

WHY HATE THE FLESH?

LUKE 14:26; ROMANS 7

FLESH

— SIN LIETH AT THE DOOR —

WAR
O WRETCHED MAN

HOME

I SHALL BE SATISFIED

— PSALM 17:15 —

The FLESH

Luke 14:26; Romans 7

Few statements spoken by our Lord have caused more questions than His words found in Luke 14:26. Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." At first reading, these words appear difficult to understand. Did Jesus command us to hate ourselves? Did He teach that our bodies are evil? Was He telling His followers to despise life itself? The answer to all these questions is no. The Lord was revealing a battle that every believer experiences. There is within every child of God a struggle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit. Understanding that struggle helps us understand why Jesus used such strong language.

The flesh is not simply our skin, bones, and physical body. Paul wrote, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). The flesh is that fallen principle within man that desires independence from God. It seeks its own will, its own wisdom, and its own desires. The flesh says, "I will have my way." The Spirit says, "Thy will be done." The flesh seeks comfort while Christ calls us to obedience. The flesh seeks recognition while Christ teaches humility. The flesh looks to this present world, while the Spirit causes us to look toward eternity.

The first great example of this battle is found in the lives of Cain and Abel. Both men approached God. Both men brought an offering. Abel came by faith and offered what God required. Cain

brought the labor of his own hands. Abel was accepted because he approached God in God's way. Cain was rejected because he approached God in his own way. The problem was not the offering alone. The problem was the heart behind the offering. One heart was submissive. The other heart was proud.

When God accepted Abel and rejected Cain, Cain became angry. The Bible says that his countenance fell. Instead of examining his own heart, he looked at his brother. Instead of humbling himself before God, he became bitter. Yet before judgment came, the Lord graciously spoke to him.

"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7)

What wonderful words. God was extending mercy. God was inviting Cain to return. God was showing him that acceptance was still possible. Cain had not gone too far. The door of repentance was still open. If he would simply do right, God would receive him. The Lord was not shutting Cain out. Cain was shutting God out. The flesh always turns God's correction into an accusation. It hears mercy and calls it unfair. It sees another man blessed and turns blessing into jealousy. That is why the flesh must never be trusted.

Then the Lord gave one of the most important warnings found anywhere in Scripture.

"And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door."

Sin was waiting. The flesh was crouching like a wild beast. It desired to control Cain's heart. God saw the danger before Cain

saw it. God warned him before destruction came. Yet Cain refused to listen. Before murder ever touched Cain's hands, rebellion had already taken possession of Cain's heart. The deed in the field was only the outward fruit of an inward surrender to the flesh.

Cain thought Abel was his problem.

God knew Cain's real problem was Cain.

The battle was not fought in the field where Abel later died. The battle was fought in Cain's heart. His anger became bitterness. His bitterness became hatred. His hatred became murder. The flesh gained the victory because Cain refused to submit to God. That is why the story of Cain belongs in this booklet. It shows us what the flesh will do when it is allowed to reign. It does not become satisfied. It does not become gentle. It does not become spiritual. It grows stronger until it brings destruction.

How often believers repeat the same mistake. We think our circumstances are the problem. We think another person is the problem. We think disappointments, hurts, or trials are the problem. Yet God often points us back to our own hearts. The greatest battle is not around us. The greatest battle is within us. The flesh desires to rule. The flesh desires the throne that belongs to Christ.

The Apostle Paul describes this struggle in Romans chapter seven. Here we find one of the most honest confessions in all the Word of God. Paul loved the Lord. Paul delighted in God's law. Paul desired obedience. Yet he discovered another law working within him. He wanted to do what was right, yet he found himself

battling the flesh.

"For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

These words have encouraged believers for centuries because they reveal that even the Apostle Paul experienced this conflict. He was not describing an unbeliever who had no concern for God. He was describing a child of God who loved Christ yet still carried the presence of the flesh. The inward man delighted in God's law, but the flesh resisted it. The very grief Paul felt over sin proved that a new desire lived within him. A lost man may love his sin, excuse his sin, and defend his sin. Paul hated the sin that hindered his fellowship with God.

That is an important truth.

The believer's sorrow over the flesh is not proof that God has left him.

It is often proof that God is working in him.

Only a heart that loves holiness grieves over sin. Only a heart that loves Christ mourns when the flesh has pulled it away from Him. Paul was not content with defeat. He was not making peace with sin. He was crying out for deliverance because he loved the One whom the flesh opposed.

Paul eventually cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Notice carefully that Paul did not ask what would deliver him.

He asked who.

The answer was not a stronger determination. The answer was not human effort. The answer was not turning over a new leaf. The answer was Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans seven brings us to the end of self. Romans eight brings us to the power of the Spirit. God allows us to discover the weakness of the flesh so we will stop trusting it and learn to walk in dependence upon Him.

This brings us again to the words of Jesus in Luke 14:26. Christ was teaching that every disciple must place Him above every competing affection. He must be loved more than family, possessions, ambitions, and even self. The flesh seeks to sit upon the throne of the heart. Christ alone deserves that throne. The flesh says, "Follow yourself." Christ says, "Follow Me." The flesh says, "Choose comfort." Christ says, "Take up your cross." The flesh says, "Live for today." Christ says, "Lay up treasures in heaven."

Every believer understands this conflict.

Every believer must choose whom he will follow.

The flesh is not our friend. It weakens prayer. It resists Scripture. It excuses sin. It magnifies self. It robs us of joy and fellowship. It constantly seeks to draw our eyes away from Christ. This is why mature believers learn to oppose the flesh. They discover that the flesh is the enemy of the very One they love most.

Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

What a wonderful promise.

The Father and the Son desire fellowship with the believer. God desires to dwell with His children. He desires communion, fellowship, and nearness. This is not a cold doctrine. This is the heart of the Christian life. The Lord does not merely save us and leave us to struggle alone. He comes to make His abode with us. He draws us into fellowship. He teaches us through His Word. He strengthens us by His Spirit. He lets the obedient heart know the sweetness of His presence.

Yet the flesh opposes that fellowship. Every surrender to the flesh weakens our communion with Christ. Every surrender to the Spirit deepens it. The flesh cannot enjoy God's presence because God's presence threatens its rule. The flesh does not want Christ to reign. It does not want the Word of God to govern the heart. It does not want prayer to become the believer's breath. It wants a religion without surrender, a profession without obedience, and comfort without a cross.

This is why the child of God learns to hate the flesh.

Not because he hates himself.

Not because he despises his body.

He hates the flesh because it opposes the fellowship he treasures. He hates the flesh because it competes with Christ. He hates the flesh because it whispers against obedience. He hates the flesh because it turns blessings into pride, wounds into bitterness, and desires into idols. The more a believer loves Christ, the more he learns to distrust anything that pulls his heart away from Him.

Romans chapter eight gives us God's answer. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. God never intended us to overcome the flesh by our own strength. The Spirit enables us to walk in obedience. He produces His fruit within us. He gives us power to say no to the flesh and yes to Christ. As we yield ourselves to Him, we discover victory that the flesh could never produce.

This victory is not flesh becoming better.

It is the Spirit ruling stronger.

The old nature is not improved by age, experience, or religion. It must be denied. It must be refused. It must be brought under the authority of Christ. The believer does not wake up one morning and find that the flesh has become holy. He learns day by day to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He learns that victory comes through surrender, not self-confidence.

The day is coming when this battle will end forever.

David wrote, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

What a glorious promise.

One day, the flesh will trouble us no more. One day, sinful desires will be gone forever. One day we shall see His face. The battle that began in Eden, that appeared in Cain's heart, that troubled Paul in Romans seven, and that every believer experiences today will finally be over. No more inward war. No more divided desires. No more grieving over failure. No more longing to obey

while feeling the pull of sin.

Until that day, we continue the struggle.

The believer does not hate the flesh because he hates himself. He hates the flesh because he loves Christ. The flesh competes for the throne that belongs to the Savior. Every victory over the flesh brings deeper fellowship. Every act of surrender brings greater joy. Every day that passes brings us one day closer home.

Another day closer home.

And when we finally see Him, we shall understand completely why the flesh had to be opposed, why the battle had to be fought, and why the love of Christ was always worth more than the desires of self.

What do you love most is the question of The LOVE Test Book. It is the rest of the story. I'll be glad to help you find it online.

Love and prayers,

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