

THE FLESH
Message 4
Scripture: Romans 8:1-13

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: This is the last of several messages on the 'flesh'. I have defined the flesh as that which we call the 'sin nature' or the 'self life'. In the last message we saw the birth of the flesh in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned. We saw it worked out in Cain, a worldly man. We saw godly Abraham give in to the flesh. Last we looked at Jacob, the heel catcher, the supplanter. We saw him become a man of faith as he agonized with the angel of the Lord.

The life of the flesh and the life of faith are incompatible. So the Scriptures says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. And it is an unsettling discovery when, with the apostle Paul, I come to the place as a Christian where I learn that 'in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells.

In the last message we looked at some significant demonstrations of the operations of the flesh. This morning I want to take time for one more in the OT and then at a very important passage in the NT.

4. Saul

Come with me now to 1 Samuel 15 (read 1-3). I said in an earlier message that Amelek pictures the flesh. As soon as Israel was out of Egypt, a picture of salvation, and into the wilderness, he met Amelek, a picture of the flesh. And only with intercession and the help of the Lord could they defeat Amelek.

God spared Amelek for a long time, but now at last, the patience of God has been exhausted. Amelek, in all the opportunities he had, has not repented of his ways, though God has spared him for a long time. Come with me for one brief moment to Genesis 15:16. By the way, let me

mention that the Amalekites are descendents of Esau.

But now, one thousand years later, the Lord has had enough of the Amalekites, and God wants them destroyed; man, woman, children, even babies. You say, "But that is horrible. What kind of God is this you are talking about?" It is the Lord, the God of the Bible. This destruction is not horrible, it is merciful. Every child brought into the world through Amalek, is a child destined to hell with no chance for salvation because of the horrible wickedness of this nation of people. The most merciful thing God could do was destroy them all.

Now here is the picture for the Christian: In the flesh, there dwells not one good thing. You say, "But those innocent babies." But in the flesh, there is nothing innocent. All of it is contaminated. All of it must go to the cross.

Well, Saul has his instruction. Now let us read 1 Samuel 15:4-9. Saul was to destroy everything contaminated by the flesh, but did you notice the disobedience of Saul? Look at it in verse 8. He spared Agag alive. Here is the king of the flesh, but he spares him alive! Now look at verse 9, Saul found some good thing in the flesh and spared it! Ah, the bad stuff he destroyed, but the goodly things he saved. What does the Bible say about the flesh? There is nothing good in it. Saul could not believe this. Many Christians cannot believe it.

Now look at verses 10-14 (read). Samuel is saying, "If you have performed the commandment of the Lord, what then is this bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen? If you had performed the commandment of the Lord, there would be no sheep to bleat and no oxen to low.

Now I want you to see a fleshly man operating in the flesh (read 15). He blamed the people over whom he is king for this disobedience. There is a word for leaders. Who is accountable? The leader, of course!

So let us read on (vrs. 16-19). Saul has failed God. But listen to this leader of God's people again (read 20-21). I saved the king alive. The people took the plunder. Both were errors of the leader. Now look at verses 22-23.

Well, there comes a time for a leader when it is too late. I have feared this in my life. Let us read on (24-31). Saul, it is too late for you! You are finished!

Now let us see the prince of the flesh. He cares for one thing, his own skin. That his wife and little ones and his army are gone, that is nothing. All he wants is his own skin protected. Here is Saddam Hussein. Now see too, how a godly leader obeys God (read 32-33). Agag was the king of the flesh. He had to go. But he fell, not at the hand of the king, whose job it was, but at the hand of a priest, who knew how to deal with the flesh. Only one trademark is fitting for the flesh, says Maxwell, and that is the trademark of the cross. Ah, here is God's greatest work. To bring to an utter end, the flesh in the Christian.

But the story is not over. Saul lived on, though in the eyes of God he was finished. And God would from now on begin to prepare a young man of faith to replace this disobedient king. God would anoint David. Now you will have read how when David began to flourish, how Saul tried to kill him. And in all the hard times David went through, even when he could have killed Saul, he would not lift his hand against God's anointed. He let God choose Saul's end, and come it did, and that, at the hand of an Amalekite! Let the flesh live, and it will kill you if possible.

Now if you read the end of 1 Samuel and the beginning of 2 Samuel you will get a conflicting reading. But I think Saul was wounded, tried to commit suicide, but he did not die from his efforts. So look at how it ended in 2 Samuel 1:1-10 (read). How did David handle a man of the flesh? (Read 1:11-16).

B. In The New Testament

I had originally planned my outline and was going to take several examples from the NT. I do not want to at this time take much more time on this subject, and changed my mind to deal with one of the most significant passages on the subject of the 'flesh.' It is Romans 8:1-13.

Now let me begin this by stating several biblical facts. First, a non-Christian is said to be 'in the flesh.' Look at verse 8, "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Now who are those who are 'in the flesh'? Well, we go to verse 9, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." First, anyone who is truly a Christian has the Spirit of Christ. If he doesn't, he is not saved. Second, those who have the Spirit of Christ are NOT in the flesh, but, they are in the Spirit. So a Christian is not in the flesh. He is in the Spirit.

But, go with me now to verse 12, "Therefore brethren (that is those who are not in the flesh), we are debtors..." Those who are in the Spirit and not in the flesh have an obligation. They have something they owe to God. And what is it? We are debtors, negatively "...not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." You see, we may be in the Spirit and not in the flesh, and still live according to the flesh. That is precisely what Paul calls a 'carnal Christian' or a 'fleshly Christian.' A fleshly Christian is not in the flesh, but he lives according to the flesh. That is what I have called in an earlier message "The Ugly".

Look at 8:3-4 (read). Now when it speaks of those who live 'according to the flesh', it speaks of Christians who are spiritually born again, but they live according to the flesh. You see, when we as Christians are caught up with the fads and fashions of the world, we are in the Spirit but living according to the flesh. This is a great disgrace to God.

Romans 8:5 then says, "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, the things of the Spirit." One of the questions that has come to me several times is with regard to Christians working on Sunday. Is working on Sunday not breaking the Sabbath? The answer is "No". Sunday is not the Sabbath. I do not have time to deal with the Sabbath here, but Sunday is not the Sabbath and it does not have the same requirements set out for it as the Sabbath does.

So you will say, "Well, is it wrong to work on Sunday?" Let me say it this way: If I am a Christian. I am born again. I say God comes first in my life. I want to please Him, and Sunday is the day the Church meets for spiritual refueling and rest for the body, but my job is more important than this day, then I think it is wrong to work on Sunday. But maybe there are special circumstances, and you are required to work on Sunday, or you have a job that serves the public and you are required to work certain Sundays, is that wrong? I don't think so. Is it wrong to travel on Sunday, eat at a restaurant, buy gas and make others work? It may all depend on your motives.

Now let us say it is not necessary for me to work on Sunday, but if I want to get ahead so I can get the next job, and the next job and I cannot leave my work because of my own things, I think it is wrong. The Bible says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." But if I seek first my welfare, and do so by working on Sunday, God is not first.

So how do you seek first the kingdom of God? Well, let me give this bit of advice. Set aside Sunday, as much as possible, as a day for the Lord and rest from work. You see, that is the FIRST day of the week. Seek Him on the first day of the week. Then, set aside the first part of each day, to seek Him before you begin the day. Then give Him the first part of your money. A tenth is a nice portion. Seek Him first.

I have been asked about ear rings. And then, is there a difference between ear rings and nose rings and

belly button rings? Yes I think so. Not in the rings themselves, but in what they stand for in society. Is it wrong to paint your face? Is it wrong to paint your toenails or finger nails? How about checking with God? You say, "How do you do that?" Well, how about checking to see if it is a fleshly or a spiritual thing? How about seeing if it makes you desire God's approval or man's?

Maybe you say, "Well then, maybe all of this is not such a big deal if the Bible does not clearly spell it out." Let us read Romans 8:5 again (read). Now look at verse 6 (read). Notice the difference? One is death, and the other is life and peace. Do that which brings peace.

Now go to verse 12, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." We owe the flesh no obedience. We owe the flesh one thing, to not live according to it. But I want you to notice the final end of the fleshly believer in verses 13, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die..." Oh, deceptive flesh. It may not seem so serious, but in the end, it brings forth death.

This is very serious, so let us ask, "What kind of death does it bring about?" When I went through a study on Romans by L.E. Maxwell he quotes Dr. John Murray, who he says is an ardent Calvinist. Murray writes, "'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.'" Here is an inevitable and invariable sequence, a sequence which God Himself does not and cannot violate. To make life the issue of life after the flesh would be an inherent contradiction. God saves from the flesh, but not in it. Paul is speaking here to believers and to them he says, 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' The death referred to must be understood in its broadest scope and does not stop short of death in its ultimate manifestation, eternal separation from God."

It is now 30 years ago when my lesson on that chapter was graded. Here is the question I wrote as a young believer, to PBI, "Could you explain to me how a person can be a Calvinist and believe at the same time that a believer who lives after the flesh will

be eternally separated from God." The answer I got back is long and involved but listen to part of it, "He does not say (as you misinterpret him as saying) that if a Christian sins he is lost. He simply says that 'if ye live after the flesh you will die' -not viewed as dead, but on the road that leads to death. And what else could he say and still be true to the passage?"

Now, thirty years later, I still cannot understand that thinking. You see, Paul does not here say that if you live after the flesh you are on the road to death. That would be serious enough. But he does say, "If you live after the flesh you will die!"

Now consider Romans 8:13 a little further. What should we do with the flesh (read 8:13b). We are to put to death the deeds of the body, that is that which pertains to the flesh, the sin nature.

While we are here, let me explain something. I do not have time to explain this as fully here as I do in the class, "Basic Bible Doctrine", so if you are interested you may wish to join that class some day. It is the difference between the believer's standing and his state; the believer's position and his practice; what he is in Christ, and what he is in actual life.

Turn with me to Romans 6 (read 6:6a). When we talk about the deep things of God, here is one of those 'deep' things. You see, the facts are that our old man has been crucified. That is an indicative statement of fact. When someone had been crucified, they were not coming back. The cross had no escapees. So the old man is not dead once and alive the next day. This is positional truth. This is my standing with Christ.

But we go on in verse 6 (read 6a-b). Why was the old man crucified? With this purpose in mind, that the body of sin might be done away with. Now let me just mention briefly that the 'old man' referred to here and the sin nature are two different things. The old man was crucified that the sin nature might be done away with. Now, there is our battle with the flesh. This is our practice. This is our experience. And day

by day, we are to win victories over the flesh, or the sin nature, until we become like Christ. So, verse 12 then says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts".

So, as to our position, we died with Christ. The old man is dead. As to our practice, the flesh, the sin nature is still with us and it is this Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15:31 when he says, "... I die daily." The flesh must go. And before it goes, it must be recognized as the flesh.

Maxwell in "Abandoned to Christ" says, "A word to ministers. How shall we ever bring God's people who are asleep in their sins to some sensibility and conviction? That is the minister's problem. It is his business to 'convict, rebuke, encourage'" (2 Tim. 4:2). Later he writes (pg. 40), "Many of us are a million miles away from dealing such a deathblow to sin. Before we ever break with sin we must come to have a furnace of desire to be rid of the fiend. Many of us have forgotten our sins. We have grown used to sin - used to it, hardened through it, calloused by it, and almost unconscious of it. Before there is any real confession and forsaking of sin, there will have to come to us all a new sense of sin, a new sense of its pollution and power and wickedness."

CONCL: Well, let us conclude this final message. Saul, what was his battle, a battle which he lost? It was a battle with the flesh. You see, the very sword with which Saul should have slain Agag became the instrument of his own destruction. If we do not put to death the deeds of the body, the deeds of the body will put us to death. This battle with the flesh, is a battle to the death. Either one will come out alive, and the other dead. So Paul says, "If you (believers) live after the flesh, you will die."

But he goes on like this: "...But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." When it comes to questions such as working on Sunday, wearing jewelry, painting the body, piercing the body; what kind of vehicle I should drive or what house I should own or what kind of recreational vehicles I may have; these questions are better answered by principles that deal with the flesh than direct Scripture passages. There are direct passages, but

they are also very controversial. Questions like: "Who am I doing this for?" Or "Why am I doing this?" Or, "What is the heart motivation?" Or, "Does it promote me or put me to death?" But in all of this remember, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

Well, how can I learn the answers to all these questions if there are not specific verses for them? Here is how. Learn to know the God of the Bible through His Word. There is no substitute for the Word. Then learn to know the flesh. Learn to recognize it and learn to shun it.

Moses was to deliver Egypt, so he killed an Egyptian. He thought he could accomplish his task in the energy of the flesh and had to go to school on the backside of the desert to learn that the flesh profits nothing. Peter was going to deliver the Lord from death and cut off an ear. But the kingdom of God has not to do with cutting off ears and killing Egyptians.

Let me say this: I have killed my share of Egyptians, and cut off a few ears. I am still learning.

If Christ would live and reign in me,
I must die;
With Him I crucified must be;
I must die;
Lord drive the nails, nor heed the groans,
My flesh may writhe and make its moans,
But in this way, and this alone
I must die.