

THE FLESH
Message 2

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: In the first message I sought to define the meanings of the terms 'world' and 'flesh'. I mentioned that the word world is used with a few different meanings, but the meaning I am zeroing in on in these messages is its use when it speaks of all the lost as the world. It is the sum total of that which the Bible calls the 'flesh' when it is used as speaking of man's bent towards sin. The flesh, as I see it, when used in this sense, is the same as what we call the sin nature or the 'self life'. It is that which is in us which creates within us a propensity towards sin. Paul says in Romans 7:18 "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) nothing good dwells..."

So we ask this morning, how does the flesh manifest itself? How can you recognize the flesh? Well, it manifests itself in various actions or works, or things people do. I want to take you to a passage that speaks of the works of the flesh, and although these passages are directed to believers, we find that these manifestations are most clearly found in the non-believer. So we begin by looking at the manifestations of the works of the flesh in the non-believer.

II. VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS

A. In The Non-believer

Turn with me first to Galatians 5 (read 16-21). In verse 16 we note that the works of the flesh are contrasted with the walk in the Spirit, or the life of faith. And in verse 17 we see that the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. This is a perpetual war.

Now I want you to notice the major manifestations of the flesh (read 19-21 again). I do not want to spend too much time here as Pastor Boehlig has done a good job on this passage. But let me say for those who say

like the Pharisee who went up to pray, "Thank you Lord that I am not like other people who do these things." The first manifestation mentioned is that of adultery. This is an extremely prevalent sin, both among believers and non-believers. Jesus said whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery in his heart already. Are we still doing ok? The second is fornication. Same sin, only it is committed by single people. Any young man or woman here who can say, "Thank You Lord, I am not like others in this"?

How about hatred? How about contentions? How about jealousies? How about envy? What is envy? Vine says it is those feelings of displeasure produced when you hear of how well others are doing. Do you ever experience that? You hear of others and you hoped it would not go well, and then they do well and feelings of displeasure arise. That is envy. Are we doing ok yet. Are we glad yet we are not like others or are we ready to say, "Lord, forgive me. Make me clean." Vine says the difference between envy and jealousy is this: "... 'envy' desires to deprive another of what he has, 'jealousy' desires to have the same sort of thing for itself."

There you have a wee little taste of the obvious works of the flesh. This is the realm of the flesh. This is how it manifests itself and says: Here I am. In that wee little exposition of the flesh, did you sense the Spirit nudge your heart? This is a very small sampling of the works of the flesh.

Now let me show you what the flesh does to the spirit. In Galatians 4 we have an example from the OT. Turn to Galatians (read 4:22-23 and 28-29). When Abraham could not have children, though God had promised him a son, he turned to the flesh. He lived like an unbeliever. So he took Hagar and had a child, like the culture around him would do, the world, the flesh. And when this son was born, he was the product of the flesh. His name was Ishmael. He brought about the Arab world of today.

Then Isaac was born (read 28). And he was the product of faith. So we have a son of the flesh and a son of faith. Now notice what happens between these two

kinds of sons (read 29). The word 'to persecute' is *dioko*, and means to pursue or to put to flight. The flesh always pursues or persecutes or seeks to put to flight the spiritual.

Now we are talking about the flesh in the unbeliever here. You may remember when we had Paul Estebrooks here as a missions conference speaker. He works with Open Doors, the ministry of Brother Andrew. He recommended the book "Faith That Endures" by Ronald Boyd-MacMillan. MacMillan writes on page 111, "Essentially, the world is our culture. Every culture has a part of it that resents Christ and will find ways to hate him. Persecution occurs when the world finds out our new identity in Christ and reacts to it. This reaction comes usually as a result of our witness. In more religious societies, such as Hindu India or Muslim lands, a key moment in bringing persecution is when the new convert declares their new allegiance in becoming baptized. But as we have seen, our new identity means that we are no longer comfortable with the way our culture works. We are living in contradiction to it, and the culture does not like it. Luther described it: 'When a man becomes a Christian and begins to confess his faith with his words and his life, the world becomes angry and begins to persecute, to torment.'"

Let me give one word to our young people. You have committed yourselves to seeking to be pure in music and videos. You now know a little bit of the battle it is to say no to this world. As a matter of fact, some of you have already failed more than once, right? Did you give up yet? For those who have kept their commitment, do you know the feeling of resistance when you find you have to tell someone that you do not wish to listen to certain music or you do not wish to watch certain videos. Maybe you know what it is like when you are spoken against or reacted against. That is persecution. It is the flesh against faith or spirit. This is the life Christians have been called to.

Now I want to add a little to this topic. The flesh will always persecute the life of faith. There are believers who are very fleshly and they will rise up against the life of faith in various ways. I have

been like that myself, and have to guard against it all the time.

Let me quote from Boyd again, "Christian persecution is any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile feelings, attitudes, words, and actions." On 115 he writes, "Persecution is the pursuit of Christ through us, carried on by the flesh, the world, and the devil." Do you see that persecution is ultimately not the world against us. It is the world against Christ. When we live like Christ, the flesh will try to hurt Christ through us.

But let me give a little warning here. Boyd tells of a westerner who approached a Muslim with a tract. The Muslim refused to accept it. They argued and the Muslim punched him. This Christian then came to Boyd and when he found he was a Christian he said, "I've just been persecuted for Christ's sake. Did you see it? That Muslim attacked me.!" Boyd then says, "I bristled at his use of the word persecution..." Boyd then asked him, "Are you sure you would say his reaction was *for Christ's sake*?" Boyd then says, "I felt he was invading everyone's privacy on the train by pushing tracts at them, and when arguing with the Muslim man, he had been quite insulting of his religion. Was the Muslim not just reacting to a bad-mannered presentation of the Gospel?" Then he quoted Brother Andrew as saying, "Don't call it persecution until you have done everything you can to bring peace to the situation, and if after all your efforts, you are still hounded, then, yes, you may call that persecution."

Our topic is the works of the flesh in the unbeliever. We have seen briefly how it manifests itself. Now let me add that there are all kinds of things that lead to the works of the flesh. These are fleshly as well. What leads to jealousy, but the desire to have more. What leads to envy but a selfish heart? What leads to adultery but many and various subtle sights? That is all the flesh as well.

This world, our own culture, as all others, is full of the flesh. The flesh is on every hand. It is most natural for us to be fleshly. It is supernatural to

be spiritual. It is supernatural to want to do right, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

That is but a very brief look at the flesh in the unbeliever. We now turn our attention to the flesh in the believer.

B. In The Believer

1. The worldly believer

I think a case can be made to show there is a difference between a worldly believer and a fleshly believer. Let me explain. A worldly believer is a believer that wants to walk in the ways of his culture. A worldly believer would do things like dress like the world, talk like the world and live like the world in general. This believer wants to be accepted by the world and by the Church. The worldly believer may do things like follow the fashions of the world. He wants to drive a big car or big pick-up or suchlike in order that he may be looked at as a 'somebody'.

The fleshly Christian is one who wants to live for God, but he wants the glory. He does not follow worldly lifestyles. On the contrary, he wants to live godly, even more godly than others. He wants to win souls, but he does it for self glory. He wants to preach or teach or help others, but he does it for self glory. He wants to avoid identifying with this world, but he does it for self glory. The worldly Christian wants acceptance with the world. The fleshly Christian wants acceptance with the Church or with Christians, but for his own glory.

So let us begin our look at the flesh in the believer in what I have called the worldly Christian. Let me take you to the **first kind** of worldly believer. We go to Matthew 13 (read 3-9). Now I want you to notice the third kind of soil. Now each kind of soil speaks of another kind of heart. The Bible says as a man thinks in his heart so is he. Now this kind of worldly Christian is pictured by the thorny ground.

Now we are fortunate that this is one of the parables that Jesus interpreted for us. So let us see what this soil or this kind of heart is like (read 13:22-23).

There are three things, when you put the Gospels together, that zap the spiritual vitality out of the Christian. First, the cares of this life. Food, clothing, shelter etc... Second, the deceitfulness of riches. I have to have a little more. Third, the pleasures of this life. These three matters keep almost every Christian quite fruitless. This is an exceptional temptation for men.

There is **another kind** of worldly Christian. We find this one in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." What is in view here is what we appear like in the eyes of others. This verse speaks most clearly of our external appearance. I do not have time to expound on this. You may ask for a message I did some years ago. Christians are very vulnerable to these things. This is an exceptional temptation for women.

There is **yet another kind** of worldly Christian. We find this one in Galatians 5:19-21 (read). Here is the most dangerous manifestation of the flesh. This one will land people who practice them in hell, Christian and non-Christian. Romans 8:13 says that if we live after the flesh we will die.

Is it possible for believers to live after the flesh? Is it possible for believers to commit adultery and fornication? Is it possible for a believer to be jealous or full of envy or pride? Is it possible for a believer to persist in fleshly living? Of course it is! So listen to Galatians 5:21. Paul has listed the works of the flesh and then says, "...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." Now I propose that

the less serious types of worldliness may well lead to the more serious.

1 Cor. 6:9-10 says: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

So Romans 8:13 says: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." The end of the life of the flesh is eternal hell fire.

2. The fleshly believer

There is another kind of Christian who lives after the flesh, but he is not necessarily worldly. We find this one most clearly defined in 1 Corinthians 3. In 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 we have three kinds of people described. I have called them the good, the bad, and the ugly!

In 2:14, we have the bad. What the Bible here calls the natural man is a lost person. He does not accept the things of God, they are foolishness to him. I talked to one like this on a flight from Edmonton to Vancouver a while ago. He did not even believe there is a God. He was a university professor who thought he knew a lot, but the Bible was foolishness to him. He was lost. Very, very lost.

In verse 15, we have the 'good'. This is a Christian, but he is not only a Christian but a spiritual Christian. Here is a truly godly person. Not perfect, but godly. A humble servant of God. He is consistent and has a Christ-like attitude.

In chapter 3:1 we have the 'ugly'. He is called 'carnal' (read). He may have been saved for some time but he is a baby in Christ. He has to be fed milk. When he comes to church and the pastor

feeds meet, he cannot handle it. He is carnal. Now the word 'carnal' in the original language is simply 'fleshly'.

Now let me show you how the fleshly Christian operates (read 2:1-4). The fleshly Christian is envious. He causes strife and division. The fleshly Christian wants to be looked up to, recognized as the spiritual person. He likes to have his own little spiritual clique. He cannot attend certain things because he is too spiritual for those people. He is a notch above.

It is in this context that we find verses 12-15. You see, the works it talks about here are not sin, in and of themselves. He is talking about fleshly Christians who did spiritual work to be recognized. These could be people who are soul winners in order that they might be recognized by others. It is not truly for the Lord. All such works will be burned up.

Maxwell says in *Crowded to Christ*, "It is a real mark of my regeneration that I begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness. In my pursuit after righteousness, however, I sooner or later make the great and shocking discovery that the flesh profiteth nothing, even though I am regenerated. I find, 'that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.' Although redeemed from Egypt, I have not entered into the land of milk and honey - at least I do not dwell there. I find my habitat in the wilderness of a divided affection. As I wander in this mixed and muddled state, my very virtues are all tainted with the flesh, the touch of death corrupts all I do, and my best deeds seem 'only taught practices grafted on a corrupt bottom.' William Law say, 'Everything that you do will be a mixture of good and bad; your humility will help you to pride; your charity to others will give nourishment to your own self-love, and as your prayers increase so will your opinion of your own sanctity'" (pg. 69).

In that quote Maxwell likens the carnal Christian to Israel in the wilderness. Israel came out of

Egypt, and they were headed toward Canaan. But between these two lay the wilderness. Now Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. That was almost 40 years too many. Many, many Christians live a fleshly life far longer than they ought to.

When Israel came out of Egypt, a picture of the world, they almost immediately met Amelek, a picture of the flesh. When a person is saved out of the world, one of the first enemies he will meet is the flesh. In Exodus 15, Israel sang the glad song of salvation. In the same chapter they complained about bitter water. So God gave them good water. Then in chapter 16 they complained about hunger, and God gave them food. In Chapter 17 they complained about the lack of water, and God gave them water.

All the things they complained about were things related to the flesh, or the body. And then God sent Amelek to them to teach them a lesson that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink (read 17:8-13). LE Maxwell says that Amelek is a picture of the flesh. You see, when we are Christians, we must no longer count on the flesh. So when Moses' hands were up, Israel won. When they went down, Israel began to lose. What does that picture? When we are Christians, a new dimension must enter life, it is the dimension of Christ. Joshua could no more handle Amelek without God, than we can handle the flesh without Christ. Joshua could no more beat Amelek on his own than you and I can beat the flesh on our own.

Look for a moment at Exodus 17:4-6 where Israel is out of water (read). Now go to 1 Corinthians 10 (read 1-6). Now I want you to notice that God was not pleased with MOST of them. I propose to you that MOST Christians are fleshly to a degree. And as Christians, we must remember that the flesh can never please God.

CONCL: So let me sum up today's message. There is a difference in my understanding, between the worldly Christian and the fleshly Christian. The worldly Christian wants the things of this world. He wants acceptance with

the world. He dresses like the world. He is impressed with the things of this world. He seeks the approval of the world, BUT he wants the approval of the church as well.

The fleshly Christian is someone who loves spiritual things. He wants to work for God. He wants to accomplish big things for God, but he wants all this for his own glory. He does not dress like the world, for his own glory. He does not listen to the world's music, but it is for his own glory. He spends much time in prayer, but in the bottom of it all, it is for his own glory.

Furthermore, there is no person who becomes a Christian who does not meet Mr. Worldly wise or Mr. Flesh very soon after being saved. And so subtle are these two that many fail to recognize them. And both of these 'Mr's' make most Christians quite powerless.