I. The Choice

Galatians 5:16-18

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever[a] you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

John Piper states: “The basic mark of the flesh is that it is unsubmitive. It does not want to submit to God’s absolute authority or rely on God’s absolute mercy.”

II. What is man’s condition apart from Christ?

“And therefore to say that man is a sinful creature, or even to allow that he is totally depraved is to acknowledge only half of the truth, and the least humbling half at that. Man is a fallen creature. He has departed from his original state and primitive purity. Man, far from having ascended from something inferior to an ape, has descended from the elevated and honourable position in which God first placed him…” A W Pink

Ephesians 2:3

Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

How does the flesh operate in the life of a believer?

Romans 7:19-20

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. 20 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.

Galatians 5:17

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

Romans 8:5-9

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Galatians 5:19-21

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Categories of flesh

2. Sins of Idolatry (Mammon, Witchcraft, Sorcery, Spiritists, Mediums).
3. Sins of hostility (Hatred – 1 John 3:15; Variance – disputes and quarrels; Emulations/Envy – envying the good fortune of others; desire to surpass others; Wrath; Strife – office seeking, Seditious; Heresies; Murderous)

The list is not exhaustive as he says ...and the like.

James 3:13-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Leviticus 19:26, Acts 19:18-20

"Do not practice divination or sorcery (Leviticus 19:26 NIV)."

"Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars. So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect (Acts 19:18-20 NLT).

Divination: The practice of attempting to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by occult or supernatural means.

Occult: Of or pertaining to magic, astrology, or any system claiming use or knowledge of secret or supernatural powers or agencies.

Sorcery: The art, practices or spells of a person who attempts to exercise supernatural powers through the aid of evil spirits, black magic or witchcraft.

Galatians 5:22-25

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Manifesting the fruit of the spirit requires the work of the Spirit. For example, the call to love. John Piper states that “This love is not optional. It is commanded. And it is very radical.: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” In other words, we are called in our freedom to desire and seek the happiness of others with the same zeal that we seek our own.” This is beyond our own power. When you are led by the Spirit it s not like following another car and driving in convoy but rather like a locomotive on a train, empowered by Him.

III. What is the Good News?

Romans 6:6

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

Romans 7:24-25

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 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] a slave to the law of sin.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Summary

1. According to scripture there are two possible ways of life.
2. The flesh nature is the sin nature into which we were born.
3. The flesh is what controls the unsaved person and the carnal Christian.
4. At salvation the Holy Spirit regenerates our spirit, imparting to us a new nature.
5. We can choose from which life to live. Hence, there is a civil war going on within us.
6. As we walk in the Spirit, the flesh increasingly becomes subdued.
7. As we walk in the Spirit we can now fulfill the law as a joyful lifestyle empowered by Him. “God’s Spirit creates law-fulfilling fruit” John Piper

IV. What are the consequences of operating in the flesh?

- We die spiritually

Romans 8:13 NIV
For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13 NLT
For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live.

- We open ourselves up to demonic activity

Ephesians 4:27
26“In your anger do not sin” : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27and do not give the devil a foothold. Foothold = topon (Gk) = Opportunity

- Our sight of God is dimmed

Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off your relish for spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of the body over the mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may seem in itself. Susanna Wesley speaking to her son John.

V. What are some Steps to Overcoming the Flesh?

These steps are for believers.

17th Century Theologian John Owen asserted “Unless a man be regenerate (born again), unless he be a believer, all attempts that he can make for mortification (of sin) ....are to no purpose. In vain he shall use many remedies, but he shall not be healed....mortification (of sin) is not the present business of unregenerate men. God calls them not to it as yet; conversion is their work – conversion of the whole soul – not the mortification of this or that particular lust.”

1. Submit yourself to God as your first act of warfare

James 4:7-8
Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Resisting the devil is an act of the will. Break off passivity.
Part of submitting to God involves calling sin what He calls it. Don’t give it a collar and a leash and call it a sweet name. don’t play the victim or get sentimental with it. You can only truly repent and renounce sin when you see it for what it is. Its like bringing a baby tiger into your house and calling it fluffy and then getting surprised one day when its starts to eat you alive. Sin is like this. It lurks.

2. Watch and Pray

Matthew 26:41

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Have a sober view of your self-control. Don’t be conceited about your spirituality.

3. Starve the flesh

Romans 13:14

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts

Colossians 3:4-9

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.[b] 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.

2 Cor 7:1

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Before He furnishes the abundant supply, we must first be made conscious of our emptiness. Before he gives strength, we must be made to feel our weakness. Slow, painfully slow, are we to learn this lesson; and slower still to own our nothingness and take the place of helplessness before the Mighty One. AW Pink

4. Actively invest in the things of the Spirit

Galatians 6:8

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

When you are passive you can open yourself up to the demonic. Mental passivity occurs with drunkenness, drug abuse, emptying of the mind (Yoga), traumatic accidents etc.

5. Resolve where you will set your heart

Colossians 3:1-3,10

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God…..10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

6. Clothe yourself with your new identity in Christ

In a sense we have dual citizenship and we can choose which one to live by. My kids can choose whether to travel with an Irish or Zimbabwean Identification. No one can take away your birth right. It is unconstitutional.

Don’t define yourself by your sin. Remember sin comes to distort your identity.
Genesis 1:27
27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

1 Corinthians 6:17
17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

1 Peter 2:9
9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Colossians 3:11-14
11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.
12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20
19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.

7. Consecrate every moment to Christ

Col 3:15-17
15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

John 15:4-5
Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

8. Renew Your Mind Daily

Romans 12:2
Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

“Indwelling sin is a parasite, and it eats what you do. God’s Word is poison to sin when embraced by a heart made new by the Holy Spirit.” Rosaria Butterfield.