

Devotional Thoughts :: The Contrary Desires of the Flesh and the Spirit by Bob Hoekstra

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For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. (Galatians 5:17)

Every believer in Christ has had the frustrating experience of wanting to do what pleases the Lord, but being unable to actually accomplish such. We are told here that a spiritual struggle is behind that failure. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The Spirit of God dwells within our lives. He is the "Spirit of holiness" (Romans 1:4). He desires that we be "partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10) and thereby walk in godliness. However, the flesh (natural humanity) is also present in our lives. The natural desires of man are not toward holiness, but rather toward self-indulgence and self-sufficiency. Thus, what the Spirit desires and what our flesh craves are set against each other. "These are contrary to one another." The consequence of this internal conflict is "that you do not do the things that you wish." Even though godly desires develop in us as new creatures in Christ, we find ourselves unable to implement these new longings by our good intentions.

The Apostle Paul gave testimony to his own failure in this battle. "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:19). The problem was that Paul's personal resources (the flesh) were not adequate to produce the desired results. "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" (Romans 7:18). Yes, Paul had some godly desires. "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7:22). Nevertheless, there was a problem that he could not resolve on his own. "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:23). A tendency to sin that dwelt in Paul's human members (his body, his brain) pulled him down to defeat.. He needed help.

Access to that necessary divine rescue was through a humble cry for a deliverer. "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). This appropriate confession of the spiritual bankruptcy of his flesh led to another confession of certain victory. "I thank God— through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). This humble turning from self to Christ allows one to walk in the Spirit, living by His victorious resources. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Dear Jesus, Mighty Deliverer, I humbly admit that I am not able to implement by my best efforts the godly desires that are developing in me. I need You, Lord. So many times I have had holy intentions that ended up in carnal defeat. So, Lord, I cry out to You to deliver me from my present struggles, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, Amen.