays a schizophrenic, towards the end of the movie he is questioned about the delusional characters that he has struggled with all of his life, he says this, a person said 'Are they gone' and he said 'No, they are not gone, maybe they never will be. But I have gotten used to ignoring them. I think that at a result they have kind of given up on me.' You think that is what it is like with all of our dreams and nightmares, you have to keep feeding them to stay alive?

There is a lot in that little thought to recommend an analogy to how we can win the spiritual battle. If you are an alcoholic, and that is your delusion, then probably it would be better not to go into bars to have business meetings. Or to go to lunch with guys that drink martini's. That probably would not be a good idea. If you struggle with pornography, and lust in the past, it probably would be a good idea not to take the Swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated. Probably. Something to consider. Starve it out. We can make tremendous progress if we would just put ourselves out of sins way. It is such a simple idea it is almost embarrassing to have to say it. Put yourself out of sins way.

Secondly: put yourself in the community. Another thing that Nash said in this movie, he said he was asking his old nemesis, who is now the department head of Princeton University, if he might be able to make a place for him in the University, after a long checkered relationship with the University. He said this, 'I want to do this, because being part of a community might do me some good. A certain level of attachments to certain places, familiar people might help me elbow these certain delusions I have.'

Think for a moment about.....publicly no one wants, in your community, to go around and pretend that you are conquering that which you have not. And so, guys, there is something that most of us in this room are struggling with. I know because I meet with men. I know that on any given day, 50% of the men have some struggle that is absolutely consuming them and they lack power to overcome it. They are not making progress. One of the ways that you can make progress

is to be in community and be vulnerable, to open yourself up to the men at your table. Share what the struggle is. Invite them to pray with you. Put on the full armor of God.  
(Ephesians 6:10 and following)

Make yourself vulnerable and tell the men what you are struggling with and then ask them to pray with you and surround you in love. Let them restore to you the possibility that it is true. What does it say again? Live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Is it true, if I live by the spirit, could it be true that I will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. No, this can't be true, I just have to deny it. I just can't believe it is true. I look at my experience, now I will admit that I have not put myself in community, I will admit that I have not been vulnerable and opened up. I will admit that I have not really put on the armor of God, I have not tried to use faith to extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy.

Why would a man deny that the scripture is true. It would be because he wasn't doing the big idea. Live By the Spirit and You Will Not Gratify the Desires of the Sinful Nature. This is the central idea in the spiritual discipline, the habit of spiritual warfare. Let all who have ears hear.

Let's Pray:

Father, there is not one of us in this room, that doesn't long to do the right things and yet all of us find that we stumble in different ways. Father, help us to make sure that we are not pretending that we are conquering over that which we are not. And Lord, in the process of struggling in this privately, be sure Lord to protect us from denying the efficacy of your holy word, the truth of your scripture. Lord, I pray that you would help each of these men to gain the victory over their flesh, their sinful nature through the Holy Spirit and I pray that you would use our communities to help us in this endeavor. And Lord I do pray that these men would see genuine progress in their lives and not be discouraged in the mean time. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, and for your glory Jesus, Amen.