

Led By The Flesh

Introduction. All that man is and all that motives him to certain actions revolves around an age-old battle between the flesh and the Spirit. In the book of Galatians, Paul explains the Christian's liberty or freedom. Although we have many freedoms (freedom from the Law of Moses and the traditions of men), our most important one is the freedom from sin (John 8:31-32).

It is truly the desire of Christ that we be free (Galatians 5:1). But we must not allow freedom to become freedom without any restraint. If we are not careful, desires of the flesh can cause self-destruction (Galatians 5:13-15). To prevent this, Paul commands us to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). And whatever dangers there might be in fulfilling the lust of the flesh are thereby diminished.

To encourage us to walk in the Spirit, we will spend this lesson and the next examining the meaning of being led by the flesh and being led by the Spirit.

I. What Does It Mean To Be "Led By The Flesh?"

- A. To be led by the flesh means to follow the propensities of our carnal desires. Now we need to be very certain where the Bible stands on this issue. False religions would have us to believe that a human is born already in a sinful state. We have sought out many devices because the devil is working to pull us away from God (Ecclesiastes 7:29).
- B. Paul wrote of the same conflict in Romans 7:15, 19. When he was under the Law of Moses, he was pulled away from doing what he knew was right. It was not until he was in Christ that he truly had power over the flesh.
- C. James 1:13-15 explains the progression of sin. Each of us is carried away when we are enticed by our lust. That is, our desires tempt us to sin. When those desires lead to sin, we have been led by the flesh.

II. The Works Of The Flesh

- A. The term "works" is used in contrast to "fruit" which will be discussed in another lesson. Works are merely those actions which are produced within the heart of man apart from the power of God. When Paul says that these works are evident, he does not mean that they are all committed publicly where they may be seen. Some are, some are not. Instead, he means that it is obvious to all that such works originate within man's evil heart, not within a life guided by the Spirit.
- B. The works of the flesh:
 1. Adultery and fornication.
 - a) It has been said that the one completely new virtue which the gospel brought into the world was chastity. The gospel came into a world where sexual immorality was not only condoned, but was regarded as essential to the ordinary working of life.
 - b) Strictly speaking, fornication may be the illicit sexual intercourse on the part of an unmarried person such as living together, while adultery is a violation of the marriage bed. When two people are unlawfully married, they are in a state of adultery (Matthew 19:9). The body is a temple of God and it is not to so be used (1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

2. Uncleaness.
 - a) This word covers a wider range of sexual sins. It describes unnatural sexual practices such as homosexuality and bestiality.
 - b) It soils the soul with acts which makes one unfit to come before God.
3. Lasciviousness.
 - a) This is anything which is designed to produce lewd and lustful emotions. This is the point of condemnation of much of the modern dance, mixed swimming, and immodest clothing which is designed to draw that type of attention to one.
 - b) It is an open or shameless contempt of virtue (Romans 13:13-14).
4. Idolatry.
 - a) This includes worshiping idols, symbols, or participating in feasts and ceremonies in connection with these, whether it be done consciously or unconsciously.
 - b) It is a worship of what comes from the hands of men instead of God (Romans 1:21-23).
5. Witchcraft.
 - a) This work of the flesh is the use of spirits in serving the needs of man. The word originally meant the use of drugs to bring trances during which they claim to have supernatural knowledge or power, but came to mean the general use of witchcraft, sorcery, and magical arts.
 - b) It is the idea of employing a medium for man with the realm of the dead. This was Saul's sin with the medium at Endor (1 Samuel 28:1-19).
6. Hatred.
 - a) This is a deep-seated ill-will toward others.
 - b) This work of the flesh is completely opposite of the Christian virtue of love for the brethren and for mankind.
7. Variance.
 - a) This word originally had to do with a rivalry for prizes, but it came to mean a rivalry which finds its outcome in quarreling and wrangling.
 - b) This is a natural outcome of enmity and absence of love.
8. Emulations.
 - a) This word also was originally a good word meaning zealous. Jesus possessed godly zeal (John 2:17).
 - b) It was the desire to attain to nobility when we see it, but now it has come to mean the desire to have what someone else has — jealousy.
9. Wrath.
 - a) This is a "hot anger" or "blowing one's top." We have all probably seen those who have violent outbursts of temper.
 - b) They resort to violence or storming out as a release of their anger.
10. Strife.
 - a) It originally meant the work of a hired laborer, then it meant work done for pay. It went on to mean canvassing for political or public office.
 - b) It now denotes an ambitious, self-seeking, self-willed party-making and factious spirit (Philippians 1:17; James 3:16).

11. Seditious.
 - a) This word literally means “standing apart.” It is descriptive of a band of individuals who do not come together, but rather fly apart; it is a contentious spirit within an individual. Other versions say “dissensions”.
 - b) It is used in Romans 16:17 where Christians are commanded to mark those who cause division and turn away from them.
12. Heresies.
 - a) It means choosing an opinion rather than submitting to the truth. This leads to division and the formation of sects within a church.
 - b) There were divisions and factions within the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11:18-19).
13. Envyings.
 - a) This is close to jealousy. It is not so much that desire for what someone else has, but it describes the spirit which begrudges the fact that the other person has their possessions.
 - b) It wants to take possessions from others. The Stoics defined it as “grief at someone else’s good.”
14. Murders.
 - a) This is the ultimate end of all ungodly hatred of others.
 - b) We are made in the image of God, and murderers work against that sacred image.
15. Drunkenness.
 - a) This word indicates a habitual sin of excess. This includes liquor, drugs, and anything else which makes one lose his self-control.
 - b) This was a carry over from heathenism and undoubtedly those in the Galatian churches would have been given over to these.
16. Revellings.
 - a) This word means unrestrained revelry or enjoyment that has degenerated into license.
 - b) It is a consequence of drunkenness. Both of these sins were combined in 1 Peter 4:3 to describe the sins of the Gentiles.
17. And such like.
 - a) This list is not exhaustive and there are more that Paul could have mentioned. This is the Lord’s way of saying that everything like these is a work of the flesh too.
 - b) Christians must learn that sin, by reason of principle, includes many offenses which are not specifically forbidden.

III. The Rewards Of The Flesh

- A. The people who follow the desires and lusts of the flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God (cp. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:5). Could it be any plainer? Bondage to the flesh in this life is declared in the New Testament as forming an inseparable bar to Heaven.
- B. In Galatians 6:7-8, they also produce “corruption.” We know that this corruption is of a spiritual nature. It is antithetical to eternal life. But it can also result in

physical corruption in some of these cases. In either case, the wrath of God is on the one who practices these sins (Ephesians 5:6-7).

Conclusion. I hope that it has been made plain by the word of God that those who are living in sin apart from Christ cannot be saved. You are walking according to the flesh. Your life is in complete opposition to a life led by the Spirit (1 Peter 2:11; 2 Peter 2:9-10).

Your only hope is to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 1:7). This is done by repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. This will result in a life led by the Spirit and will produce fruit which we will examine next.