

Spiritual Warfare

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, October 14, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon)

"This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Gal. 5:16, 17

It is sad to a spiritual person to look around and see how that, through the legality of our nature, and through the veil of ignorance spread over our carnal mind, men are constantly seeking to make that perfect in the flesh, which they think deficient in the spirit. They feel how short they come in knowing, feeling, and enjoying what they would know, feel, and enjoy. And in order to obtain this blessedness, they have recourse to all sorts of expedients which are not only foolish, but altogether opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Now the issue of all these attempts to make that perfect by the flesh, which is begun in the spirit, is to lead men to fall into sin; for men, being unable to live nearer to God by attempts of legal obedience, actually fall into the other extremity. The reason of this is, as the Apostle explains in the seventh chapter of the Romans, because the movements of sin are by the law; for the law comes to condemn and curse; but God never promised any strength in the law. The only strength he promised is that which he gives in and by the gospel. Now look at these Galatians, who were striving to make themselves perfect in the flesh, by a legal obedience, and just see what they gained by it. They fell to biting each other, and were ready to scratch each other's

eyes out, to fall upon one another with all the animosity of brute beasts. Now the Apostle tells them a more excellent way, that which the law was never meant to give,—*to walk in the spirit*—and what will be the blessed fruit? *Ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh:* because by walking in the spirit there will be such an influence and power given that you will not actually be able to fulfil the lust of the flesh; for there is no inclination then to do so. He goes on to open up the conflict and struggle which takes place between these two principles, one of which he calls the flesh, and the other the spirit, and he tells us that *the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; and that these are contrary the one to the other, diametrically opposite, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.* In opening up these words I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour—

I.—First, to show, What is meant by the *flesh*, and what is meant by the *spirit*.

II.—Secondly, How the *flesh lusteth against the spirit*, and, how the *spirit lusteth against the flesh; these two being contrary the one to the other.*

III.—Thirdly, the result of this conflict,—*that the child of God cannot do the things he would*, which will bring me

IV.—Fourthly, to the Apostle's exhortation *to walk in the spirit*; and if we are enabled to do that *we shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.*

By the flesh we are to understand that corrupt principle which we inherit from our fallen sire, Adam. God created him innocent, there was no sin in his nature. He did not possess holiness; for that is a new covenant gift produced by the Holy Ghost through the gospel; but he was a partaker of sinless

innocence, it being impossible for God to create anything but what was pure. God was not bound to give him grace; for he needed not grace; but God could do no other as being pure, than create a being which was pure also; but he created him subject to sin. He knew from all eternity that he would sin. He had no hand in the matter. He did not tempt man to sin; for he tempted no man with sin; but he permitted Satan to do it, and allowed him to fall under that foul fiend. But this is a deep mystery, and therefore I will not enter more minutely into it.

We still feel the fall, we know that we are fallen creatures, for every movement of sin in our carnal mind tells man that he is fallen; sin works in him all the day long, and every movement of sin in his heart is a proof to him that he is a fallen sinner; so that you need not go further than yourself, you need look no higher, you need look no lower than your own heart to know that you are a fallen sinner before God. And not only so, but being a fallen sinner, your flesh is diseased to the very core; it is true of you as it was true of the church of God of old that *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is nothing but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores*. This then is the flesh—all we were and have as inherited from our fallen ancestor—everything we have, every faculty of our mind, every power of our body, all that we are in this time and state and have derived from Adam is comprehended in that expression used here and elsewhere,—*the flesh*—but still so called because our bodies are composed for the most part of flesh, and therefore the Holy Spirit has used that expression to stamp the whole of the human body and soul in what man is as having a fallen nature, and inheriting sin and death from his father Adam.

Now the word spirit here used is not the Holy Spirit so much

as the holy principle that the Holy Spirit creates in the heart of a child of God, as the Lord himself declares in the third of John that, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." As the Apostle also tells us in the eighth of Romans, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the Son of God." So that a child of God has not merely the flesh that is a wholly corrupt nature and whose every member contains in itself a proof of its corruption; but he has also another principle called here *the spirit*, and called by Peter *the divine nature*, and *the new man* by Paul. All these expressions refer to the same thing—that spirit which is born by the Spirit, and lodged in the heart of the sinner, and just as the flesh is the seat of everything base and evil, polluted and vile; so the spirit is the seat of everything gracious, spiritual, and holy, "In me, that is, in my flesh," says the Apostle, "dwelleth no good thing." No faith, hope, truth, love, spirituality, heavenly affections, prayer, nor praise, there is nothing good in it. Just as in a dark cellar there is nothing but darkness and death, spiders and toads and loathsome creatures in every corner, attended by bats and vermin, so of man's flesh, in it there dwells no good thing, and on the other hand, in the spirit in the new man, called by Peter the divine nature, there dwells everything spiritual, holy, and divine, according to the divine measure. And both these principles possess life, or movement; for we cannot say of the flesh that it possesses life; but it possesses movement, power, strength, energy and *lust*; not that base desire of our fallen nature that is usually understood by the expression, but it means desire, breathing, wishing, longing from within, some inward movement; because you could not say, with any propriety, that that which was produced by the Spirit lusteth; if you take that word to signify anything impure, you could not say it lusteth; but you may say there is a desire in the new man of grace, only with this difference from the desire of the

flesh, the desire is a holy desire in the new man of grace, whereas the desire in the flesh is natural and carnal.

II.—But the Apostle represents the child of God as carrying in his bosom these two opposing principles; he views them as continually in movement one against the other, two opponents who are always fighting hand to hand, one desiring to spill the blood and see the death of the other. The flesh wars against the spirit because the spirit is against it; therefore the flesh is striving against the spirit; because it is always being checked by it, and it will not be checked; the more it is tied the more it raves against the spirit which binds it. Whereas the spirit is continually striving and contending against the inward movements of the flesh, against what are the lustings of the flesh, everything that is evil, the gratification of every sensual desire, and every other wickedness, for there is nothing too evil, too base, for this flesh always to be lusting after. Not a sin was ever committed by any man or woman upon earth which has not its seed in every human heart. Let a garden be shut up for a time and it soon becomes full of weeds. Whence come these weeds? From the earth. While the gardener is there, there are no weeds; but when he leaves off cultivating the garden the weeds begin to spring up. So in the heart of man, moral society and education subdue the crop of weeds and hold them under restraint, but when there is nothing to keep under the evils of man's heart, where are they? See what men are in prisons, on board ships when they are taken as convicts! See what they can do in Australia and the more secluded parts of America and other places! There is not a sin from which they are kept back. If anyone is kept back from sin, it is from some restraint in providence or in grace. The spirit is continually prompting to everything good, to prayer, to reading of the Scriptures, to calling upon God's name, to believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, to hoping in his

mercy, to loving him with a pure heart fervently, to watchfulness, prayerfulness, and patience in God, and to anything that is good. All this lies in the spirit, and the flesh lusteth against it. It says, "I will not be humbled, I will not be mocked, I will have my way, what do you interfere with me for?" As a parent says to his child, "My dear boy (or girl), why do you do these things?" But on they go in their sin and cruelty, and earn perhaps the wages of infamy. What do they care for their parents? They will have their own way, and drink the poison cup of sin. The parents' advice takes no effect upon the children because they are determined to have their own way. So with the flesh, always determined to have its way, it is so mad after evil that it will not be checked. Now there is a spirit that keeps lusting against the flesh and desiring everything contrary to the flesh, a sweet manifestation of the blood and love of Christ, a sense of God's presence, a tenderness of conscience, to walk in the straight and narrow way; and both these are opposite the one to the other; the spirit lusting toward God and the flesh toward carnal objects, these two are directly contrary the one to the other, the one loving everything that God loves, and the other loving everything that God abhors. And these two opposing principles being in the same bosom are like two persons naturally in one house who never can agree, (perhaps as it too often happens the husband and the wife,) where the house is full of broils, the parties never can agree on any one point, it is a continual scene of domestic discord; hence arise conflicts, exercises, trials, sorrows, perplexities. The flesh is always running against the spirit; but the spirit is always running against the flesh. These two can never be at peace; nor does God mean them to be so; therefore he says

III.—"*Ye cannot do the things that ye would*" in either sense of the term. The spirit keeps the flesh from doing what it would, or it would break free entirely from all control, would

cast away all religion, throw off all restraint; but the spirit will not permit it; therefore it puts a check upon it and holds it back, and will not suffer the flesh to rush forth into these tracks of evil, work out its desires, and speak and do as it wishes. So you will find that your flesh would work evil; but your spirit will not let you do it. When you would burst into a passion, and wicked words spring up into your heart, when you would do evil and infidelity arises in your mind, there is an internal principle that checks you: the flesh may say, "What use is prayer and reading the Scriptures? What good will that do for you? Be like other people; what do you want to be tied down to all this religion for? to be thus continually reading and praying, always going upon your knees before God?" But you say, "I cannot leave my room without bending my knees, and I must read God's word." Here is the flesh casting off everything that is good; and the spirit holding it under restraint; as the horse is held by the horseman, and held back by a powerful hand; so the spirit holds back the flesh. Thus there is a continual struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the flesh suggesting evil courses and the spirit acting in the fear of God, and thus counteracting the motions of sin and for the most part getting the best of the day. You have felt sometimes how much there is to keep you from reading the Scriptures and praying, or perhaps on a Thursday evening from coming to chapel; you have got some business to do, a letter to write, or something else; you find all these idle excuses come into your mind, and when you would read the Bible perhaps, you will find a thousand excuses suggested to turn your eyes from that holy book, and when you would pray the flesh is turning your thoughts to everything that is evil, so that you cannot call upon the God of peace with any spirituality or hope. Here we have the flesh opposed to the spirit, so that we cannot do the good we would; but in another sense of the term you cannot do the evil that you would—that is your mercy—you cannot be as

bad as you would, and that is the infinite mercy of God; you cannot do the good that you would, because of this flesh which watches you as the spider watches for the fly to draw it into its web, it seeks after you day by day so that you cannot do the good you would; but you must look upon both sides of the picture. You would be spiritual, prayerful, holy, religious, and the like; but you cannot because of the flesh. That is one side of the picture; now look at the other side. See what things the spirit keeps you out of! What a wretch would you be if you had not the spirit to keep you! How you would plunge into every evil except the Lord kept you. Looking then at one side of the picture it seems gloomy and dark; but turning the canvass then you see the evil you cannot do; so that you are kept in a straight though rough and rugged path, and the Lord will be on the side of the spirit. He will not let you be tempted above that you are able.

Now if you were all flesh you would feel no conflict; those who are in sin feel no conflict; they obey the lusts of the flesh. Just like an easy workman whose companions say, "Come and have a glass of ale." The man is as willing to have the glass of ale as the comrade who takes him in, and there he sits, and he will sit until he gets intoxicated. So with our base nature. Sin says, "Come enjoy yourself, here is this or that to amuse you, to delight you," and we should come if it were not for the spirit, like the fool to the correction of the stocks, and as the poor silly workman who listens to the suggestion of his mate, so that he spends his wages and comes out as drunk as possible; therefore it is a mercy we cannot do the things we would, because we have the spirit to counteract the desires of the flesh; but were we all spirit we should have no temptations, no battles, no trials all the day long; we should live the life of an angel; but that is not the will of God. He meant you to be a soldier of Jesus Christ, to learn what the flesh was, so that you might prize his grace

more, and feel more of his salvation—free salvation through the atoning blood of his dear Son.

IV.—But now I pass on to our last point, which is to "*walk in the spirit.*" There is a *walking* in the spirit, that is to walk in the light of the spirit, in the way of the spirit, in the midst of it, to be spiritually minded, which is life and peace. Now you may feel at times all the lust of the flesh, in the baser and more usual sense of the term; the movements of the mind, whether pride, or worldliness, anger, evil temper or general carnality, these are all the lust of the flesh from the early bud to the ripe crop. Now our desire in our right mind is not to fulfil the lust of the flesh. We cannot help feeling the lust; because it is not only not dead; but it thinks, moves and acts. You don't carry a dead weight of corruptions; but a principle that breathes, moves; acts, and works, and all towards evil; and you wish as much as lieth in your power not to fulfil what the flesh desires. You want to walk in a path where the flesh shall not have the power to seduce you into words and acts which are unbecoming of a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, never to fulfil the lust of the flesh by bringing forth those wretched fruits that the flesh is ever bringing forth. And you want to know how this is to be done. The Apostle says—"*Walk in the spirit*" that is—live, move, think, act, dwell, walk in and by the spirit; but how? You cannot do it, God must work it in you, he must give you strength and power to walk, and act, and think, and dwell in the spirit, and then the flesh will become weakened and crippled, and unable to do the things it would. Now you may find many things working in your mind, for instance, you may be of a very irritable, fretful temper; you may get up in the morning calm and cool; but something soon crosses you that stirs up that wretched haste of temper that you possess, and it grieves and distresses you that you should be so entangled in this temper. Now if you were walking in the spirit, and

God's face were shining upon you and your heart was melting in his love, you would find a stay, a restraint over your mind, a power put forth in your soul that would not suffer this passion to break out into words and actions. Or you may have a wonderful love for money and be continually laying it up, and considering how you can make two into four, four into eight, eight into sixteen, and so on, and see how you may advance your position in life, and how you may spend the day so as to increase your stock; but suppose you are enabled to walk in the spirit, in the enjoyment of the light of God's countenance, then you say, "What matters it whether I die rich or poor, if I have enough to carry me honourably through this world, why need I be so anxious about the morrow." Or you may feel temptation to go into the world and associate with worldly people, with ungodly people; to be always going to chapel, you may think, how dull it is! to have no worldly company! And the flesh may lust after worldly company, as the children of Israel did after the god of Egypt. But, what would you want wicked associates for, if you had the life of God in your heart? You would say, "What have I to do with these worldly people, who know nothing about Jesus, and of his blood to take away our sins?" Here you are not fulfilling the lust of the flesh. So with temptation to strong drink or baser things than that, you will find so far as you walk in the spirit, there is a power put forth to resist the evil, so that you cannot do the things you would. But directly these influences are suspended and you begin to walk in the flesh, everything evil rises up, and what is the consequence? Why, it is almost like a father who is a good driver himself, driving his carriage; but his son gets upon the box and says, "give me the reins," and what is the next scene? Why, the carriage is upset as soon as it gets to the next heap of stones. As long as the reins are in the father's hand the carriage is safe; so with the soul, as long as the spirit holds the reins then it rides on safely; but if the flesh

gets hold of them what work it is! it drives apace to destruction, and only the rich mercy of God can prevent body and soul being damned in hell, and so lost for ever.