

Out of the Rut

Escaping negative thought patterns

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 HCSB For although we are walking in the flesh, we do not wage war in a fleshly way, (4) since the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments (5) and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Introduction (Galatians 5:9-10; Philippians 3:13-14; Galatians 5:19-24)

In our passage today, Paul is directly answering a challenge that he mentions in v.2. Apparently, some people accused him of being cowardly (v.1) and fleshy (v.2). In other words they thought that his message of freedom from the necessity of following Judaic law for the sake of salvation meant that he acted in a worldly fashion, without consistency or principle and that he was lacking in Christian character.

It was not all the Corinthians; it was just some few malcontents but as Paul stated elsewhere, “a little yeast leavens the whole lump of dough”. (Galatians 5:9-10)

Paul uses the term “flesh” in two different ways in our Corinthian text. “Walking in the flesh” means “we live from day to day dealing with the same temptations as everyone else.” Just because he was an Apostle does not mean that Paul was perfect. As he wrote, “I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But... I pursue as my goal the prize.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

Waging war in a “fleshy way” means he refused to live under¹ the impulse of the perverted, sinful yetzer hara; that dark impulse we all possess. Consider:

- **Galatians 5:19-24 HCSB** Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, (21) envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar, about which I tell you in advance--as I told you before--that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

In this Galatian passage, we have two different kinds of people contrasted: the righteous person who pursues God while controlled by the Holy Spirit – **the tzaddik**; and the wicked person who pursues temporary pleasures while controlled by his sin nature – **the rasha**.

I want you to notice the general trend of the works of the flesh. They are all largely negative.

- The rasha cannot enjoy the positive, wholesome joys of sex. He must turn them into something dirty, nasty; characterized by guilt and fear.
- The rasha cannot enjoy the pure holiness of vibrant worship of a living God who calls us to new life. Instead he chooses the dark arts of the occult, the dubious benefits of asceticism or the opposite, sensual revelry.
- The rasha cannot enjoy the simple pleasure of wine as given by God to cheer the heart of man.² He must so overindulge that he loses all self-control, all modesty, all positive and healthy habits.
- The rasha cannot enjoy quiet healthy relationships based on love, trust and mutual service. He turns relationships into anger, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and

¹ Also see Romans 7:5-6 and 8:5-8

² Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 31:6-7

envy. Either that or he goes in the other direction and can only have friends who will be drunk and carouse with him.

All negative. All dark. All nasty. That is a key characteristic of the works of the flesh.

A believer can experience defeat through **negative thoughts**. Because each of these thought patterns bring negative consequences, each must be identified and its hold on us broken:

1. **Worry**: being overwhelmed with future circumstances that we can't control.
2. **Inferiority**: feelings of worthlessness, having no value, feeling rejected.
3. **Self-pity**: feeling sorry for ourselves over situations that can't be changed.
4. **Depression**: feelings of hopelessness and despair.
5. **Discouragement**: emotionally giving up, not seeing a solution to our problems.
6. **Bitterness**: anger and resentment resulting from the pain others have caused us.
7. **Covetousness or greed**: focusing on temporal things instead of accepting and being grateful for what we have.
8. **Envy and jealousy**: focusing on what we do not have, causing us to compare ourselves among ourselves and complain.
9. **Fear**: anxiety and apprehension from overwhelming situations.
10. **Lust**: focusing thoughts and desires on immoral activities that violate God's design for sexuality.
11. **Guilt**: focusing on past failures whether forgiven or not, yet acknowledged before God.
12. **Negative attitudes or thoughts**: being emotionally locked onto the pain others have cause us, leading to bitterness or feelings of rejection.
13. **Selfishness**: centering on our needs and rights to the exclusion of others.

THIS is what Paul said we should war against. We need to demolish the dark arts of the devil in our lives. We need to demolish these strongholds. We must demolish every argument our sin nature has with the Holy Spirit's quietly insistent voice. Every time we think we know better than God we need to take that thought captive, and bring it to the feet of our King as an enemy to be executed without mercy.

Does this sound harsh to you? Notice that Paul acknowledged that we are in a war! He did not say that we do NOT war. He said we DO war – just not in a fleshly way. We have weapons but our weapons are not fleshly.

I would like to point your minds today to one of the single greatest strongholds that the devil uses in our lives – **negativity**. It usually takes form in **ingratitude**. Turn please to Deuteronomy 28:15. After listing a litany of amazing blessings that will come to those who obey the Lord and serve Him faithfully, Moses warns,

- **Deuteronomy 28:15 HCSB** "But if you do not obey the LORD your God by carefully following all His commands and statutes I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overtake you:

Glance through the following curses! They read like a Stephen King or a Clive Barker horror novel: curses, confusion, rebukes, destruction, pestilence, extermination, wasting disease, fever, inflammation, burning heat, drought, blight and mildew. Utter defeat before our enemies, boils, tumors, festering rashes, incurable scabies, madness, blindness, mental confusion. The list goes on and on, piling awful consequence upon awful consequence.

Moses concludes,

- **Deuteronomy 28:46-47 HCSB** These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever. (47) Because you didn't serve the LORD your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though *you had* an abundance of everything,
- **Deuteronomy 28:63 HCSB** Just as the LORD was glad to cause you to prosper and to multiply you, so He will also be glad to cause you to perish and to destroy you...

We are not to give our King grudging service. We are to serve Him joyfully and with a cheerful heart. We must recognize the good that He has done for us and give thanks. Why? Is He commanding esprit de corps simply because, like some of the ancient kings, he didn't want to ever see sadness?³ No! It is because He knows that if we develop ungrateful, negative attitudes we will soon wander from Him and become disobedient and all the curses of the book will end up falling upon us.

He is Yawheh Ori the Lord of Light. When we separate ourselves FROM Him we are separated TO darkness.

He is El Ch'aim the God of Life. When we separate ourselves FROM Him we are separated TO death.

- **John 1:4-5 HCSB** Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. (5) That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.

Darkness will never **overcome light**. **Negative ingratitude** will never produce anything good. Had our founding fathers only been angry at the English king's taxes and revolted, without having had in mind a positive good with which to replace "taxation without representation" we would not be enjoying the great nation and its incumbent freedoms that they passed down to us.

If you do nothing but **criticize** and have nothing positive to offer in return you are **useless** and will quickly find yourself **isolated and alone**.

Characteristics of church-going rashaim.

Let's talk about these rashaim for a minute shall we? Let's discuss negative people who criticize, complain and backbite but don't ever serve, compromise or yield to others.

They have much **knowledge but little to no **application**.**

To be sure, on Sunday they must be fed. They want sermons to feed their souls. They eat the fat and drink the sweet. They crowd the table for the best wine. They tuck their spiritual napkins around their necks and say, "Feed me, Pastor! Feed me! Feed me!" but they do not want to fight. The battle rages on the other side of the Jordan and while the fighting is going on they want to stay on the east side and "feed the sheep."⁴

They love their conferences, their worship services, their sevenfold amen and their anthems. They even love their Bible studies and deeper-life conferences, yet they never turn a hand to do anything in the battle. They gird no armor, grasp no sword, hurl no spear, throw no stones, shed no blood, render no sweat and weep no tears.

They look like believers, they try to sound like believers but they are actually weeds – not wheat. These Diotrophes⁵ grow whole nurseries of weeds; sow spiritual crab grass in the aisles of the church.

This crowd of deserters often know much about the Bible. They can tell you all the types concerning what the beasts stand for; they can tell you the symbolic meanings of the leg on the beast, the foot on the leg, the toe on the foot, the nail on the toe and the polish on the nail. In fact they often know truths that even God doesn't know or at least choose to reveal, and they find things in the Bible that God didn't put there.

They have no desire to **win souls.**

If a church has no invitation, they shriek in horror, yet if all the converts who came forward were theirs, there would be no need for an invitation.

³ Nehemiah 2:1

⁴ Numbers 32

⁵ 3 John 1:9-10

If the church never baptized any converts, they would classify the church as being dead, but they never lead a convert to the baptistry.

They gravitate to committees and shun soul winning as though it were a plague.

They are watch-gazers during the service and the invitation.

Preferring the building of spiritual towers of Babel over missions, they oppose being scattered abroad everywhere. In their minds if 3,000 got saved today, it would be no Pentecost - it would be a holocaust.

They avoid spiritual conflict and persecution through moral and spiritual compromise.

These goldbricks don't want to be called fanatics, but they glibly talk about being crucified with Christ.

Yet they have no scars in their hands, no spear in their side.

They are surrounded by neither jeering mobs nor angry critics.

There are no thorns on their brow. They want no pain. They suffer no heartache.

They want victories – with no battles;

Crucifixion – with no pain.

They treat their spiritual leaders poorly.

These loafers constantly cause trouble in Adonai's churches. Practically every faithful, soul-winning, Biblical elder is hounded by these hoards.

- If he leads as Moses did, he is a dictator.
- If he fights sin, he is a legalist.
- If he loves souls, he is shallow.
- If he has zeal, he's a "loose cannon".

They are serpents who shoot deadly venom at every soul-winning church elder.

They are dead weight.

These Monday-morning quarterbacks never make a tackle, never complete a pass, never kick a field goal, never block a kick, never make a first down and never win a game.

These modern Korahs would think the parting of the Red Sea too spectacular.

They would have criticized the sensationalism of Joshua making the sun stand still.

They would suggest that the feeding of the 5,000 was carnal.

They certainly would classify Pentecost as an emotional experience unworthy of the morning worship service.

They are users – parasites sucking the good out of the church and contributing nothing in return.

They are termites who eat away at the foundations of our churches.

They are buzzards circling the field to pull at the carcass of new converts.

They are parasites who live on other's toil.

They are skunks who spray their odor on every church member who gets close to them.

They are cockroaches infesting the church and spreading worldly filth and disease.

The truth is no Christian has a right to be at peace during the war. No Christian has a right to whine and complain and never pick up a sword. No believer has the right to nitpick at the way things are done when they've not contributed to the process. No one has the right to go around complaining "no one greets me, no one acknowledges me" when they are not friendly in the first place. Trust is not demanded. Trust is earned. Friendship cannot be demanded – it must be gained.

As the old hymn demands,

“Should I be carried to the skies, On flowery beds of ease,
While others fight to win the prize, And sail through bloody seas?
No, I must fight if I would gain, Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, Supported by Thy Word.

Brothers and sisters, friends and visitors, you who are merely curious onlookers – listen to me. There is a war on! We do not need whining ninnies. What we need is people with a gung ho, can-do attitude who are daily fighting the spiritual war with spiritual weapons and are serious about making a difference in the world.

Please turn to one last verse:

- [James 5:9 HCSB](#) Brothers, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door!