

THE STRUGGLE

- Rebekah was pregnant with twins and the babies were struggling within her womb (Gen. 25:22).
- One night Jacob struggled with an angel until the break of day (Gen. 32:24; Hos. 12:4).
- Paul struggled with a law that waged war against the law of his mind and made him a prisoner to the law of sin at work within his members (Rom. 7:23).

Please consider that all three of these struggles have something in common. In the final analysis they all represent a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. A struggle between doing our own will, or the will of God! This is the same struggle that each one of us faces on a daily basis.

That's why Paul wrote: **“Live in the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. The the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law” (Gal. 5:16-18).**

The good news is that in all three of the above examples, the Spirit triumphed! The struggle, however, is not easy! The Spirit and the flesh are in constant conflict with one another! Often we do not do what we want to do! Defeating devil requires effort. Our struggle is like an athletic running a race or competing in a boxing match (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Even though we fight against giants, like David fought Goliath, we can still win! Goliath fought with a sword, spear, and javelin, but David fought in the name of the Lord Almighty (1 Sam. 17:45). Fighting in the name of the Lord Almighty is also the key to our victory! When we live in the Spirit we somehow have the power to defeat the desires of the flesh!

JACOB AND ESAU

- Let's consider each of these three struggles one at a time.
- Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, was barren (Gen. 25:21).
- **“Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife became pregnant” (Gen. 25:21).**
- **“The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, ‘why is this happening to me?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord” (Gen. 25:22).**
- **“The Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger’” (Gen. 25:23).**
- **“When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first came out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau” (Gen. 25:25).** (Esau comes from the Hebrew word that means “hairy”)
- **“After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.” (Gen. 25:26).** (Jacob comes from the Hebrew word for “supplant”). “Supplant means to “supersede” or “replace”. Jacob was destined to “replace” his older brother.
- Please note that before her sons were born the Lord told Rebekah that her elder son would serve her younger son!

Obviously God knows the future! God knows everything. God knew in advance that Jacob would “supplant” his older brother. Isaiah reminds us that God knows the future. He wrote: **“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Is. 46:9-10)**. God knew exactly what these two boys would be like before they were born. Thus Paul wrote: **“Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger’. Just as it is written: ‘Jacob have I loved but Esau I hated’” (Rom. 9:-13)**.

Esau was the firstborn son. One special privilege of the “firstborn” was to be the priest of the family. During the Age of the Patriarchs the oldest male member of the family was the priest of the family. Thus, when the father died, the oldest son assumed his role as priest. This is the privilege Esau despised!

- The patriarchs were priests!
- Job faithfully sacrificed a burnt offering for each member of his family (Job 1:5).
- Noah also built an altar to the Lord and made sacrifices (Gen. 8:20).
- Abraham also served as a priest and built an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12:7).
- After Abraham died Isaac built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:25).
- ESAU, HOWEVER, DIDN’T WANT TO BE A PRIEST! HE DESPISED HIS BIRTHRIGHT AND SOLD IT FOR A BOWL OF STEW (GEN. 25:29-34).
- THIS IS WHY THE SCRIPTURES CALL ESAU “GODLESS” BECAUSE FOR A SINGLE MEAL HE SOLD HIS INHERITANCE RIGHTS AS THE OLDEST SON (HEB. 12:16).
- WHILE ESAU CARED NOTHING ABOUT BEING THE PRIEST OF HIS FAMILY, HE WEPT AT THE THOUGHT OF NOT INHERITING AN EARTHLY BLESSING (HEB. 12:17).
- The “birthright” was spiritual and involved being a priest. The “blessing” was physical and involved earthly wealth. Esau despised his “birthright” but sought the “blessing with tears” (Heb. 12:17).
- Here is the “blessing” that Jacob stole from Esau: **“So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said, ‘Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine. May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.’” (Gen. 27:27-29)**.
- Even though Jacob lied to get this earthly blessing, God still honored him as the firstborn. The Lord told Moses to tell the Pharaoh: **“THIS IS WHAT THE LORD SAYS: ISRAEL (JACOB) IS MY FIRSTBORN SON” (EX. 4:22)**.
- In Christ we too are promoted to be the “firstborn” of God. In fact, we are **“the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:23)**.

JACOB WRESTLES WITH AN ANGEL

- Now let us consider the second struggle.

- As you know, Jacob was a deceiver! He bought his brothers “birthright” but stole his brother’s “blessing”. Because Isaac was blind Jacob dressed up like his brother and deceived his father. Isaac asked him directly **“Are you really my son Esau?”** Jacob deliberately lied and said: **“I am” (Gen. 27:24).**
- Do not be surprised that Jacob was a sinner **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).** This, of course, provides hope for sinners like you and me.
- Like a loving Father God helped Jacob to change. Like a loving Father God chastened Jacob to help him stop lying and deceiving others. Remember! **“The Lord disciplines those he loves” (Heb. 12:6).**
- For example, God had Jacob serve twenty years under Laban who was a bigger liar and deceiver than Jacob was!
 - You know the story! Jacob fell madly in love with Laban’s beautiful daughter Rachel and agreed to work seven years so she would be his wife (Gen. 29:18).
 - Jacob loved Rachel so much that those seven years seemed like only a few days (Gen. 29:20).
 - Laban, however, deceived Jacob and gave him Rachel’s older sister, Leah, to be his wife (Gen. 29:16-30). **“Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful” (Gen. 29:17).** Leah apparently had some physical deformity.
 - Jacob had to work seven more years to marry the woman that he really loved. Every day Jacob was reminded of the painful reality of how wrong it is to deceive others.
 - Further, during the twenty years that Jacob worked for Laban, that wicked deceiver changed Jacob’s wages ten times (Gen. 31:38-42).
 - God, however, was with Jacob and taught him how to get rich in spite of his wicked and deceitful father in law (Gen. 31:6-12).
 - Remember! God had plans for Jacob before he was born. God promised to give the land of Canaan to Abram and also to his descendants (Gen. 13:14-17). Ultimately the family of Jacob would not only inherit the Promised Land but also bring Jesus into the world.
 - Therefore, when Jacob fled from Canaan to avoid being killed by Esau, God promised him: **“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you” (Gen. 28:15).**
 - So after twenty years away from the Promised Land God commanded Jacob: **“I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land” (Gen. 31:13).**
 - This set the stage for Jacob’s great struggle! As he drew near to Canaan he was informed that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men (Gen. 32:6).
 - Remember! Jacob fled from Canaan because Esau was planning to kill him (Gen. 27:42-45). So, as Esau approached Jacob desperately prayed to God: **“Save me, I pray, from the hand**

of my brother Esau, for I am afraid that he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children” (Gen. 32:11).

- Jacob was so afraid that he sent hundreds of animals as a gift to Esau to appease his wrath (Gen. 32:13-21).
- Then Jacob separated himself from his family for their own protection (Gen. 32:22-23).
- **THAT’S WHEN JACOB HAD HIS GREAT STRUGGLE. THAT’S WHEN HE WRESTLED WITH A “MAN” UNTIL THE BREAK OF DAY.**
- **HOSEA TELLS US THAT THIS “MAN” WAS AN “ANGEL” (HOS. 12:4).**
 - This “struggle” took place at a place called “Peniel” which means “Face of God”. Jacob had run from God for many years but now faced God without running away.
 - This “struggle” resulted in a dramatic change in Jacob.
 - After struggling all night the “man” dislocated Jacob’s hip and said: **“Let me go for it is daybreak” (Gen. 32:26).**
 - **“But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me!’ (Gen. 32:26).**
 - In spite of his dislocated hip and exhaustion Jacob knew that he needed the blessing of God more than anything. Because he wouldn’t let go until he got a blessing God changed his name from “Jacob” to “Israel”!
 - “Jacob” is an uncomplimentary name referring to his deceptive nature. “Israel” is a wonderful name denoting someone who has power with God. Please note: **“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” (Gen. 32:28).**
 - Jacob not only had a new name, he had a new nature. Now he would depend upon God and never again resort to lying and deception. His perpetual limp was a constant reminder of his monumental struggle when he saw God face to face and didn’t die (Gen. 32:22-30).
 - Now when he met Esau he was completely resigned to the will of God. There was no attempt to run away, bribe, or deceive. Jacob met Esau with no weapons or body guards. He not only exposed his family to Esau and his 400 men, but he personally bowed down seven times without raising a hand in his own defense.
 - **WE TOO, LIKE JACOB, NEED TO ABANDON ALL EFFORTS TO SAVE OURSELVES AND FOCUS ON TRUSTING GOD TO BE OUR SAVIOR!**
 - We too can receive a “new name” from God. **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.” (Revelation 2:17)**

PAUL'S STRUGGLE

Now let us consider the third struggle. Even though Paul was a spiritual giant who wrote more inspired books of the Bible than any other man, he was still a human being who struggled just like you and me. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life”** (2 Cor. 1:8). He continued: **“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed”** (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Paul's long and fruitful ministry involved a constant struggle!

Please prayerfully consider these words of Paul: **“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”** (Rom. 7:14-25).

Please do not be confused or discouraged by Paul's struggle! Paul has “Good News” for those of us who also struggle! The very next verse declares emphatically: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Rom. 8:1).

- **“Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”** (Rom. 8:2).
- **“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit”** (Rom. 8:3-4).
- **“For those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires”.** (Rom. 8:5).
- **“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God”.** (Rom. 8:6-8)
- **“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”** (Rom. 8:9-10)

- Please take time to read Romans 8:11-17 as the role of the Spirit is mentioned five more times. It is the Spirit that helps us to understand how there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!
- Yes! Paul struggled and suffered in the service of Christ! In summation he said: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!” (Rom. 8:18)**

IT IS FAITH THAT BRINGS US THE VICTORY

“For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:4-5).

Let us pretend that we are Joshua and God has called us to lead His people in the conquest of Canaan. Please prayerfully read these words of God to Joshua: **“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:1-9)**

PLEASE NOTE THAT EVEN THOUGH GOD PROMISED TO “GIVE” JOSHUA EVERY PLACE HE SET HIS FOOT JOSHUA STILL HAD TO “STRUGGLE” FOR EVERYTHING HE RECEIVED!

Let us take the conquest of Jericho as an example. The book of Hebrews informs us: **“By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days” (Heb. 11:30).**

Why did the people march around the walls of Jericho for seven days? The answer is obvious! The Lord told them to (Josh. 6:2-5)! Because Joshua “believed” God he did precisely what God told him to do. Yes! God “gave” them the city of Jericho but they did not receive that gift without a struggle!

Now the question is: “Do you believe God?”

If you believe God, then you will do what God commands you to do. It is your faith that empowers you to keep struggling and to not give up until you get a blessing! Yes! Your faith will give you the victory that overcomes the world! **“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”**

