

## **STOP THAT CIVIL WAR INSIDE YOU!**

**Today's Text: Gal. 5: 16-27**

### **Extracts:**

**I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 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 you wish....* Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies... of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in the past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law... *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit* [Gal. 5: 16-25]**

*Luis Suarez, the Uruguayan and Liverpool striker, has over the past year emerged as one of the best football (soccer) players in the world.<sup>1</sup> However, he has also emerged as a serial biter of opponents. In 2010 and 2013, he had been caught and penalized for biting others on the pitch. The third one was on Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> June 2014, during a Brazil 2014 World Cup match between Uruguay and Italy. In the full glare of a global audience, he sank his teeth into the neck of an Italian defender, Giorgio Chellini. The referee did not see it but FIFA, the world soccer governing body, did not buy Suarez's defence of unwilful conduct. He was banned from nine Uruguay matches and for four months from all football, in addition to a fine of 100,000 Swiss francs (US\$112,000).*

*Why would a good family man at home and a top football striker on the soccer pitch suddenly turn vampire at the same time? That suggests that he is dealing with a civil war within himself. Believers struggling between walking in the Spirit and in the flesh face a similar dilemma. That is the issue confronted by Paul in his letter to believers in the church at Galatia, the basis for this week's Bible study. Read on!*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: Sam Borden, "Uruguay's Suarez, Known for Biting, Leaves Mark on World Cup," *New York Times*, June 24, 2014; [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/sports/worldcup/apparent-bite-by-luis-suarez-mars-uruguays-victory-over-italy.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/sports/worldcup/apparent-bite-by-luis-suarez-mars-uruguays-victory-over-italy.html?_r=0), "Soccer's Suarez on bite: My teeth fell onto his shoulder," *CBS News*, June 28, 2014; [HTTP://WWW.CBSNEWS.COM/NEWS/SOCCERS-SUAREZ-ON-BITE-MY-TEETH-HIT-HIS-SHOULDER/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/soccers-suarez-on-bite-my-teeth-hit-his-shoulder/) and Susanna Kim, "Luis Suarez Apologizes for Biting Italian Soccer Player," *ABC News*, June 30, 2014; <http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/2014-fifa-world-cup-luis-suarez-apologizes-biting/story?id=24367362>

## 1. Background: Walking in the Spirit

I still remember quite vividly the freshman orientation class organised for us at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, in September 1968. The new students were required to come in a week ahead of the rest of the student body to give them an opportunity to learn about university culture. Coming from secondary schools or teacher-training institutions, we had been drawn from regimented systems. Before coming into the university, we had been subjected to strict school rules and regulations, enforced through dorm prefects and class monitors and supervising tutors. They told you when to wake up and when to sleep. They monitored your attendance quite closely. Infractions were punished immediately and harshly.

In the new university environment, on the other hand, emphasis was on self-discipline. You chose when to wake or to sleep. There were no school uniforms and there were no class prefects. I remember quite vividly how the then Welfare Officer, Mr. Basse, put it to us during that orientation course:

*The choice is all yours. You can even choose not to show up in class. If you pass your exams, we'll congratulate you. But if you fail and are expelled, you won't be missed!*

I came away from that course scared of freedom! I came to know that ***to be free does not mean that you can behave freely. It is a great responsibility.*** That is why most of us cannot handle it on our own terms. It becomes a dilemma. For the believer, it is a more challenging problem because sinning is man's default mode.<sup>2</sup> Believers want to use their new freedom in Christ to do what is right but their human nature draws them back into sin and moral decadence. So, within the average believer, a civil war is raging! Paul summarizes it this way [**Rom. 7: 22-24**]:

*For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 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. O wretched man that I am!*

Christ has died for our sins but He cannot force us to come to His Father against our will. There is no pass mark to gain entry into heaven unless on His terms. Therefore, unless we are ready to risk eternity in hell's unquenchable fire, believers need to listen, hear and do what Christ is saying to the churches. That brings us to Paul's message to the Galatian church, the basis for this week's Bible study.

Put bluntly, Paul reminded believers in that church to walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lust of the flesh. ***The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit***

<sup>2</sup> "Sinning is man's default mode," *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol. 14, No. 1: 20 January 2013; [http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_14/SinningismansdefaultmodeVol14No120Jan2013.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_14/SinningismansdefaultmodeVol14No120Jan2013.pdf)

*against the flesh; “and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” [Gal. 5: 16-18]. How then would they be able to stop that civil war within them? From the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden [Gen. 3:1-6] and of Jesus in the wilderness [Lk 4: 1-13], **Satan and his forces use the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life [1 Jn 2: 16] to war against believers.** Paul offers the following guidelines to help the Galatians to win such devil-driven civil wars:*

a) *Physical Battles- Lust of the flesh*

The first level of battle is physical and it is characterized by the lust of the flesh, unbridled sexual appetite or material greed, which can manifest *as adultery, fornication, uncleanness and lewdness [Gal. 5: 19].* Adultery is sexual relations between a man and a woman, one of whom is married to somebody else. Fornication is sexual relations between two unmarried people. Any other form of sexual relations, such as pornography and sodomy, would fall under uncleanness or lewdness. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus even tightened the definition of sexual sin by saying that anyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart [Matt. 5: 28]. That also applies to any woman that so looks at another man not her husband.

As Paul discovered in the Corinthian church [1 Cor. 5: 9-13], sexual immorality is a major plague in most congregations. For example, in the church in Thyatira, a key member of the congregation had a Jezebel spirit. She called herself a prophetess but she taught and seduced the leaders of that church to commit sexual immorality [Rev. 2: 20]. Balaam that God did not allow to curse the children of Israel on their way to the Promised Land lured them to commit harlotry with the women of Moab and twenty-four thousand of them died in the plague that God rained on the culprits [Num. 25: 1-9]. Therefore, the lust of the flesh is a killer, not a thriller!<sup>3</sup>

Paul offered an appropriate spiritual antidote to sexual temptation. The fruit of the Holy Spirit manifests in various ways, some of which are *love, faithfulness and self-control [Gal. 5: 22, 23].* What we call love is actually lust-induced infatuation! That is why you do not need love to make love. *Love implies taking your spouse’s interest into consideration in anything that will affect his/her honour and integrity. Therefore, you must learn faithfulness and self-control to defeat the lust of the flesh.* Moreover, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to commit sexual immorality with your body is to pollute the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 6: 18-20].

<sup>3</sup> “Adultery is a killer not a thriller!” *Weekly Bible Study Series*, Vol.5 No. 33: 21 Nov. 2004; [http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume\\_5/PDFs/33\\_Adulteryisakillernotathriller.pdf](http://www.bibleresourcecentre.com/Volume_5/PDFs/33_Adulteryisakillernotathriller.pdf)

b) *Psychological Battles- Lust of the eyes*

Some works of the flesh can be grouped as psychological warfare that rages mainly in the mind. We are social animals and so we get entangled in those things that will make us acceptable to/by others. We want to get in with the crowd and be seen as progressive or politically correct. We see some people as our role models or Joneses that we spend almost our life time trying to impress. By hook or crook, we have to win! Paul gave examples, such as ***hatred, jealousies and contentions, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions and dissensions [Gal. 5: 20], drunkenness and revelries [v. 21]*** to characterize such forms of psychological warfare . So, when you see or hear believers in public office espousing views and behaviour that run counter to their Christian beliefs or values, they are dealing with psychological battles within: they are going for short term gains with damaging long term pains.

Walking in the Spirit is a better recipe for people with an identity crisis. Paul recommends ***kindness, longsuffering, goodness and gentleness [vv. 22, 23]***. With such, you can turn the other cheek [**Matt. 5:39**] and never be tired of doing good [**Gal. 6:9**]. You will be able to appreciate that He that is in you is greater than he that is out there in the world [**1 Jn 4:4**]. You will come to understand that it is in giving that you receive [**Lk 6:38**].

c) *Spiritual Battles- Pride of life*

When we are unwilling or unable to surrender self to divine authority, we are dealing with pride that is manifested as ***rebellion***. We would rather serve the god that we can carry than the one who can carry us. Understandably, therefore, ***idolatry, sorcery and heresies [Gal. 5: 20]***, and ***envy [v. 21]*** feature on Paul's list. Believers with a rebellious spirit want everybody else to defer to them but they will hardly respect constituted authority. For example, in leading the rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, Korah, Dathan and Abiram said, "You [Moses and Aaron] take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" [**Num. 16: 1-3**]. After Satan had been thrown out of heaven, he wanted to go back there to exalt his throne above the stars of God and be like the Most High [**Is. 14:12-14**].

Of course, pride goes before a fall [**Prov. 16: 18**] and those who exalt themselves will be humbled and humiliated [**Lk 18: 14**]. The joy of the Lord is the strength of the true believer [**Neh. 8: 10**], and God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are stayed on Him because they trust in Him [**Is. 26: 3**]. That is why Paul pointed to the spiritual fruit of ***joy [Gal. 5: 22]*** and ***peace [v. 23]*** for the Galatians who chose to walk in the Spirit.

Paul concluded as follows [**vv. 24-25**]:

*Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

What lessons can we learn from that for our daily walk?

## 2. Lessons for today's believers

It does not make sense to claim to be born-again if we are only doing so to please family or society. It is better to be genuine about it so that our own spiritual fruits can lead others to Christ, even without opening our mouths to preach to them. It may not be easy but it is worth trying. In that light, here are some important lessons that we can learn from the foregoing:

### a) *Know your Achilles' heel*

No matter how strong we may think that we are, we all have a weak point that can potentially or actually lead to our downfall. That is what is called our Achilles' heel.<sup>4</sup> It is important that you identify your spiritual Achilles' heel as early as possible. According to an African proverb, when you advise a thief to stop stealing, he will ask you to beg opportunity to stop tempting him!

God called David the man after His own heart [**1 Sam. 13: 14**]. But David's main weakness was his sexual appetite. Even before he became king of Israel, he already had multiple wives. Yet, when he saw "a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold," he sent for her, another man's wife, and committed adultery with her [**2 Sam. 11: 2-4**]. As a result of that sin, which led to David's murder of the woman's husband, the sword never departed from his house for the rest of his life [**2 Sam. 12: 1-12**].

Do you know your Achilles' heel? For example, some people may hate stealing but are cheating on their taxes. Some people may be faithful to their spouse by not sleeping with somebody else but be secretly involved in pornography or masturbation. Some people may abhor sodomy but run a hotel that makes a fortune from sodomite-guests. Check your telephone discussions and text messages and you may be amazed how much gossip you unwittingly peddle each day! Indeed, all have sinned and fall short of God's glory [**Rom. 3: 23**].

### b) *Go for the permanent solution!*

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<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles%27\\_heel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles%27_heel)

Once you are able to identify those weak points that can derail your steady walk in the Spirit, do something about them by going for a permanent solution. For example, on dealing with adultery, Jesus told His listeners during the Sermon on the Mount, “If your right eye causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” [Matt. 5; 29]. He is not recommending that we go blind because blind people still have lust in their hearts! Rather, He is challenging us to *look without seeing* or falling for sin. For example, Job said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?” [Job 31: 1].

*Here is the heart of Paul’s message. As long as we remain in human flesh on earth, we will face the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. But temptation is not a sin. It is only when we fall that it becomes a sin. So, if we want to keep standing all the time, we must walk in the Spirit and that will be seen in His fruit that we exude. It will radiate as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Then, the world will know that we are not conceited, provoking one another, envying one another [Gal. 5: 22-26].*

### 3. Conclusion: To walk in the Spirit is to be God-fearing!

Joseph was well placed to have an affair with Potiphar’s wife. She asked for it; he was Potiphar’s chief servant trusted with his estate, and opportunity beckoned daily. As she mounted persistent pressure on him, Joseph said to her, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” [Gen. 39: 1-12]. *Joseph refused to walk in the flesh because he feared God.* How about you?

Jesus told His disciples, “You are My friends if you do *whatever* I command you” [Jn 15; 14]. God called Abraham His friend [Is. 41: 8] because he believed whatever He told him to do. You will also be God’s friend if you fear and obey Him *at all times*. So, walk in the Spirit and He will count you as God’s friend.

Alleluia!