

Works of the Flesh

Under Human Nature's Influence

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As you probably know, next Sabbath weekend the world will be celebrating Halloween. You have probably seen displays of jack-o-lanterns and skeletons, ghosts and ghouls, spider's webs, and whatever all over in stores displays, schools, yards, and other places out and about. Even some municipalities have their yearly Halloween displays. It is kind of like Christmas—they have to have a Halloween display as well. (I guess they have to please all those Satanists out there!)

You have probably seen the mounds of candy that are available in your local grocery stores or Wal-Mart. (Have you seen how much candy they have at Wal-Mart? It is a whole aisle full of candy. I never go near it, so I do not know what is all there, but I have seen it from afar.)

You may have noticed that stores are pushing alcohol sales quite a bit as we approach this holiday. And there is a method to their madness. It is no coincidence, really. Halloween's beer and liquor sales rival the sales for New Years Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Super Bowl Sunday!

As you know, Halloween brings out the most venal aspects of people. Even kids, they say, "Trick Or Treat?" when they come to the door. But, that is nothing more than accepted hold-up, something that we allow. It could be, "Choose! Either extortion or vandalism!" So, you choose to give them a piece of candy—well, we do not, but other people do—to make sure that they do not paint or T.P. [toilet paper] the house or something. Once their night of marauding is over, once they have sufficiently stolen as much as they want, they go home, and gorge themselves on their looted candy!

As mentioned earlier, Halloween is really popular as a party day, as popular as Super Bowl Sunday, New Years Day, and St. Paddy's Day. People dress up in costumes, and this immediately has the effect of putting someone out of character—feeling free to indulge in things he would not ordinarily do because he now has a mask, or is in some other way, incognito.

So, they eat a lot of candy or a lot of food in general. Or they drink too much and they end up doing all sorts of things that they would not normally allow themselves to do because they have allowed their inhibitions to fall.

They engage in things like drugs, or sexual perversions; crimes like vandalism, or robbery, or even murder. (Just watch CSI this week. You will probably see a few shows that have to do with this holiday theme—maybe a murder at a Halloween party.)

As you may recall from my Halloween sermon from a couple of years back [Tape 365], and also from an article in last year's Forerunner [September 2003], that Halloween and this attitude of partying and letting go, coincides perfectly with the Celtic holiday of Samhain, (pronounced "Sow'an") which looks like Sam Hain, but it is not. Samhain was a time of abandon and engaging in uncharacteristic behaviors because it was considered to be "no time." It is not the past year, and it is not yet next year. It was this time of in-between when the veil between this

world and the next was supposedly the thinnest, and one could engage in things like that when you could not do it at other times of the year. Usually the behaviors that they did were rather hedonistic, outside of what was normally allowed within the society.

Well, I have gone through all that, and you may be thinking, "Oh no! Another Halloween sermon!" Well, it is not!

But, the things that happen on Halloween are a good introduction to the sermon I have for you today, "The Works of the Flesh."

I have been on this series of "works" for about month, and I figured that I needed to do a sermon that hit on the works of the flesh aspect, and the next time that I speak, God willing, I will do the Works of God. It will be the last of the series, and should cover most of the bases of works.

I sometimes get the impression from church of God members that they believe or feel that the works of the flesh are behind them. We may say or think that we would never do anything like that. We look at some of the lists of the works of the flesh and we would say, "These are terrible things. I would never do any of them!"

But, I think that this might be a hangover—this feeling of being beyond works of the flesh—from Protestantism, where all of our lives before we were converted we believed that Christ's blood covered everything, and so we were beyond that. The works of the flesh were just things the people in this world did. And now, we are beyond that.

I think that is may also be a bit of pride to think that we are above these types of sins and so we have this attitude, then, that we are never going to stoop to anything like that.

And I think, thirdly, that it is a bit of naiveté on our part to think that we cannot be tempted to do some of these works of the flesh.

What I am trying to tell you, today, is that we are. We are very much, everyday, tempted by the works of the flesh, and we probably do one or more of the works of the flesh every day; especially when you come to understand what works of the flesh are.

What I am trying to say is that in reality the line between our Christian works and the works of the flesh is rather thin indeed! Because, well frankly, we probably have not grown as much as we should have, and we still have these tendencies back toward the works of the flesh because we are in the flesh, and they are always screaming at us to give them some time, and satisfy them, and gratify them.

And in this sex-crazed, wealth-driven, every-man-for-himself culture that we live in, today, here in America, temptations to gratify our desires are flung at us at light-speed all the time. You just turn on your TV and you are exposed to allurements to fornication, envy, selfish ambition, and well, you name it. It is there on TV, and there is a desire created in the programming and in the commercials to get us to follow the cravings of our flesh.

Here in Galatians 5:19-21 are the specific three verses that list most of the works of the flesh. And, this *is* the best-known section on the works of the flesh. So, I wanted to hit this first.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, [lewdness, or lasciviousness in the KJV], idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

It is important that we look at the word "practice," here. This has a meaning of habitualness—things that are repeated and not overcome. It could also be something done in sheer rebellion, thumbing one's nose at God, done only once, but it might keep one out of the Kingdom of God, too, if one does not repent of it.

I bring this up so that you will understand that these are habitual practices, but we should not just limit it to that, because none of these works of the flesh are good to be done at any time.

There are seventeen behaviors or attitudes listed here. Some say that there are sixteen because they believe that first one, adultery, should not be there. It is not that they want to commit adultery, but they believe that some manuscripts do not include it. But it should be there. We will just leave it at that. Whether it was there in the text or not, it is certainly appropriate being in the list.

It is a different word from fornication. Adultery is sexual perversion among married persons. Fornication would be all the rest of sexual perversions. It is just specifically between unmarried people. Fornication—porneia is the original Greek word—has a much wider application than just sex between unmarried people.

Uncleanness is a more general term for anything that is unclean, not good.

The original Greek word translated licentiousness, lewdness, or lasciviousness is I think closer to our English word "debauchery." It means excesses to the max. Whether it is in violence, sex, or whatever it might be, it is those things taken to the extreme.

Idolatry is self-explanatory.

Sorcery is interesting because this is the word, pharmakeia, which is drugs. But, you get sorcery out of it because the sorcerers, those who used witchcraft, used drugs in order to do their divinations. So, that is why pharmakeia was the word for sorcery among the Greeks at the time.

Hatreds are enmities, or long-held grudges and whatnot against people.

Contentions would be strifes.

Jealousies—this is zeal for something that is bad, because that is what the word is, zealous (Greek). Normally, you would think of zeal in a good sense, like for God. But, jealousies are that sort of zeal in a bad way—wanting something [wrongly], and then taking action on it that much [or with great zeal].

Outbursts of wrath are fits of rage.

Selfish ambitions are self-explanatory.

Dissentions might be better as divisions.

Whereas, "heresies" should actually be "factions." The Greek word for heresy means "choice or preferences." This is one of those words where you have the word meaning something that is a result of it. If you have a preference for something, it usually causes people to separate into different factions or divisions, and then they start fighting one another. That is what that word actually means. It is party spirit, basically.

Envy and murders are kind of together in this, because they consider envy to lead to murder. I think that you can understand that.

Drunkenness, and revelries go together as well. Drunkenness leads to revelries. Another word for revelries is, believe it or not, orgies.

The Roman society at the time had a cultural practice of having frequent dinner parties. And, depending on who gave them, they could turn out to be philosophical discussion, or they could end up being huge feasts where people gorged themselves. They could be drinking parties, they could be orgies, as the word is here. It covered a great deal of ground. Drunkenness helps to understand what Paul meant by revelries.

What I imagined Paul doing here is dictating this letter, and he came at these from off the top of his head, and the idea of drunkenness made him also think of the term revelries, meaning drinking parties that had gone way too far.

"And the like." There you have it! Paul is telling us that there are a lot more. One commentator I read said that there always seems to be a lot more bad things than there are good things. That is because human nature finds a way to reach out and corrupt in just about every aspect of life.

This idea of works in general, we should know by now because of all my sermons, are what we do, how we behave, and the things that we practice; including how we think and feel. Several of these are feelings that have gone too far, or thoughts like hatred, and stuff like that, that have gone to an extreme.

Works, if you want to wrap it up neatly, are manifestations, then, of what we believe, what we think, what we feel. It includes what we worship and what we aspire to be. These things work their way into our behaviors.

For instance: There is an example of how what we believe, what we worship, and what we aspire to be ends up being works of the flesh. If we believe that money is a sure refuge, and we believe that money makes the world go round, if we worship at the altar of the almighty dollar, if we desire to rival Bill Gates, or Warren Buffet, we will do whatever it takes to amass a fortune. We will lie, cheat, steal, sleep around—you name it!

If our goal is to make money—and we do not have an ethical system behind that—no behavior will be out of bounds. If all we are focused on is making money—"worshipping the dollar"—watching its fluctuations up and down, believing that only the dollar—only wealth—will save us, and if we believe that money is the only thing that we can be sure of—that if we do

not have tons of money we are not going to have a good retirement, or we are not going to be able to do all the things that we want to do—we will do anything. No behavior will be out of bounds.

Our works, like these, telegraph to others (especially to God, but also to people who are observant), what we worship, what we believe, and what our goals are. Anybody who is observant enough to watch a person for long enough, and see what that person does, should be able to come up with the answers to these questions: What do you believe? What or who do you worship? What do you aspire to be?

You should be able to see it. If a person loves cars and cars are his whole life, he is going to surround himself with cars. He will get classes on cars. He will spend all his money on cars and car parts. He will paint his garage door checkerboard [like for car racing]. He will have a membership at Napa Auto Parts, or something. That will be his life. That will be his god and he will aspire to be the "car god." He will be totally wrapped up in cars.

What I am trying to say by these examples is that our works will tell what we believe, what we worship, and what we aspire to be. We cannot hide it.

Now, we get to the word flesh. It comes from the Greek word "sarx." It just literally means "flesh." But, as in English, it has a whole variety of meanings. We say, "those are fleshly desires." But, we also eat flesh.

Paul especially uses it in a wider sense to include all human thought, all human feelings, all human desires, and all human activities. They are all grouped under the term "flesh."

Now, I used the word human in every one of those. Human thoughts, feelings, desires, and activities. That was done intentionally because most of these things that are called "of the flesh" are apart from God.

They are human thoughts, feelings, desires, and activities which are in most instances apart from God.

There is an exception to this in Acts 2: 30 to show you that in some cases it is used in a normal, neutral sense, or in a sense in which God is a part and He is working through the flesh. This example is from Peter's sermon on Pentecost when the church of God was founded:

Acts 2:30 Therefore, being a prophet [David], and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne.

Here is a case in which something is done with the flesh which was part of God's purpose; that is that Christ would come of David, and be his heir, and sit on his throne as king.

So, here is a good thing in which something is of the flesh, but in this case it was guided, directed, and inspired by God; and made to work throughout all those generations between David and Jesus. And, of course, all the work that He did in order to be able to sit on that throne. Much of it was done through the flesh. God works through the flesh. But, in most cases in which Paul is describing something having to do with the flesh, it is not so positive. I wanted

to go to the exception to show you one way that it works well. Then, the other ways will make more sense.

Even here in Acts 2: 30 the thought comes through that it is physical descent. It is human. It is natural. We need to hang onto those words—physical, human, and natural—in terms of sarx, the flesh.

Back to Galatians 5. Paul's meaning here about works of the flesh—the whole phrase—pretty much accords with the idea of human nature. Actually, I should say, the flesh. We are still on the idea of flesh. Works of the flesh would be the works of human nature. The nature of man, man's ideas, man's desires, man's feelings and actions apart from God, and apart from the influence of His Spirit. It is what we think, what we say, what we do naturally, because we are living in these bones and skin of flesh.

I do not want to go into a great deal of the theology of this, but this began back in the Garden of Eden when our first parents, Adam and Eve, refused to follow God, refused to obey Him, and rebelled, and took of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Protestants, and Catholic have a huge doctrine, The Fall of Man. Their belief is primarily that we inherit our human nature from Adam and Eve. However, that is not true. There is no indication of that in the Bible. Adam and Eve's choice to take of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil rather than The Tree of Life was an indication to God that any person would make the same choice.

God decreed, then, that man would be cut off from Him from that time forward. They made the choice as our representatives for all of mankind for a certain period of time until God should choose to open their minds through His Spirit. But, even now, that has not taken place to any great extent. Only in the ones that God has chosen to call.

Where do we get our human nature then?

Our human nature comes simply from the fact that we are fleshly, plus the terrible influence of Satan the Devil who is here, plus the world that that human nature has created under the influence of Satan that we live in everyday. And, all the traditions and all of the ideas, and all of the structures, and authorities, that we are used to make us what we are.

If you will remember my dad's sermons from a few years ago, he said basically that we are born neutral. But, we have this tendency toward evil simply because of what we are. We are flesh and our flesh cries out for satisfaction.

Parents know that a baby just born squawks for satisfaction. He cries, and cries, and cries until he is satisfied with milk. It is that flesh that is crying out for it to be satisfied. That is a very simple illustration but it is an appetite that screams to be filled. All of our other appetites are exactly the same way.

Unless there is something else that works upon us to get us to resist the screams of those appetites and do something else, then we will follow the path of human nature.

And, we all do.

That other thing that needs to fight human nature in order to get us to do good instead of evil is

not there.

Now, there is the parent, who Mr. Armstrong always said stood in the place of God, who could fight off some of those things with good training, and being aware of the child's needs, and desires, and could regulate those sorts of things.

But even we fail to hold off human nature to some regard, most of us do not have the wisdom when we have our children to be able to do that well. So, our children grow up with just as much human nature as we have. Hopefully with you there, training them and teaching them, they are able to hold off the worst of it. But, even so, all of us, every one of us on the face of the earth, has human nature.

We all, then, do works of the flesh, because works of the flesh is simply the behavior that is influenced by human nature. Ever since the Garden of Eden, all generations have turned deaf ears to God. And, because they have shut God out, they have also been open to the influence of Satan the Devil and his world and the cravings of their bodies and minds. They are continually urged to conform to the wrong spirit.

And so we have verses like Ephesians 2: 1-3, another memory scripture:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

This is what we were before. As the first verse tells us we have been called out of that. We have been made alive. Paul is saying that before this time we were basically dead. We could go to several scriptures where Paul repeats this idea that before conversion, before our calling, before God forgave us of all these terrible things, and we started to walk in newness of life, we were dead. We were as good as dead, just as Adam and Eve were after they took the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil were as good as dead. They may have died 1,000 years later, but they were dead. They had written their own condemnation.

Let us go back to Romans 7: 5. This is something similar. Paul is putting this into terms of law, here, of it telling us what sin is.

Romans 7:5 For when we were in the flesh [human nature only--now we are in the spirit], the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.

He says the same thing here in Romans 7: 5 that he did in Ephesians 2: 1-3. I will not go into the whole argument about the law's place in all of this is. He is speaking in terms of a cardinal approach to the law here—not its spiritual intent. But, the general idea is the same. We were

dead in the flesh.

This idea that we were dead, totally cut off from God, that we were living according to human nature only, doing the works of the flesh, is why God, to fulfill His purpose, must specifically call certain ones, and *drag* them out of this world.

Let us go back to John 6:44. You do not see it quite so clearly in English here, but it comes out in the Greek. This is another memory scripture.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

It says, "draws him," here, but the Greek is much more explicit. It says, "*drags* him."

"No one came come to Me unless the Father who sent Me drags him kicking and screaming out from this world" because he is so used to following his human nature. I think just about every one of us can give an account of how hard it was/is to change. Even those of us who are second or third generation in the church of God Christians; even though we grew up knowing the way of God, we still had to change. There was repentance there. We had to recognize that we had not lived in a bubble, that we had picked up human nature, and that it was tearing us down, and killing us, trying to draw us back into that world of death where the rest of the world is.

Once God opened our mind, and gave us our calling, then, we had to face that and start making changes, realizing that we are just as sinful as everybody else, and that there must be regeneration, as it were. We must let that old man die—kill him! Take on the new man.

This is why God's calling along with Christ's sacrifice are said to be so liberating. If we go back to Galatians 5, we will read verses 1 and 13.

Galatians 5:1, 13 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage....For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Paul is saying here, "Look! You have been called out of those opportunities for the flesh. You have been called to a life that has freed you from that bondage to the flesh."

Now, it is not a complete freedom while we are still in our physical bodies. We will still have to face our flesh. But, the freedom has been granted to us. Now our mind has been opened to the fact that we have these pulls that are against God and His way of life, and we can do something about them. People out there in the world who do not have His calling, and have not been justified by His blood, do not have this freedom. They are still entangled in this bondage.

For most people if you tell them to change their behavior, they give you this dumb look, and say, "Why should I?" It is because they love their captor. They love what their captor allows them to do. That is why Mr. Armstrong had that booklet, *A World Held Captive*. Do you

remember that one? He termed our former bondage, *A World Held Captive*. This whole world is enslaved to human nature, to the lusts of the flesh, to the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. They love to take orders from Satan the Devil because he lets them do their own pleasure. They love to conform to this world because they find certain benefits there that people who do not conform to this world can never have.

Paul says in Romans 8: 21:

Romans 8:21 Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Do you know what? We already have that liberty! We do not have it in its fullness. That will not come until we slough off this mortal body in the resurrection when Christ returns. But, we are already under the glorious liberty of the children of God as children of God—begotten sons, yes, but we already have the first bits of it because now we are free to understand what is really going on.

We are free, then, through God's Holy Spirit and all the power and grace that He gives us to overcome that and to strive, as Paul says in another place, for immortality and eternal life. We can do all those things because we have this liberty that the people out there do not have because they are still chained to the works of the flesh, that is, gratifying their own human nature, plus all those other things.

In summary, (we are still talking about sarx here) flesh implies human nature in its raw state, uninfluenced by God, acting on its desires. Once a person becomes a begotten child of God, the flesh is opposed to God's Spirit.

Before this time, it had no opposition. It just ran wild. Whatever our conscience would allow us to do, we did. But, once we become begotten children of God, then God sends a fighter into the ring on our behalf. Then we have an advocate who will punch out our human nature—if we let it.

The question for us is, as I just said here, which are we going to allow to be the most influential in our life? The flesh or the Spirit? Which one will we permit to guide our behavior? That is the question! Are we going to allow Satan through our human nature? Or God through His Spirit? Which is it? That is the big question, now that we have been begotten.

Do not think that we have made this decision once and for all before our baptism. We face this decision everyday. Which one are we going to hear today? Which one are we going to follow?

(We had that announcement last week about baptized members of the church allowing human nature the upper hand. That is why my dad said, "Choose!")

Either stay in and follow God's Spirit, or get out and give in to your human nature. You cannot sit there and do both. We should, those of us who are baptized, have made this decision a long time ago, and dedicated our lives to our answer in the affirmative to God's Spirit. But, some of us think that we can live in both worlds. You cannot.

James 4—do you know what it says there? This is only one of the places where something like this is said:

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

You cannot be both a friend of this world and a friend of God. Make the choice.

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident...

This is why I can speak so glibly about the works of the flesh. They are obvious for everyone to see. That could even be a translation of this verse! "The works of the flesh are obvious!" They are right out there in the open. Anybody can recognize them. They are easy to spot.

Good works on the other hand tend to be either inner attitudes or behind-the-scenes behaviors. Remember that Jesus said not to let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. He says to pray in the secret place. He says to give alms in secret.

Those are the good things. They often do not show themselves in a flashy way, but works of the flesh do! They often tend to be open secrets. They are just the ugly, huge, gaping, putrid sores that everyone sees, whereas, the good things are the things of the heart that people may not be able to see—quite so well, at least.

Being that works of the flesh are easy to spot, it does not mean that they are easy to overcome. We all know that, too! But here in Galatians 5, Paul does give us advice about this overcoming. Let us go back to verse 16, and read down through 18, and then 24-25.

Galatians 5:16a I say then...

Meaning, "this is what I mean." What he is referring back to is do not use liberty as an opportunity to the flesh (verse 13). "This is what I mean by that," he says.

Galatians 5:16 Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Simple, is it not?

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts [or better yet, "sets its desire" or "longs for" things that are], against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...

They both have different goals. They are going in opposite directions. That is why they come to loggerheads all the time because everything about them is opposed.

Galatians 5:17b ...and these are contrary [opposed] to one another,

so that you do not do the things that you wish.

I do not know if you are aware of it, but in verse 17 there is a huge controversy over the first word "do" there "so that you *do* not do the things..."

The King James Version has "cannot do," whereas most modern translations have, "may not," or something similar. I believe that the modern translations are probably more correct in this. The actual Greek says, "may not."

"These are contrary to one another so that you may not do the things that you wish"—we do have a choice.

Galatians 5:18, 24-25 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law...And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

This seems to be easy advice to say but hardly helpful. But, I think that that is just the way that we tend to look at it.

This phrase, "walk in the spirit," really contains all the advice that we need.

Do you know what it is lacking?

WILLPOWER!

That is all that it lacks. "Walk in the spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." All you need to do is strap down and do it. That is hard. I did not say that it was easy. I specifically said that it was not going to be easy to overcome these things. But, that is the advice. It really is the key to successful Christian living. What Paul means here is to conduct your life under the influence of God's Spirit always.

If you *really* do this second part, you will not give in to the sinful desires of human nature. That is what he is saying.

If you *really* live by God's Spirit, under the influence of God's Spirit, in the guidance of God's Spirit, allowing God to mold you and shape you, because you are so caught up in what the spirit is urging you to do, and you are actually doing those things that it urges you to do, and you know through God's Word are the right things to do, then you will not do the other things.

Why?

Because God's Spirit, reading God's Word, and doing the things that God's Word is telling you to do, will fill our lives fully. We will have no reason to do the things of the flesh. We will not want to.

Mr. Armstrong was right when he said, "this work"—he meant it in terms of the work that he was doing, but I mean it in terms of the work of bringing you to salvation—"is our life."

That is what he said, "This work is our life." (This is a preview of my next sermon, The Works of God.) God wants willing clay.

How can this be? How can we conduct ourselves according to God's Spirit and then not give in to the other?

Paul answers this in this next verse.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

As I mentioned, what it says here is that human nature and God's Spirit are diametrically opposed, as if they are in a pitched battle. It is as if they were jousting. You have God's Spirit on the one horse and you have human nature on the other horse. They go thundering towards each other and they clash, and one wins and the other loses. That is how it always is. They are just total opposites—there is no gray area between human nature and God's Spirit. There is no blending along their borders. It is one against the other. They hold absolutely nothing in common because the designs of God are totally different from the designs of man.

The desires of God are totally different and opposed to the desires of man. Our flesh cries out for things that the Spirit does not cry out for. They are totally, diametrically opposed to one another.

Therefore, if we are persuaded by our flesh to do something, it will miss the mark. It is a work of the flesh. Conversely, if we allow God's Spirit to direct us, we will do good.

Do you know how I know this?

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked [we do not pull the wool over His eyes]; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

If we live by the flesh, we are going to die. If we live by the Spirit, we are going to live. If we live according to the flesh, our fruits will be corrupt. If we live according to the Spirit, our fruits cannot but be good, because we are following God's urging doing what God wants.

This is why Paul adds in Galatians 5:18 that if we are guided by God's Spirit we are not under the law. Now, why would he say that? Do you understand what he means there?

Most people, when they look at this, will do a double take and wonder, "Are not we supposed to live by God's law?"

Well, he is looking at law in a totally different way here. If we live by the Spirit, what are we doing? Good things! We are being obedient to God.

Therefore, the law is absolutely powerless. It has no place to stand in our lives, because what

does the law do? The law shows us what is wrong. That is its power. Once we break the law, once we do something that is wrong, then the law rises up in righteous indignation and strikes us down! Because, that is its power! Its power is in sin, he said. The law has power because there has been an infraction. But, if we live according to the Spirit the law is pretty much defunct for us.

It is not that it is not there, it is not that it is not working for other people, but for us it plays no part, because there is no sin.

Paul is showing an absolute here. And he is giving us encouragement. If we keep our noses clean we do not have to worry about the condemnation of the law because the law will have no hold on us. There will be no record of our transgressions because there has been no transgression.

So, the law is powerless. That is the goal we strive for now in the Spirit, that we do nothing to make the law go into effect.

Now, how often that occurs is pretty rare, I would say. The law is constantly rearing its ugly head against us, as it were, because we are constantly sinning because our flesh keeps crying out for us to do this or that which we should not do.

So, the ultimate is to get the law totally out of our lives so that it does not even make any approach to us because it will not be needed.

Do you think the law, even God's law, has anything on God? Do you know that He does not live by the Law of God? Because He is holy, righteous character. He never infringes or breaks the law. So, it really means nothing to Him. It has no power over Him.

On the other hand, a better way to say it might be, the law of God reflects His character, not that He lives by the law. The law *is* the way that He lives, so there is never any infraction.

I know, it is a bit of a mind-expanding idea, but that is, as far as I can understand, not being a philosopher, the way that I look at it. God does not have to live by His law because He is the Law. The law mimics His way of life.

This does not mean that the law has been done away for us. That is ridiculous. It has always got to be there as a standard. It has always got to be there to bring us to justice when we sin.

It is just that the law has nothing on us when we do good. That is what we are striving for. That the law has been so inscribed into our hearts that we act according to it every time, with every decision.

Now, we are all a long way from that, but that is the goal so that we do get to the point where we no longer are living under the law. We are not there yet.

In verse 24, Paul says that those who are true Christians crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. And I think that he used this term advisedly. He did it intentionally. He wanted us to think of Jesus Christ when he said, "We must crucify the flesh, and all of its passions and desires."

What he wanted us to do here is to reflect back on what Christ did in order to sacrifice Himself

for our sins. And then, come to the realization that the work that we must do to overcome our sins, to overcome our works of the flesh, to overcome our human nature, has to be just as intense and just as agonizing. The lengths that we have to go to are similar to what He went through to overcome sin. That is what crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires entails. HARD WORK! TRIALS! PAIN! An incredible force of WILL to stay on the true and right path.

We are never going to come to the point where we actually equal the pain and agony that Christ went through, but Paul, again, is giving us a goal to where we so constrain ourselves, and motivate ourselves to do what is right that none of the desires of the flesh come even close to tempting us.

But, because we are of the flesh, it is going to be painful. It is going to be very difficult. We are fighting against the thing that has guided us all our lives. It has got a tentacle into every cell of our body. We have to do what it takes—in this case, to crucify—(that was a pretty wicked punishment), we have to crucify the flesh. We have to go to the extreme to fight the extreme. It is going to take everything that we have.

If you would just jot down Colossians 3:1-10, you will see this idea come through.

[Colossians 3:1-10 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who *is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the *newman* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.]

But because we have set ourselves on the path toward the kingdom of God we had better mortify our members—put to death your members which are on the earth which is of the flesh—our human nature. He lists several and then put on the new man. It is so important.

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

I will paraphrase: "If you profess to be a Christian in whom God's Spirit resides, make sure your conduct is guided by God's Spirit."

It seems here that we think of living and walking as the same sort of thing. But, Paul is separating them here from the standpoint of the Spirit lives in you, and we live in Christ, as it were—Christ lives in us, and we live in Christ. If we profess that then we had better make sure

that our conduct is that way as well. If we call ourselves [true] Christians we had better act like [true] Christians.

I want to give you two examples. The first is one who lived by the works of the flesh, and the second is one who lived in the Spirit.

Let us go back to Genesis 25. This is a fairly obvious one. This is about Esau.

Genesis 25:29 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary...

His human nature was telling him that he was tired. He longed for rest. But, he was also hungry and needed food. His body was crying out for sustenance and rest.

Genesis 25:30-32 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. [Edom means "red."] But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." ["Or this stew is going on the ground," is the way I can see it.] And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?"

"Look! You are taking advantage of me!" But, He had no vision whatsoever. All he wanted to do was satisfy his flesh.

Genesis 25:33-34 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way [without another thought]. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

There was no, "Why did I do that? That was so stupid!" But rather, "Great stew, Jacob!" and then he went away. Thus Esau despised his birthright. He had no thought for it. There was no idea of what it meant.

Chapter 27, verse 30. This is after Jacob has deceived Isaac and gotten the blessing as well.

Genesis 27:30-33a Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that your soul may bless me." And his father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" So he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac trembled exceedingly...

I am certain Isaac, being who he was, realized very quickly not just that Jacob had deceived him, but that God had done a work here for his purpose to go forward. I think that is why he trembled so. He felt the hand of God working in all of this.

Genesis 27:33-37 Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed." When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?"

I do not have anything left! I gave it all to Jacob your brother!

Genesis 25:38-40 And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: "Behold, your dwelling shall be of [or away from] the fatness of the earth, And of [or away from] the dew of heaven from above. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck."

That is not a very good blessing if you ask me!

Genesis 27:41 So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

The way that he is acting here—his craving for the food, his craving for the blessing, then his immediate decision to kill his brother, are all aspects of the works of the flesh. He has no thought for what God may be working out here. He has no familial love for his brother. He probably lost that when he lost the birthright. Everything we see about Esau is carnal.

Now, if we would go down here to chapter 28:

Genesis 28:6-9 Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he

blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," [Esau had this backwards as well] and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

This is carnal thinking to a "T." He had two wives already, Hittite women. (Hamidic—they are of the family of Ham.)

Then he decided, "Okay. Since Isaac and Rebecca have blessed Jacob for going and getting a wife from our family, I will get another wife, also from our family."

So, who does he go to? Rather than go back to Padan Aram where his uncle was living, he goes to Ishmael, the son of a concubine, and gets a daughter from him.

A third wife. Just adding problem upon problem. He should have had one wife, but he ended up with three because he was jealous of his brother and his relationship with his father and mother.

Everything that we see about Esau shows that he was a typical man of the flesh. If you would go back to Hebrews 12: 14-17 you will find that Paul calls him, "an immoral, and profane person" because that is all that he ever thought about—immoral things and profane things—meaning "far from God" ("Far from the Temple" is the exact definition of "profane" in the Greek).

But, he did not think about God's purposes because he was entirely caught up in the flesh.

Now, to the good example. Genesis 39. This, of course, is Joseph, who happens to be the nephew of Esau, but a person of a totally different spirit altogether.

Genesis 39:1-9 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his

master's wife [preaching her a sermon], "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

That is what I meant about preaching her a sermon.

Genesis 39:10-18 So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her. [He avoided her at all costs.] But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house was inside, that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside." So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

Then Joseph is thrown into prison. But, notice the character of Joseph.

First, he refused through words. He explained his belief to her in no uncertain terms. "Look, I will not do this because not only is it disloyal to my master, it is a sin against God," and against her, and it would be a sin against his wife to come.

Second, he bore all the temptations she laid before him, and avoided them as well as he could. When that ceased to be effective and she trapped him, he took physical action and fled. He got out of there no matter what the consequences to himself, leaving his garment behind, which was to them proof that he did what he was accused of. It landed him in prison.

But, he was able to go with a clear conscience, because he had done what was right. He is a sterling example of crucifying the flesh in order to walk in the Spirit.

These two people are just within one generation of each other—Esau and Joseph. What a difference there was in the way that they approached life.

Esau is the prototypical human, profane person of the Bible. Whereas Joseph is a type of Christ in the way that he avoided sin and temptation.

Let us conclude with two verses. First Genesis 6:5, and then down to 11 and 12. Then, we will go to Matthew 24.

Genesis 6:5, 11-12 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

Matthew 24:36-44 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect Him.

If the world has not reached this degree of corruption and carnality and violence, it is not far off. It is not far off that this world will be showing signs of the way that it was in the days of Noah.

In addition, the whole world is caught up in doing its pleasure without a care or thought for God, and what he is doing, or about to do.

People are going blindly into the future, and they are living their lives based on their human nature. We can see it. We have the blinders off. We know what it is like out there.

Being content with their sinful way of life, unwilling to change for the most part, they do not know that their own behavior is a sign of Christ's imminent return.

Do we realize it?

If we do, if we realize that this time is close, what are we doing about it? Are we preparing ourselves for the marriage to Jesus Christ? Are we cutting out the works of the flesh in order to walk in the Spirit? Will we be the "one taken" or chosen by God? Or, will we, because of our fleshly works, be the one left behind?

It is our choice.