

Victory Over Me

by Jim Cymbala

As Christians, we must choose to be controlled by the spirit or the flesh, and must mortify the flesh and put it to death every day in order to live a life that honors God.

Duration: 30:15

Scripture: Galatians 5:1, Galatians 5:19, James 3:2

Topics: "Victory"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor reflects on his series called Vital Truth and how it has transformed his thinking on preaching. He emphasizes the importance of hearing the gospel to become a Christian and the need to focus on the vital truths of the Bible for spiritual growth. The pastor uses the analogy of playing basketball to illustrate that while certain details may be extraneous, understanding the fundamental principles is crucial. He also discusses the concept of knowing oneself in Christianity and warns against living a lifestyle of sin, emphasizing the need for repentance and a reverence for God.

Transcript

At the beginning of the year, and this is now July, I started a series called Vital Truth. It's been illuminating for me. It's rearranging me, not only on the subjects in my thinking, the subjects that we're covering, but it's making me look at preaching in a whole new light.

Pondering and asking God to direct me the most effective way that all pastors should be helping their people grow. To become a Christian, you have to hear the gospel, the good news of Christ. Then to grow as a Christian, you need to know not every truth in the Bible, you gotta keep reading to learn them all, but the vital ones, the most important ones.

When you learn to play basketball, it's not important what kind of sneakers you wear, but it is important that you learn proper position to defend somebody, and you learn balance, and what to use your hands for, and all of that. And you gotta get in shape, but what sneakers you wear or headband, that's extraneous. You need sneakers, you can't play in your socks, but it doesn't matter what kind of sneakers you have compared to vital truth.

Now this one, which is gonna take us into next week too, because of the other side of it, I keep thinking to myself, why didn't I speak on this earlier, because like this is the most vital one of all, but I keep telling you that one. You're gonna stop believing what I'm saying here. This is so vital, and it explains something

which the Greek philosophers talked about as a first principle, they said know thyself.

Know thyself. Well, in Christianity, it's not so much know thyself, it's know Christ, but it also involves in know thyself. How are we made? Why do we do the things we do? How do we become susceptible to temptation if Christ is living within us and we're a new creation? The dilemma has always been with Christianity that since it's a message of grace, and salvation is a gift.

So let's take Vanessa, who shared so powerfully, I thought. She is a Christian because she has not earned it, she's received it as a gift. And her name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven, she's born again.

We're born again, we who are Christians, and we're gonna go to heaven one day. All in favor say amen. Amen.

Well, if that's so, and we're born again, and God's grace prevails, and his mercy, and his love for us, then why can't we, or why shouldn't we live any old way? Because it really doesn't matter. We're all going to heaven. If God's grace is so great, why are these prohibitions in the Bible written to Christians? Don't go there, don't do that.

And why are we still tempted and drawn into these things, and why is it that some Christians and ministers have shipwrecked themselves, and left a horrible testimony about Jesus? If we're born again, and if any man be in Christ, he's a new creation, et cetera, et cetera. This question was dealt with most powerfully in Paul's letter to the church in Galatians. Let's look at it.

We find him saying, you, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. In other words, you don't have to get circumcised to be a believer. You don't have to worship on a certain day of the week.

We're free from all of that stuff in the Old Testament ceremonial law. And on top of that, you don't have to worry every day, am I obeying the law enough? Am I being good enough to go to heaven one day? Because salvation isn't based on how good you are, it's based on how great Jesus is, and that we put our faith in him. Do you all understand that? Okay, now he says, don't use that freedom to indulge the flesh.

Rather, serve one another humbly in love, for the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command. The whole law, love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

How in the world would you say that to Christians? But if you folks, and you folks, and me folks, and us folks, if you bite and devour each other, watch out or you're gonna destroy each other. That goes against all the mental positivism and all the triumphalism and sloganeering that is in most Christian circles. They're not gonna even dwell on this possibility that if we bite and devour.

If you're a Christian, why would you bite and devour another person? Why would you gossip and slander and hurt someone? How could it even happen? Paul says it can, be careful or you're gonna destroy one another. He now goes to explain it. So I say, walk by the spirit, led by the person, controlled by the person of the Holy Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires, the longings of the flesh.

For the flesh, now, this word in the Greek, S-A-R-X, sarx. Everybody say it, one, two, three. Sarx, one more time.

Sarx. That is translated in various translations, the old man, the sinful nature, which is what it's called here is the flesh. The sinful nature, the flesh, the old man, the carnal nature.

It's human nature, me, let's just use me, because I don't want to get into anyone's kitchen here today, let's go in mine. It's Jim Cymbala apart from God. Oh, that's humbling.

It's Jim Cymbala apart from God's grace, influence, spirit working in me. It's who Jim Cymbala really is, in case any of you admire me. That's who I am, you're gonna see it in a second.

But don't look down at me, just look in the mirror, and you'll find out you're just like me. For the flesh, Jim Cymbala desires what is contrary to the spirit. Always has, always will.

He never changes. And the spirit, the Holy Spirit living inside of me is always desiring what's contrary to the flesh. Notice they both have desires.

The carnal nature of Jim Cymbala, the old man of Jim Cymbala, he is always desiring against the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit inside of me is always desiring against what Jim Cymbala wants. Always.

They are perpetual enemies. They are in conflict with each other, and don't we feel it sometimes? You don't have to say amen, I'll say amen for all of you. Amen, amen, amen, amen.

So that you are not to do whatever you want. Some translation says, so you cannot do everything you want. And that's on both sides.

Sometimes Jim Cymbala drags him away to do what Jim Cymbala wants, and the Holy Spirit in conflict holds him back. You can look at it the other way. Sometimes the spirit is drawing Jim Cymbala to do something, right? But the flesh is fighting against what the spirit wants me to do.

You don't know that. Hello? We don't experience that every day. Amen.

For real. But if you are led and guided and controlled by the spirit, you're not under the law. You don't have to worry about what you're gonna do.

The word will judge you and correct you as you read it. But if you're led by the spirit, would the spirit ever cause you to do harm to anyone? Would the spirit ever lead you to kill someone? Would the spirit ever lead you to harm someone with your mouth? Would the spirit ever do that? Would the Holy Spirit possibly ever do that? So Paul's just saying, be led by the spirit. You don't have to worry about anything.

The spirit will always lead you into holy things because his name is the Holy Spirit. Now, the acts of the flesh, Jim Cymbala, are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, which is linked to covetousness in the New Testament, love of money, and witchcraft, that word in the Greek comes from a word for drugs. Some people mean, because witchcraft was using drugs thousands of years ago, that it's linked to the fact of the flesh wanting sometimes to escape into Never Never Land through drugs.

Hatred, discord, jealousy, notice that, with impurity and immorality, which is sex outside of marriage, having intercourse with someone who's not your husband or your wife. That's what the flesh does, always is tending that way. Stronger in some than in others, but this is what the flesh does.

In the same sentence with sexual immorality and impurity is hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, that means temper tantrums, selfish ambition, dissensions, that means always causing division. You put some

people in a circle, they're gonna break up that circle, just give them time. They just have this ability never to promote peace and unity, they are always promoting division.

That's a work of the flesh, that's where that comes from. Along with it is factions, that's people who think this is especially true in religion, but it can be true racially, it can be true politically. My group and my opinion is special, everyone else is wrong.

That's the flesh. My denomination, I'm Church of God, and we're a little bit better than everybody else. No, we admit maybe they might be Christians, but not like us.

Or Brooklyn Tabernacle, there might be other churches, but there's no church like the tab. Let's hear it for the tab. No, no, please.

That's a party spirit that you're doing right there. They're all people are created, but blacks are a little more special. No, no, no, no, West Indian blacks are more special than blacks, not American blacks.

Or white supremacy, and it's all from the flesh. The minute you hear someone talking nationalism and putting down other things, my political view, I'm a liberal, everyone else is a demon. I'm a conservative, everybody else is a bleeding liberal, they're misguided, and that's all the flesh, and it's everywhere, it's everywhere.

The world is controlled by that flesh. It's everywhere, and we accept it. We're so used to it, comes right in the church.

Denominationalism, I found out a long time ago, and it was so eye-opening to me when I went into ministry, that I would meet ministers, and I'd come back from Argentina or someplace in America, and I'd say, wow, I was just at this conference where they invited me to speak. You gotta hear what God is doing there, and they would look at me and go, what group is that? And they'd go, I'd say, well, whatever it's called, Movimiento Cristiano Misionero in Argentina, and they would go, they're not us. Why are you telling me? No, it's the truth before God.

Why are you even talking to me about that group? They're not us. We're assemblies of God, we're Southern Baptists, we're whatever, what are you talking about? We're the only ones who exist. Why, that's not true, you never heard that? We're Calvinists, we're Arminians.

It's all from the flesh, cursed, filthy flesh. Listen to how God looks at it. Along with that, an envy, drunkenness, orgies, all linked together.

Notice the different manifestations of the flesh, different strokes for different folks. And some who would never or would really think three times before they would get involved in witchcraft or something like that, they might just be destroying other people with their tongue. Other people don't want to talk about anyone, but they're loose morally.

It's all different, but it's all from the same source, the flesh. And he says, and I warn you, to the Christians, I warn you as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. I warn you, he says, that people who practice these things unrepentantly and just keep doing it, and even though God corrects them and other people over them in the Lord, say, you can't live that way, don't judge me, I'm not judging you, I'm showing you what God says is wrong.

How in the world could you end up in heaven if you practice the things that God punished his son for on the cross? Does that make any sense to anyone? Christ bore our sins and was slaughtered on a cross, and God punished him in our place, and now I'm gonna go back and do those things that he died for. And if you correct me from God's word, I'm gonna say, get out of my face, I'm gonna do what I wanna do, but I'm gonna serve Jesus too. That's impossible.

Either self is the master or Christ is the master. You can't serve God and mammon, you can't serve yourself and Christ. That's why we call him Lord.

Lord means he's in charge. How many want him to be in charge of your life? Lift up your hand. He can't be savior if he's not Lord, if you don't want him to be Lord.

Does this mean perfection? Does this mean that Christians don't sin? Well, obviously not. If anyone says he's without sin, first John says he's a liar and the truth is not in him. We all stumble along the way, James says.

James, who was called the righteous, half brother of our Lord, says don't many of you wanna be leaders because we all stumble in many ways. There's provision in the Bible that Christians make mistakes, but Paul says, I warn you, people who live like this, that's their lifestyle no matter what they tell you, no matter how they sway in the worship or they go to church every Sunday, nobody in the world can be going into the kingdom of heaven, he says, if you practice these things. Puts the fear of God in you, doesn't it? Doesn't it put a reverence in all of us? I mean, I didn't make this stuff up.

Church is legalistic and judgmental. You have no problem with me, I'm just reading the Bible to you, for all of us. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. When the Spirit is producing fruit, you don't have to worry about any law contradicting you because the Spirit is never gonna violate the law that God gives us. In fact, it's all fulfilled in love.

So notice, the Spirit in me, when he has control, produces fruit. If I revert back to Jim Cimbala and he tries to usurp the authority of Christ in me, then things are gonna get sideways quickly. Is that not true? How many know that just from your personal experience in one level or another, that what I just read from you to Galatians is absolutely true and the word of God? Lift up your hand high, in the balcony down there too.

And Paul says this all the time, it's like going on a diet. You know, the thing I will to do, I don't do and the thing I say I'm not gonna do, what in the world am I doing it for? Right, doctor just said cholesterol is out of control, I'm out of shape, I gotta do this. So guess what, I'm a human being, I'm gonna just change my eating habits, it's simple.

I just won't eat any carbs and I'm gonna put away sugar and no more soda and all of that and that's it, it's done. It's not done. How many know it ain't done until it's done? Whether it's rice and beans or an Oreo cookie or Haagen-Dazs.

Well, I'm getting a little support here from the choir. It all has a voice. Come here.

Yeah, no, no, no, I'm eating lettuce, I'm having kale, I'm having a kale salad, you know, with lemon vinaigrette, light lemon vinaigrette and you send it down and your stomach says, what in the world was

that that you just said? What do you think, I'm gonna be satisfied with that? A double cheeseburger please and a milkshake. Am I wrong or right? All right, so let's talk serious but it's that double dichotomy. We're free, we have salvation but don't use it now to indulge the flesh, he says.

Instead of loving each other, you're gonna use one another, destroy one another. We saw the characteristics of the sinful nature. It's always self-gratification and different people have different desires but the flesh works only one way.

I won't dare use any of your names. I'll use my own name, how humiliating that might be, so be it. What I want is what I want when I want it.

I don't care. Don't tell me what Jesus said and don't tell me what God said. The flesh could care less.

It's against the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is against the flesh. Put up a red light or at least a warning signal.

You're going too fast, you're going in areas you shouldn't. You know that, you know, you shouldn't go there. The flesh, get out of here.

Don't talk to me. I do what I want when I want it. I wanna blow up and have a temper tantrum and say something that will crush my spouse, I'm gonna do it.

That's how the flesh operates. I know, but the law of God, get out of here. I don't care about the law, I'm the law.

That's how the flesh operates. We don't know that as being true. How come you're not saying amen? Either you don't understand it or you're under conviction, which is it? Okay, I'm under conviction too.

That's how it operates. And it justifies everything. No, I'm gonna sleep with her because you don't know God, you know, you don't know how lonely, you don't know what's happened to me in my life.

The flesh is a mastermind. It's gonna justify everything. And it's absurd, it's so absurd because let's take another form of it which dominates the world, hate.

Hate, enmity, people you don't like. I was with someone the other day and I mentioned a name and I could just see enough body reaction that I knew they have a problem with that person. You know, that's how it is with us.

You know, we got a good list and then we got the other list. We got a little black book and when we call that out, we got, yeah, there's a few names in here. You don't know what they did to me.

But wait a minute, let's just look at how the flesh operates. Let's say you're right and I'm right, they did something, they were hurtful. Haven't you ever been hurtful? Haven't you ever hurt God? Haven't you ever sinned? And what did God show you? But you're gonna hold it on someone else.

Is that not insane? No, I'm just asking you. You're gonna hold it against them and say, yeah, but they're different. Well, how different are you and me than God? And yet He shows mercy.

So think how the flesh is. The flesh is insane. The flesh is a madman or a madwoman because it says what I get is not what I'm gonna give.

I have to gratify this bitterness inside of me. Sometimes I think the whole political scene, the whole sometimes racial scene for sure, just there's nothing out there, outside these doors, but just bitterness, hatred, animosity, enmity, harsh words, mean text, mean this, mean that, just everybody, and justifying it because the flesh never says it's wrong. The flesh says, you don't know.

I'm standing for God. Someone's gotta stand for truth as I bury this person. This is not accurate.

It's the way the flesh is. Now, here's what we learn. We learn that the flesh, of course, is very when it acts out.

And all those acts, notice the works of the flesh. The flesh works. The spirit, when we yield to Him, produces fruit.

So every day, every hour, shall we say, every conversation, I can say, Holy Spirit, guide me, give me your thoughts, give me your words, give me your reactions, or no. Let's go by Jim Simbla. And you go by yourself.

But according to Paul, says this dichotomy is true. We're gonna be controlled by the spirit or we're gonna be controlled by the flesh. How humbling this is that the only me that's up there is the flesh.

In other words, God never works with the flesh. Paul is talking years later now after these people got converted. God never changes your flesh.

This will help you now when you get tempted or you feel those stirrings. I thought I was saved. I thought I was really saved.

I gotta get rid of it. That's just your flesh looking to gain ascendancy. Because remember, before you were a Christian, the flesh ran the show.

And it always wants to get back in the driver's seat. Could I get an amen here from somebody? Always wants to get back. So when you feel that movement, that the greatest people in the world who ever served God have felt that movement.

That's the flesh. It has to be mortified by the spirit, put to death every day, every hour, sometimes every minute. Otherwise, it's only law is I wanna be in charge and I wanna do what I wanna do.

And that's in us until we see Jesus. When we see Jesus, we're gonna have a new body, no more flesh, no more devil, no more anything. How many say amen to that? But why he permitted it to be this way? To keep us closer to him, to show his power on a daily basis.

It is what it is. Walk in the spirit and you won't fulfill those desires. The only option, the only victory, the only antidote.

No, I'm gonna just read more of the word. But that reading more of the word gotta lead you to surrendering to the spirit. Holy Spirit's the only one.

Walk control by the spirit. Later on, he says it like this, which we'll look at next week, God willing. If you've begun by the spirit, if you were born again and changed because of the Holy Spirit, now keep on walking with the Holy Spirit.

Don't go back to your old person because now you're saved. So the Holy Spirit, control of my life, producing his fruit is the only antidote to the old Jim Cymbala because that is one ornery creature. Isn't that true, Bishop, that one of the heartaches in prison for those guys is once they're born again and Christ comes into their life, they weep and cry over what they did.

The average sentence there is 91 years in that prison he was in. Most are in just for murder, rape, or serious repeat felons. And now when they have this new life in Christ and they realize what that old person did, it's almost impossible to live with.

It wasn't me, it was the old me. But now I have a new me. But I gotta watch out for that old me because he didn't leave town, he's still hanging around.

I wept with some of those guys and prayed with them. When they look back, it's too hard to even contemplate because they're new. So notice this, God never works with Jim Cymbala, never, the flesh, never.

He won't touch it, he won't try to improve it. Listen to me now, you can't improve the flesh. It's a scoundrel and always will be.

God never tries to change it. He said, no, I'm just gonna put someone stronger than your flesh inside of you. I'm gonna give you the spirit of Christ.

Come on, let's say a loud amen, a loud amen. So it's offensive to God, it's dangerous for us. Ooh, hurtful to us.

It leaves a bad witness with others when we give into the flesh. Haven't you had days like I've known where half the day you know you're being led by the spirit and then you don't know where you went off the tracks but you feel your flesh reasserting itself? No, that's true. We come from a time of prayer and study of the word.

We're so sensitive to the spirit. We're listening for his whispers. To be led by the spirit, you have to be open to the spirit.

Just think, he has thoughts. He wants to put those thoughts in my head. He has feelings, he has desires.

This is why sometimes you just feel you have to get up and read the Bible. Who do you think put that in you, the devil? The flesh? The flesh would never read the Bible, ever. Every time you wanna pray, every time you wanna go to church, then you know it's the spirit of God working in you because the flesh, it doesn't care about any of that stuff.

And every day, we have to mortify it. We have to say, no, no, no, no, I'm a new creation now in Christ Jesus. I live for him.

He not only saved me, he's gonna keep me now every single day by the Holy Spirit. Oh God, give us warnings when the conversation goes and we feel, don't you even feel when the flesh starts to rise in you sometimes? You watch certain things, you indulge in certain conversations or you just meditate on the wrong stuff, what people have done to you. And that's why in heaven, no one's gonna be walking around, no one saying, look at here, look at me.

No one, no one. You know what everyone's gonna be saying? Jesus paid it all, Jesus paid it all. Come on, let's say that, Jesus, Jesus.

Jesus led me all the way. Father God, you know that I need this message more than anyone here. I'm preaching to myself.

Let the others hear. But God, I wanna be more like Jesus. But I can't get there, I realize that, because Jim Cymbala can never change.

He'll never be like Jesus. It humbles me, but I come to you and say, Jesus, be Jesus in me through your Holy Spirit. Teach us, all of us, how to yield if it takes a hundred times a day.

Say a hundred prayers of surrender to you. Spirit, lead me, guide me, watch my lips. Guide my eyes, watch over my heart.

Put your love, produce your fruit. Love, joy, peace, meekness, kindness. Again, such things as that, there's no law, I don't have to worry about anything.

Teach us how to mortify the flesh. Put it to death, 10 times a day if we have to. But daily, Lord, this has to be worked out.

That's all I ask for today is, Spirit, grow your fruit in our lives today. That's our simple prayer, grow your fruit in my life today. I acknowledge it won't be me, it'll be you, and I'll give you all the glory.

And if someone says something complimentary to us, we'll tell them, to God be the glory. Because we know who we really are. Save us from condoning the flesh and its works, its acts.

Help us to abhor it, detest it, run from it. But it can't be done except your Spirit guides us and leads us. Take away self-effort, take away self-effort religion.

Like, if we just suck it up enough and get committed enough, we're gonna do something different, it'll never happen. But by the Spirit, we can be like Jesus. Flow through us today.

And God, let love characterize this church and our lives. If God is love, then hate must be the ultimate antichrist. Take away division, strife, envy, all that filthy stuff.

Help us to be sweet even when people rub us the wrong way. Thank you for your word today. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For greater is he that's in us than the one that's in the world. Praise God. Can we put our hands together and just clap, a hand clap of praise? Here's what I want you to do when I tell you, stand up and every lady will hug one or two ladies.

And here's what I want you to say, men with men, I love you with the love of the Lord. I love you today. I love you.

Even if you don't know him, love him. Everybody stand. We'll have a mass.

Hug in, everyone hug somebody. God bless you.

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