

THE FLESH  
Message 1

Passage: Romans 8:1-17.

Text: Romans 7:18 "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells..."

Romans 8:8 "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

INTRO: Some time ago, did a message to challenge our young people to use godly discretion in the music they listen to and the videos they watch. I am deeply grateful for the words of encouragement I received from the young people themselves, and the encouraging comments I have heard. In that message I challenged the young people to learn to recognize the flesh. After that message I gave a lot of thought to that and wondered, "How will they learn to recognize the flesh except someone helps them?"

As I was thinking all that over, I was questioned about some in our church who work on Sundays, and about body piercing and what is the difference between body piercing and ear rings. And is it permissible for Christians to wear jewelry etc... And as I considered all of this I thought, "How many questions such as these would not be settled if we recognized that which the Bible calls 'the flesh'?" The more I considered all this, the more convinced I became that I must do several messages on the flesh.

You see, we often want permission to do certain things. We are not sure, is the Holy Spirit convicting me or is this just something I have been taught and that is why it bothers me. We want some specific verse that says something like, "Thou shalt not smoke cigarettes." And when we cannot find it, then we think, "Oh, then it's ok to do it."

I thought of what it would be like in my life if I had not been given insights into the biblical teachings of the flesh by others, and then determined that I must pass some of this on. I believe an understanding of the flesh and related terms will shed a lot of light on a lot of questionable things. May God be honored in these messages.

I. IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

It is of primary importance that before we begin this subject, that we make some very important

definitions. We are going to define two very important terms; the world, and the flesh.

#### A. The World

Let us begin by defining the word world, for in my understanding, the word world sums up all that the word flesh means when used as that part of man that bends him to sin. I see the use of the word world in at least three senses. Others give more than three. Let me begin by saying this that the word world in itself basically means orderly arrangement. In 1 Peter 3:3 it says of women, "Do not let your beauty (world, kosmos, orderly arrangement) be that outward adorning of arranging the hair, of wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel."

##### 1. As referring to the earth

First, the word world can be used to refer to this earth. Jesus said, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If any man walk in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of the world" (John 11:9). Those references are far and few between.

##### 2. As referring to the things on earth

So the term, 'the world' may refer to the earth in some cases but it can also refer to those things produced by man and which are necessary for life. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:31-34 like this, "...and those who use **this world** as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about **the things of the world**--how he may please *his* wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about **the things of the world**--how she may please *her* husband." Jesus speaks of certain things as the cares of this life. These are things like food and clothing etc.. These

things of the world Paul speaks about may be just those.

### 3. As referring to lost mankind

Third, the term 'the world' is used to designate lost mankind. This is how it is mostly used. The classic verse is John 3:16 where it says, "For God so love the world..." Jesus said many things such as, "I am the light of the world." All such references are to lost mankind.

Believers have come out of the world, into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). They are not part of the world. Jesus said to God, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world..." He further said in John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Then again in John 17:6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. In John 17:14-16 He said, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

So believers are not part of the world. They are to be a light to the world. It is for this reason that we are not to be worldly. But now we want to define a little more closely what the phrase 'this world' refers to when it speaks of all lost mankind. In my estimation, it refers to all that the flesh brings about.

LE Maxwell writes this of George Mueller's secret of success in running an orphanage by faith, "Thus answered George Mueller when asked for the secret of his successful service. 'There was a day when I died, utterly died, died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes, and

will - died to the world, its approval or censure  
- died to the approval or blame even of my  
brethren and friends - and since then I have  
studied only to show myself approved unto God.'"

## B. The Flesh

We are going to seek to define the flesh and in doing so must deal with at least these three expressions: the sin nature, the self life and the flesh. But before I do that, let me briefly explain that the Bible uses the term 'flesh' in a number of ways.

### 1. The term 'flesh' in Scripture

-The term 'flesh' in Scripture can refer to just simply **ordinary flesh**. The Lord Jesus became flesh (John 1:14). The bodies of men and animals are composed of flesh in the ordinary sense. In the ordinary sense it can refer to mankind as a race (Gen. 6:12; Ps. 145:21; Isa. 40:5-6). Then it can refer to all living, animated creatures (Gen. 6:17, 19; 1 Cor. 15:39). In this sense it can refer to the body (Ex. 4:7; Lev. 17:14; Num. 8:7; 2 Kings 4:34; Prov. 5:11) etc...

-Second, the term 'flesh' can refer to various **relationships**. For example, it can refer to blood relationship (Gen. 29:14; 37:27); marriage relationship (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:29-31) etc...

-Third, the flesh can refer simply to the **weak human nature**. In this sense it speaks of the material part of man which is opposed to the immaterial or the spirit. Jesus said in Matthew 26:41, 'The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.'

-Fourth, the term flesh can refer to that part in man which came into being when Adam sinned which we sometimes refer to as the sin nature. We will discuss this more fully later. The key passage to this which was read for us earlier is Romans 8:1-13.

Various writers give more uses of the word flesh, but these are the major ones. In these messages

we are primarily interested in the fourth use of this word as we have given them. So, let us look more closely at the term 'flesh' as the part in man that came into being through the fall of Adam, that is the term 'flesh' as that entity in man that ever leans him toward sin.

## 2. The term 'flesh' as man's fallen nature

We said earlier that we must define at least three expressions we commonly use in theological discussions; the sin nature, the self life, and the flesh. Let us then begin with the sin nature. Some say, "A sin nature? What do you mean by a sin nature? I do not find that in the Bible." Well, because you do not find the phrase 'sin nature' in the Bible does not mean it is not there. Many people do not find the Trinity in the Bible, but it is there.

The Greek word for *nature* in the NT is *phusis*. The adjective of this word is *phusikos*. Turn to Romans 11:24 (read). The Jews are pictured here by the good olive tree. The Gentiles are pictured as the wild olive tree. And we, the Gentiles are the wild olive branches which are grafted into the good olive tree. When you graft a wild olive branch into a good olive tree, that branch will still bring forth wild olives. It is by nature, a wild olive branch.

Certain families have certain characteristics that they are born with. You can sometimes see it by the way they walk, or talk. They cannot make themselves different, for that is what they are by nature. Now I want you to turn to Ephesians 2:3 (read). Now notice that we, Gentiles, are by nature children of wrath. We, as Gentiles are always exposed to the wrath of God because of what we are by nature. And what are we by nature? Well, verses 1-3 explain that. We are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, in which we walked according to the ways of the devil and we all lived in 'the lusts of the flesh', fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were 'by nature' the children of wrath.

You see, we have a nature. We are naturally wicked because of our nature. That is the sin nature. Now notice carefully in these verses how this nature fulfills the desires of the flesh (read 1-3). As I see it, the sin nature has its seat in the flesh. We are naturally wicked people, and there are no exceptions. And if you are 'naturally' wicked, you have a sin nature.

Now come with me to 2 Peter 1:2-4 (read). From these verses we learn that these wicked people who are by nature children of wrath may become partakers of the divine nature (phusis). And when we become partakers of the divine nature, we have a new nature. This is not the nature of the flesh, but of the spirit. So there is a bad nature and a good nature. There is an old nature and a new nature. There is a sin nature and there is a holy nature.

Now from Ephesians we learn that the bad nature that we have, has its seat in the flesh, and the flesh is inherently wicked. So let me explain further. Bishop Moule, in his classic commentary on Romans comments on 8:12-25 like this, "For a moment he turns to say what we owe no debt to; even 'the flesh,' the self life." So Moule equates the flesh to the self life.

All of that to say this: the sin nature, the flesh and the self life are all expressions for the sin principle in man. We have a sin nature. You hardly need Scripture to prove that. Just take a good look at yourself. Life is abundantly full of examples and life allows no exceptions for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. This sin nature is often spoken of as the self life, and in the Bible is referred to as 'the flesh'.

Listen to Maxwell on the flesh in his book, 'Crowded to Christ'. "The flesh has almost infinite forms. It may not always appear devilish, deceitful, and hateful; on the contrary, it may be cultured, educated, refined, and religious. In fact it may so play possum as to lead you to think that it is dead. It thrives

in any soil, and under the shades of earthly sorrow as well as in the sunshine of prosperity. Whatever its behavior, however, it is still changeless flesh, 'unimprovable, incorrigible, incurable...There remains then no remedy but that which God has provided - condemnation, crucifixion, death with Christ' (Mantle). The only trademark becoming the flesh is the death mark of the Cross" (pg. 70).

Now let me give a brief explanation of the phrase 'the self life'. When we are born again, we become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It is at this time that we receive a new nature and we are born again and become a new person, or new man. The old person, or the 'old man' as the Bible calls him, has been crucified, and the new man is now in office. The old man refers to 'the self' under the dominion of the flesh and the devil, and thus lost. The 'new man' is the self under the dominion of God Almighty.

A born again person is not a new man and an old man at the same time. He is a new man. That is the teaching of Romans 6. Many people say something like this: The old man got the best of me today. The facts are, according to Scripture, that the old man is crucified, and the new man is in place. "But", someone will say, "why do I yet struggle with sin"? We are not two people, an old man and a new man. We are one new person with two natures; a sin nature, the flesh, and a divine nature. Precisely therein lies the problem.

You may not remember, but a long time ago I did a message on three people I called "The good, the bad and the ugly." We find these in 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 (read). In verse 14 we have the natural man. This is the unsaved man. Then in verse 15, we have the spiritual man. This is the born again believer who is filled with the Spirit of God and walks in the Spirit. Then in 3:1 we have what is called the carnal man. The word carnal here is 'fleshly'. This is a Christian walking in the flesh. He is not spiritual because he does not walk in the Spirit. This is UGLY.

This person calls himself a Christian but he pulls the strings of the flesh. He lives according to the dictates of the flesh. You see, even Christians do this. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:2-3 (read). What is the sign of fleshly Christians? First, they cannot understand the deeper things of God. Second, they have envy or strife, and cause divisions. They behave like the unsaved.

So what do we mean by the 'self life'? We mean a Christian who is living in the flesh or according to the sin nature. One thing is all important to the self life: Self. Maxwell used to say a man all wrapped up in himself makes a pretty small package. The major problem of the self life is pride. L.E. Maxwell would say it like this:

We had a little party  
This afternoon at three.  
'Twas very small, three friends in all,  
Just I, myself, and me.  
Myself ate all the sandwiches,  
While I drank the tea;  
'Twas also I who ate the pie,  
And passed the cake to me.

So, just what is the self life? It is the sin nature or the 'flesh' as the Bible puts it.

Donald Grey Barnhouse in "The Invisible War" defines the flesh like this: "Let us now consider the flesh... We are defining the 'flesh' in its metaphorical meaning. We do not refer to the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is penetrated with blood. God created that flesh and gave it to man, and the proper use of its every function is normal, natural and moral. There is no sin involved in any thing in connection with the human body in itself. But there is a figurative meaning of the word *flesh* (especially when it is used in antithesis to the spirit), which has an ethical sense, and denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore, prone to sin and opposed to God. It is this flesh which has frequently debased the body and turned some



of its highest functions into the most ignoble. But we must be careful of the word *flesh* as having to do merely with the sins of the body. It is true, as we shall see, that fleshly sins tend to vice and depravity and worldly sins sometimes tend to nobility of character. But we follow Luther in his *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, where he writes, 'Thou must not understand 'flesh,' therefore, as though that only were 'flesh' which is connected with unchastity, but St. Paul uses 'flesh' of the whole man, body and soul, reason and all its faculties included, because all that is in him longs and strives after the flesh" (pg179-80).

CONCL: So, in conclusion, let me summarize what we have thus far. First, the word *world* is generally used to refer to lost mankind. It may also refer to that which mankind produces, such as cars or houses or TV's etc... So John says in 1 John 2:15, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." When the present tense is negated by the Greek negative *mee*, it does not mean 'do not do it', it means 'stop doing it'. That is what we have here. Everybody loves the world and the things in the world. That is how we are. But we, as Christians, are to stop loving the world.

Now notice that there are two things we are to stop loving. First the world. There I believe we have the attitudes and actions, the fads and the fashions produced by a lost world. That is why Romans 12:2 says, "Stop being conformed to this world..." Same negative construction as here. Second, we are to stop loving the things in the world. There we have all the things produced by the world. We may have many of these things, such as cars etc... But many of these we are not to have, and that is especially so whenever they enter the ethical realm and become wrong, such as certain kinds of clothing etc... Once you recognize the flesh, you will be able to tell much better that which is wrong. We have become so used to the world, that we can hardly tell between right and wrong unless it is specifically spelled out in the Bible.

Now notice that 1 John 2:16 tells us what he is talking about when he says we are not to love the things in the world. It is things that produce the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. There are a lot of

things the Bible does not specifically tell us not to do or have, but an understanding of the terms 'world' and 'flesh' will reveal these to us.

The second term we considered was the term 'the flesh'. For these messages, we are talking about the fallen nature of man sometimes referred to as the sin nature or the self life. The Bible refers to it simply as the 'flesh.'

Now let me ask you: Would you like to be an utterly believing believer? Do you have a desire to be truly Christ-like? Do you want to be a believer who has learned to recognize the flesh and live according to the Spirit alone?

Let me tell you this about those who learn to recognize the flesh and then begin to live in obedience to Christ: They will be disliked and shunned, sometimes even by other believers. I am not talking about being abrasive, bullying Christians. These are shunned and disliked as well, but not for the same reasons. I am talking about godly, right living Christians; those who dare to voice their godly concerns. I quoted to you some time ago from 2 Timothy 3:12 which says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

I wonder, are you tired of the shallow shoals of the half hearted Christian life? Are you sick of your inner nature that always seems to get the upper hand? Are you sick of the self life? Have you come with Paul, to realize that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing? That is a good start.