

“A Continual & Irreconcilable War”

The Ministry of the Spirit

March 22, 2026

INTRO - Are we good enough?

*Whether the problem is anger, fear, worry, or something as common as laziness, we've all experienced that gap between what we are and what we should be. The Bible says we're new creations, victors, overcomers. And we're not just conquerors—we're more than conquerors (Rom 8:37). Sometimes we even feel that way. More often than not, however, we have a hard time seeing beyond our limitations and perpetual failures. And it always seems to be during these seasons of life that Matthew 5:48 surfaces in our Bible reading plan: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Quietly we sigh and think to ourselves, 'It will never happen.' I call this state of mind the "gap trap." Here's how it works: As Christians, we all have a certain amount of knowledge regarding what God expects from us. But we achieve less than we know we should be achieving. There exists then a gap between what we know is required and our actual performance. If the distance between what we know and what we're living becomes too great, we can rightly be called hypocrites. This gap is a fact of Christian life. For most of us, no one need tell us of our inconsistencies—we're all too aware of them. Such awareness should serve to keep us humble and dependent upon God for success. But the trap is often sprung by our ignorance of the doctrine of sanctification. Rather than recognizing that the gap exists to urge us onward in fervent reliance upon Christ, we allow it to condemn us and halt our forward progress. We get trapped into thinking we're just losers, failures, good-for-nothings...and maybe not even Christians. Some even lapse into inaction or disobedience. Those caught in this trap (and, to a certain extent, we all are) suffer unnecessarily from discouragement. **Robin Boisvert** "How Can I Change?" pg. 2*

Life: kata pneuma OR kata sarka?

*Intro to Sin | Intro to the Age of the Spirit

Difficult dilemma explained different ways...

Romans 8:1-9 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

'kata pneuma' – according to the Spirit | 'kata sarka' – according to the flesh
"Holy Movement" & "Perfectionism"

1 John 3:4-6 *Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.*

Within his use of flesh-Spirit language, Paul indicates that the situation is yet more complex. Although 'crucified with Christ' (Gal. 2:20), the flesh continues to stand as a threat to life in the Spirit; it 'desires what is contrary to the Spirit' (Gal. 5:17). Hence the injunctions to refuse to allow the mind to linger on the thought of how to gratify the flesh (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16). Thus, life in the Spirit is not yet lived in the context of the final resurrection order. Rather, life kata pneuma is lived in the context of life kata sarka. The Christian belongs to the community of the resurrection order, but lives within the context of the present order. Even new life in Christ, lived in the Spirit, has as its context bodily and mental existence which has long been dominated by the flesh...Here is the most baffling element of the Christian's present status. The supra-personal flesh-Spirit conflict has a deep echo within the existence of the believer. Christ dwells in the heart through faith (Eph. 3:17). Yet sin also dwells within. True, the situation is not that of two equal powers opposing one another. Grace is reigning through righteousness! We are not 'in' the flesh, but 'in' the Spirit. But for that very reason the tension and conflict are all the more bitter and urgent. There is a radical and deep-seated conflict-situation in the progress of sanctification that should never be played down. To do so would incline us either to fall into incipient perfectionism (the flesh has no energy in me), or to have an inadequate view of salvation (failing to realize that, by the Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ indwells us as the hope of glory). Sinclair Ferguson "The Holy Spirit" pg. 155-156

Exegetical Battlefield!

Romans 7:17-20 *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

...And this is the 'Continual & Irreconcilable War'...

The New Testament sees the coming of Christ (including his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension) as intersecting time and in a dramatic way altering its flow and filling all present time with special significance. The person who is a Christian lives at a unique period of human history, between the first coming of Christ which inaugurated what the Bible calls 'the last days, and the return of Christ, which will usher in the end of the world. The Christian's life therefore bears all the marks of this interim period in which the fruit of Christ's work and victory begins to be seen in the world and in the lives of individuals as well as corporately in the new society of the church. We are already 'saved' by grace (Eph. 2:8), but there is a sense in which we are 'being saved' through Christ's work within us, and a further sense in which we will not be fully saved until Christ returns and we are transformed into his image. We live 'between the times.' Sinclair Ferguson "The Christian Life" pg. 133-134

A Biblical Case-Study: Keeping Up with the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:4-6; 2:14-16; 3:1-3 *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16 "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. 1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

...The jealousy and strife were just the beginning!

(Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ | Sexual Immorality | Lawsuits | Food for Idols | Lord's Supper | Spiritual Gifts | Love) *kata sarka*

These were people whose testimony about Christ was confirmed...

(Speaking in Tongues | Prophesying | Enriched in Knowledge | Speech | Rooted in Christ | Giving | Serving | Respond to Correction) *kata pneuma*

The Corinthian church wasn't weak. It was gifted, knowledgeable, and active... but also immature and divided.

The Romans, the Corinthians, the New Orleanians, in this state of the 'gap trap' all have the same need!

Romans 8:23 *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Desperation for the Spirit

*It is imperative that we realize our complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit. We must not forget, of course, that our activity is enlisted to the fullest extent in the process of sanctification. But we must not rely upon our own strength of resolution or purpose. It is when we are weak that we are strong. It is by grace that we are being saved as surely as by grace we have been saved. If we are not keenly sensitive to our own helplessness, then we can make the use of the means of sanctification the minister of self-righteousness and pride and thus defeat the end of sanctification. We must rely not upon the means of sanctification but upon the God of all grace. Self-confident moralism promotes pride, and sanctification promotes humility and contrition. **John Murray** "Redemption Accomplished and Applied" pg. 147*

Galatians 5:16-17 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

*John Owen...wrote: 'Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.' If we build it on man-made rules (don't do this, don't go to that, don't touch this, keep away from that) we live under the delusion that we are truly dealing with indwelling sin when in fact we are merely altering our outward habits. This is no lasting foundation, and when the crisis of the 'evil day comes (Eph. 6:13) we will find ourselves on sinking sand. **Sinclair Ferguson** "The Christian Life" pg. 149*

Is the question of 'Are we good enough?' leading to a sinking sand moment?

*Since sanctification is primarily a work of God, it is appropriate that Paul prays, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thess. 5:23)...But it is specifically God the Holy Spirit who works within us to change us and sanctify us, giving us greater holiness of life. Peter speaks of the "sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:2), and Paul speaks of "sanctification by the Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13). It is the Holy Spirit who produces in us the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23), those character traits that are part of greater and greater sanctification. **If we grow in sanctification we "walk by the Spirit" and are "led by the Spirit"** (Gal. 5:16-18; cf. Rom. 8:14), **that is, we are more and more responsive to the desires and promptings of the Holy Spirit in our life and character.** The Holy Spirit is the spirit of holiness, and he produces holiness within us. **Wayne Grudem** "Systematic Theology" pg. 932-933*

Is that not our prayer this year? Is that not our prayer for our walk as Christians in the 'gap trap'?

The war within requires something greater than what we have to offer in ourselves!