

## The Conflict of the Soul

By Ginny Larsen

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*  
(Ephesians 1:2 ESV)

“It is worth noticing that grace comes first, then peace. This is always the order. Only after grace has dealt with the sin question can peace be known. And only through the undeserved strength which God gives from day to day can the believer experience peace, perfect peace, in all the changing moods of life.” (William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*)

*“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”*

(Romans 7:15-20)

As God’s children, He has placed in us the desire to do His will. He has given us a new heart, a new will, and new desires to please Him through His Spirit coming into our hearts, if we are born of His Spirit. Yet we find within us a conflict, because the enemy accuses us, twisting our motives and our understanding of God’s will. The enemy preys on our weakness. He condemns us, or pushes us to condemn ourselves, so we will put our eyes on ourselves rather than on God—to the point we’ll be torn by irresolvable conflict in our soul, which only God Himself can sort out. There are times I’ve cried out, “God! I do want Your will, but I can’t discern what it is! The conflict inside of me brings confusion, and I can’t discern between what is coming from my flesh, my own desires, my own weaknesses, my own inability or what is from the enemy twisting your Word in my head, and Your will, Your command. How to resolve it?!” I find myself in hopeless despair to ever live up to His will! As I struggle through, trying desperately to come to peace with this conflict in my soul, trying to honestly discern what is of God, what is of the devil, and what is of me, I realize I cannot. His Word comes to me: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil”* (Proverbs 3:5-7).

I realize it is only God Himself, through His Word and by His Spirit, that can discern the thoughts and the intentions of the heart and divide between soul and spirit. *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). I must not wrestle to discern it by my knowledge, understanding, feelings, or anything else – especially not by another’s opinion. I must do as the Word says. I must go to Him and acknowledge Him.

Acknowledge—“1. To own, avow or admit to be true, by a declaration of assent; as to acknowledge the being of a God. 2. To own or notice with particular regard”  
(Webster’s 1828 dictionary).

Even if I should seek wiser counsel, I need first to acknowledge and seek Him. And then if I do seek another's counsel, that too must be brought before Him. I must not lean on another's understanding anymore than I lean on my own. I must own, avow, and declare God as my God, my Father – to regard Him alone as the One Who knows all. He understands perfectly His own will and the schemes of the enemy, which deceive, twist, and condemn falsely. God alone is the One Who understands all the intricacies in my heart, the motives, the feelings, and the desires. Only He can divide between His own work in me by His own Spirit and what is coming from my own flesh, which is very deceptive, always holding onto what it desires. He alone is able to conquer all those places in my heart, to help my will conform to His will. He alone is able to resolve the conflict. It is He Who works in me *to will* to do His will and then enables me to carry it out—I cannot by my own understanding and efforts. When I try, I fail, I fall, I stumble in the dark, and the enemy then comes in for the kill with condemnation, until I feel buried under it and hopeless to ever find peace.

God is our peace. His *grace* is sufficient for us to enable us in the conflict. His power is sufficient for us to do all. Until He comes into the situation or conflict, we can't understand, we can't trust, we can't rest, and we can't "do," because we so easily deceive ourselves and others. As we look to Him, then we are able to look away from the conflict itself, to stop the struggle, and to look to Him. Then we are able to say, "It is Yours, Lord. I will trust You with all my heart and not lean on my own understanding. I know You will direct my path. You will discern, You will make Your will clear and understood in me, and bring my will to conform to Yours." We find rest in our souls, though perhaps the conflict is not yet resolved to our understanding. It is now cast on Him. As we wait on Him, we stand in His grace, in His peace, and determine that we will submit ourselves to His Spirit in our hearts as He resolves it and brings discernment and light. We stand in His salvation against the attacks of the enemy's condemnation. We stand in His righteousness, knowing we have none in ourselves, and His righteousness will be ultimately fulfilled in us.

We must submit and present ourselves to the working of His will in us, by placing ourselves before Him in His Word, letting it speak to us, letting it divide soul and spirit, letting it bring light, truth, and counsel to our hearts. Most of all, we need to let Him reveal Himself, His heart, His mind, and His will to us through that Word. As we do that, we grow in love to Him, and we grow in our awe of Him. We desire His will above our own. We find we don't have to strive, and as His Word becomes our delight, we want it more than anything else. We find, almost without realizing it, that there has been a work in our hearts to make us conform to His will even in our feelings and desires, and the will of our flesh no longer has a hold on us. "*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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*" (Galatians 5:16-17). "*Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday*" (Psalms 37:4-6).

There are two ways to think on Ps. 37:4. First, if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us our heart's desire. Second, if we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will put the right desires in our heart. I have found both to be true in my own experience. As I delight in Him, my desires become what He desires for me and others. Then, those very desires that I am asking of Him, He gives. What a wonderful God we have! Our wonderful Father does not want a slave

relationship with us. He wants us to discover Him, His heart, and His will. He tells us life eternal is in order that we may know Him! (John 17:3) He wants us to know Him, not just to come to Him as a slave master. He does not force submission. He reveals Himself to us, which makes us unable to do anything other than to adore and worship Him, to delight in Him, and to desire His perfect will, even when it is a sacrifice for us. When we are “in the Spirit,” we are being filled with the Spirit and with the will of the Spirit.

Under the law there was more of the slave/master type of relationship:

“As to man, the law and the ordinances were only bondage. They aimed at bridling the will without its being changed” (J.N. Darby, Galatians 4).

Grace and peace is how Paul greeted the church in Ephesus. Grace gives us the enablement to know Him, love Him, love His will, and to do it. Peace is the outcome. We stand in all God has done for us and in us, trusting alone in His work, His power, His provision, submitting ourselves to Him as we abide in Him—by that grace, then, we find the Father’s will to be increasingly the pure will of our hearts. And only in submission to His will do we find peace from the conflict of the soul. It is our hope and promise that one day the conflict will be over forever. We will have the most perfect peace at that time—more than we can now comprehend, for we will be in His likeness and in His presence, where nothing can ever again be in His presence that is not conformed to that blessed will. *“For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness”* (Galatians 5:5). *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3).

Knowing this, it stands to reason that we should do all we can do and as much as we can to embrace, love, and cherish the Father’s will—to seek it, know it, and submit to it. Ultimately, we will live in the Father’s will perfectly. It is in His will alone that we are made complete, whole, and can have His peace. Even so Father, work Your will in our hearts! Deliver us from all that hinders it in us and around us. In Jesus name, Amen.