

### Galatians 5:24-26

**Gal 5:24 (NKJV) And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

What we have determined so far is that **the ability to crucify the flesh is based on the work of Christ on our behalf that must be appropriated into our life by faith.** So, what we want to do in this part of the study is to provide some very simple principles to help us be able to crucify our flesh. This list is terribly incomplete and very elementary, and may not even address the issue for you. On the other hand, many of these things should simply be intuitive to all of us, so in most of these principles I am simply providing you with a reminder to do what you probably already know you should be doing. However, what I want you to appreciate is that our flesh has no preference as to what area of our life it wants to invade. It does not matter to a person's flesh what area of their life in which it can get them to struggle. Most of the time when people think of temptation, for some reason they think of sexual temptations, but that would be greatly short-sighted on our part simply because many committed Christians do not struggle in this area of their life. They love their wife or their husband, they have a deeply meaningful relationship with them in that area, and they are exactly how God wants them to be – fully satisfied and content in this area. So, let us just assume that you are that type of person and the flesh may never even bother you in that area. However, that does not matter. Why? It is because the flesh will simply find another area in which to threaten you. It could be your anger, tone of voice, impatience, unkindness, selfishness, self-centeredness, vulgarity, bitterness, lack of self-control, honesty, unwillingness to trust God, always questioning God, anxiety, depression, bad habits, vanity, lack of consistency in our life, being a spend thrift, retaliation – virtually anything. You know right now the areas that you may be struggling in, so just allow these very simple principles to speak to those areas.

The one thing that we cannot do is to falsely assume that for some reason we are immune from the flesh bothering us. If you are breathing, the flesh is trying to disturb, disrupt, and unsettle some area of your life. That is a biblical fact. I.e., you never receive a respite or even a reprieve from the flesh and its undermining influence on your life. Paul stated it this way in [Romans 7:18-19](#) when he said,

**Ro 7:18 (NKJV) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. <sup>19</sup> For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will *not to do*, that I practice.**

The word for “**practice**” is “*prasso*” and is in the present tense, active voice which means that Paul was constantly struggling with his flesh. Here was one of the most godly servants on the planet and his confession was that he constantly struggled all the time with the temptations, appeals, and impulses of his flesh. So, it would be more than foolish for me to intimate to someone that I have no real spiritual struggles. Sure you do. Why? It is because you cannot change the flesh and it is always working against you. In fact, I personally think that the enemy would love for me to believe that I have no spiritual struggles in my life and just let me live on spiritual autopilot. [1 John 1:8](#) reiterates and reinforces even further the fact that we do have sin and struggles in our life when it says,

**1Jn 1:8 (NKJV) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

The actual fact that we may be struggling in an area of our life and that it is actually bothering us is reality a good thing. The very last thing that we want to happen is to get to a place in our life where we think that we have no struggles. In reality, that would be a very grievous area of pride in our life, and that may be the most dangerous of all sins. Obviously Lucifer was well acquainted with that aspect of sin.

So, where do we start in appropriating this amazing work of Christ “**by faith**”? The first principle that will help us is to simply **be willing to obey God in the small things**. I am personally convinced that God will not entrust us with larger things, and especially in the area of spiritual matters, until we have proven ourselves faithful to Him in smaller things. If you cannot win the smaller battles, it is fair to assume that you will not win the larger battles. If I can say it in a different way, it is not that you are faithful, but that **you become faithful**. We become faithful in spiritual matters over a period of time, but we specifically accomplish that reality by being faithful in the simple, daily spiritual matters that impact our life. I am talking about simple areas of obedience that require that you to exercise your will and make the correct choices.

For some people, just reading their Bible or praying for other people on a regular basis seems like a monumental task to accomplish. We all have our reasons why it may be a struggle, and we are able to successfully rationalize why we are the exception to faithfulness in a particular area of our life. For some people, just being faithful to their local church on a consistent, regular basis seems like an area of their life in which they will never be successful. Why is that? It is simple. It is because over an extended period of time they have rationalized, justified, excused, explained away, and vindicated themselves in this area of their life to the point that they no longer even have a desire to come to church except when it is convenient to come.

I was explaining to my students in Springfield that when someone comes to church irregularly that they completely minimize the impact of studying the word of God consistently. One sermon here or there will have virtually no impact on a person’s life – none, zero. It is the consistent hearing, learning, and being challenged that helps someone – not some sporadic exercise in spiritual futility. Think of it this way. Only brush your teeth once a week and see how long they last. I brush my teeth 3-5 times every day because they need that kind of consistency to remain clean. Just go to work once or twice a week and see how long you can stay employed. The point of all of this is that we **BECOME** faithful through consistency and dependability. For instance, [Luke 16:11](#) says,

**Lk 16:11 (NKJV) Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?**

You would never entrust your money to someone who had consistently been unfaithful with what you previously gave them to manage. I had a financial advisor that was handling our retirement account. My normal advisor had retired and been replaced with someone in Georgia. He never called me, never let me know what he was doing, and I made several bad decisions on not changing some of the investments that he had placed us into. I dropped him like a hot potato and transferred everything to another financial advisor that constantly communicates with me, takes us out to lunch, and calls me regularly to see if there is anything that I would like for him to do. You will not commit your riches to someone who has not been faithful with what you have given them previously. So, there is no need for

us to think that God is any different. If you want to be able to appropriate by faith what Christ has done for you, then please be faithful in the little things, in the basic things that are so critical to be successful.

I know that verse is specifically addressing our stewardship with money, but the principle here is that we migrate from the smaller to the greater. What we are doing in this idea is building our strength day by day, little by little. We are always moving in the right direction, and as we grow, the things that once may have seemed incredibly difficult to us begin to seem much easier now. We have grown in our obedience.

The second principle is to simply **ask God into everything that you do**. Intentionally bring God into your life in any area, in any temptation, and in any circumstance where you know that you are becoming uncomfortable with your life and your choices. If you are reading, ask God into your mind and heart as you read and to help quicken you to His will for your life. If you are driving in your car, ask God into your life as you drive and talk to Him and ask Him to guide your thoughts and protect you as you drive. Listen to a CD or podcast on some biblical subject. Just keep bringing God and His Word into your life. Find ways to redeem your time. If you are eating with some friends, ask God into your fellowship and to guide your conversation.

If you are being tempted in some area that you know is off limits, ask God into your life and to help you resist the temptation. [1 Corinthians 10:13](#) says,

**1Co 10:13 (NKJV) No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

What a promise – “**but God is faithful...**” It does not say, “**but you can do this...**” Please appreciate that there is nothing in this promise that says any of this will be easy – not one word. In fact, it says that God will allow you to be tempted up to what you are able to endure and resist. Then Paul says that even at that point that the temptation does not go away, but that God will help you to “**bear it**”, or to “**endure it**”. The idea in this Greek word is that God will underpin you, support you, sustain you, and help you to bear up under really stressful moments and temptations in your life.

The principle here is that generally when we are not able to overcome what Paul calls in [Galatians 5:24](#) as the “**passions and desires**” of the flesh, it is simply because our flesh has a greater voice in our life than God does. We have not consciously invited God into those areas of our life. We have allowed the flesh to persuade us to do something that we know God would not approve, and in essence have ignored God, shut the door on God, and listened to our flesh more than Him. When I walk around the field for an hour late in the afternoon, I do two things. I pray and I listen to various messages and teachings from godly men. What am I doing? I am bringing God and His Word into my life, and it strengthens me by keeping my mind on the things of God and off of the things of my flesh. [Romans 12:2](#) says it this way,

**Ro 12:2 (NKJV) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

The word “**renewing**” is not referring necessarily to learning something new, but simply being reminded of things we already know.

The third principle that will help us is to **make good decisions**. The struggle to choose is always there – will I do what God wants me to do or will I do what my flesh wants me to do? I have to be willing to make a good decision. Do I tell the truth or will I slant the truth a little? Will I speak harshly or will I be kind to this person? Will I choose to be merciful to someone that may not even deserve it, or will I choose to be unmerciful. Jesus said in [Matthew 5:7](#),

Mt 5:7 (NKJV) **Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

I am always having to choose – always. Will I do what is right or will I choose to do something less. Listen carefully. The Holy Spirit is always there to prompt us to do the right thing, but the choice is still ours. I have to make the right choice. God will not make the choice for me. He will not live the Christian life for me. God gives me the opportunity, but I still have to make the right decision. Here is the truth that is embedded in this principle and it is very simple. Our life is simply a by-product of the choices that we have made. If we make careless decisions and thoughtless choices in our life, we will reap what we have sown in those bad decisions. If we make godly decisions and ask for the counsel of others in the process, we will reap the benefits of those choices.

Fourthly, do everything possible to **maintain a strong and consistent walk with God**. Read the Word, pray, seek God's face, pray for other people, keep a journal of God's work in your life and of what He teaches you in His Word, have regular fellowship with other believers, spend meaningful time with your family – you name it. The issue here is that we will not have any strength against the “**passions and desires**” of the flesh if we do not maintain a strong relationship with God. It would be foolish on our part to think that we actually can win the struggle against our flesh, but ignore God in the process. That is a spiritual mirage at best. Think of it this way. Whatever you are consistent in, you will also be proficient in. The opposite is just as true. In whatever we are inconsistent, we will also be in proficient. So, if you have a kind of up and down, in and out relationship with God, then I personally think that your tendencies will consistently be to yield to the “**passions and desires**” of the flesh.

The fifth and final principle is simply to **cultivate a strong and meaningful relationship with God and His Word**. As has been stated earlier, give time to both, and let nothing distract you in the process. It is important to understand that yielding to the “**passions and desires**” of the flesh is not something that is simply inadvertent, unplanned or accidental in our life – not at all. In fact, I would say that it is actually very intentional. In most cases when people fall into some kind sinful act, it is really the consequence of an unhealthy, ungodly, and uncontrolled desire that has been watered, cultivated, and nurtured for a long time – even years. I think the statistics will prove that people who have had adulterous affairs have thought about having one for a long time. It was never accidental or something that they just stumbled into. I was reading recently about a very well-known and highly respected Christian leader who had become a member of an Internet site on how to have an adulterous affair. Apparently the site offered names and contact information to their members of other people who wanted to have one as well. His response was that his curiosity had gotten the best of him. However, I would imagine that this was something that this individual had been thinking about for a long time before they actually signed up for getting the information.

Ultimately our actions will catch up with our heart if we simply allow ungodly thoughts to go unchecked in our mind. The principle that we have taught for years on how to overcome this is that of **replacing**

ungodly thoughts and desires with godly thoughts and desires. Whenever a believer senses themselves struggling in their thought life, they have to replace those ungodly thoughts with godly thoughts. For me personally, I begin to pray for my family, for this church, for lost people, for my students, and for the Word of God to help me control my thoughts. We simply cannot dwell on ungodly thoughts or they will find a way into our life and our behavior that we will terribly regret. If we allow ungodly thoughts to remain in our mind, then eventually they will take root and begin to grow and become a stronghold that the enemy will use against us. So, it is imperative to replace ungodly thoughts with godly thoughts. This is a discipline thing, a spiritual discipline that is critical to a believer's spiritual success. Unfortunately, very often the believer simply enjoys the ungodly thoughts more than godly thoughts. It is what the Bible calls a "**snare**" or a trap. Ungodly thoughts and desires are nothing more than bait on a hook that eventually will find its way into an actual act that will not yield anything good. The issue is simple. Whenever we allow sinful thoughts and sinful propensities to grow unchecked in our life, all it means is that sin is just waiting for the right moment to express itself, and to gratify itself. Think of it this way. **It is the inner life that drives the outer life**, so we have to protect our inner life and we do that by constantly cultivating a strong relationship with God and His Word.