

## Enemies of the Soul: The Flesh (Formed or deformed?) - 1/12/25

Galatians 5:16-21 (ESV)

**16** So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

**19** The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; **20** idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions **21** and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. **Gal. 5:16-21 (ESV)**

*When I was a kid, I first dreamed of becoming a weather man... then it was a professional baseball player... then I became more down to earth and said a math teacher... We all have been in that position, one way or another, when we were kids when someone came up to us and asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" For some reason, this is as default of a question when talking to kids as asking "what do you do for work?" is for an adult conversation... **It is an interesting dynamic within our communal circles, but not a surprising one.** We all have this pervasive wiring built inside of us to do something, to dream... My son to this day still holds fast to the fact that he wants to go to outer space.*

While this is certainly an important part of the discussion, I wonder if one that is equally, if not more important to bring to the forefront of our conversational prompts is not so much what do we want to do with our lives, but who do we want to become?

And, even within this question lies the tendency to resort back to the idea of action as something dislodged completely from who I am becoming as a person...

I want to propose today that there is a great desire from our Creator God and prioritization on his part to call each and every one of us to become someone, to enmesh ourselves with a certain identity, characteristics and lifestyle, and he has had this intention and plan since the beginning of time.

And, equally true as the previous remark I made, there is an internal force, a desire, that is inside each and every one of us that is dead-set against the desires of God.

We are in week 2 of our series, Enemies of the Soul—taking a look at different realities, evidenced by truth in the Bible, that have the propensity to wreak havoc on our souls (disrupt our peace, sabotage our relationships, ruin our hope for life).

Last week we looked at the enemy of the world (not actual world, but the systems and forces that embed themselves into our culture that are, ultimately, determined to rebel against God and distort the truth of what is good and evil.

Today, we are looking at the next enemy which the Bible calls, **the flesh**. What is the flesh and why is it in such opposition to God?

In our passage this morning (thank you Leah for doing the reading for us), one of the pioneers of the church, Paul, is writing a letter to a mixed bunch, but with a heavy population of Jewish-Christians.

A major theme in this letter is that “God has set you free if you are in Christ!” Christ has come so that you may be free!

- Paul has already spoken of freedom several times in this letter (2:4; 4:26, 31; 5:1)—one of his central themes; but up to here, he has not defined it, at least not in practical terms

**Freedom.** It is a massively important concept for us to understand as it pertains to the Bible. It is a concept that sums up the human experience. Every day, we have the freedom to choose... I had the freedom to choose whether to get up this morning, to eat breakfast, to brush my teeth, to smile...

**Freedom to choose whether we live beneath or into our dignity is what sets apart the human race from the rest of the animal kingdom; but the freedom to choose is not without its consequences, is it? For better or for worse... If I don't get up for church, people are going to start to wonder... If I don't eat breakfast, I will be hangry... If I don't brush my teeth, well, you all suffer...**

So, I feel like this is a Matrix moment with Morpheus... Paul says, “*walk by the Spirit*” and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...” THE RED PILL OR THE BLUE PILL?

2 choices to make with our freedom; 2 categories of desire: **the flesh** and **the Spirit**.

The Greek word for flesh is **sarx** = *can mean the whole person as conditioned by a bodily existence and by natural desires, in Christian vocabulary (especially in Paul), it came to mean a human being as fallen, whose desires even at best originate from sin and are stained by it. Thus, sarx came to mean all the evil that one is capable of apart from the intervention of God's grace in one's life.*

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*: The flesh is “the corruption that sin has introduced into our very appetites and instincts.”

It is the force inside each and everyone of us that pushes us towards abusing the very freedoms that make us human and that are God given.

The other category is **spirit** (Gk *pneuma*) = Its earliest meaning is “wind,” “air,” “breath,” or “life;” the Spirit of God takes up residence in Christians to enable them to understand spiritual things

(1Co 2:14), receive Christ as Savior and Lord, call God "Father" (Ro 8:15; Gal 4:6), and develop a Christian personality. The Spirit is thus the presence of God in a person, through whom fellowship with God is made possible and power given for winning the warfare against sin in the soul.

So, you have a choice, to sow seeds of the flesh or seeds of the Spirit... **7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Gal. 6:7-8 (NIV)**

So, Paul lays out pretty bluntly what those desires of the flesh are and that they are constantly in conflict with the desires of the Spirit: *sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.*

A lifestyle consumed by lust and sexual gratification outside of God's original design... allowing meaningless things to consume our attention which, ultimately, becomes the thing we worship (we cannot live without it), constantly overcome by the desire to acquire or have deep seeded discontent because I do not have what someone else has (whether wealth, fame, success, popularity, the trophy wife or husband), a perpetual gravitation towards over-eating, lusting after someone else other than your spouse, taking to "the bottle..." **Our nation is literally structured to indulge the flesh... We celebrate this, market towards this...**

**This is the human struggle, isn't it?** This is the narrative of the entire Biblical story that God willingly chose to enter into... We have all heard the phrase, "The struggle is real!" And here is the truth: The desires of our flesh are not satisfied with just a little bit.

*Talk about the temptation to get caught up in between contentment and envy...*

EVERY DAY WE ARE CAUGHT UP BETWEEN THESE CONFLICTING DESIRES AND TEMPTATIONS... THE LIE THAT WE CAN HAVE BOTH AND BE "AUTHENTIC"

Paul understood this to his core: **"8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness... 15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. Romans 7:8, 15, 17-20 (NIV)**

This is why Paul urges us to take seriously the choices we make because every choice has a consequence, every choice has an impact on who we are becoming. So, he says, "walk by the Spirit." **Does this mean we cannot enjoy life? Of course not. But, we have to ask ourselves**

**this question: Do the things we choose to indulge in 1) Honor God, 2) Bring life to us and those around us, and 3) Consume our lives?** Our freedom is not a license to live with reckless abandon...

It is for freedom that Christ has set you free... but that freedom can still lead to a road of destruction if not walked in the ways of Jesus.

So, what does this mean for today? For you and me, in the here and now?

Paul says, "live by the Spirit..."

*Interestingly he doesn't say, "Muscle up! Pull yourself up by your boot-straps and take life by the horns!"*

"The solution is not to white-knuckle our way through but to live by the Spirit via practices that enable us to draw on the power of God to live in freedom." - John Mark Comer, Live No Lies (harsh but true)

***But there is a choice: Will you posture yourself in such a way that opens yourself up to be filled by the Spirit and the things of God instead of the flesh?***

We do have a choice to make, but we do not have the power to dictate how we change. Only God does, and that is good news. *Jokingly share about how I was always so skinny, and I worked out not to get yoked, but to just look "normal." I can do all the training and nutritional regiments recommended and, yes, I will be healthier naturally, but how my body actually changes and, thus, appears on the outside is outside my control. I cannot will my body to look a certain way...*

It is not about trying harder, but about training ourselves through practices/rhythms... **FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT...**

**What are the desires of the flesh that are keeping you in slavery? Weighing you down?**

1. If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus and the overcoming, chain-breaking, life-altering, and eternity changing power of his work on the cross, make that choice today!
  - a. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25  
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! **Rom. 7:24 (NIV)**
  - b. **Sign up to be baptized in service on the 26th!**
2. **Fasting** - "More than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting, these things surface... Anger, bitterness, jealousy, strife, fear — if they are within us, they will surface during fasting. At first we will rationalize that our anger is due to our hunger; then we know that we are angry because the spirit of anger is within us. We can

rejoice in this knowledge because we know that healing is available through the power of Christ.” - **Richard Foster**

- a. Formation over salvation... we cannot do anything to save ourselves, but we can take actionable steps, empowered by God’s Spirit, towards spiritual growth and maturity.
- 3. Press in & prayerfully commit to joining a community group; life was not meant to be lived alone
  - a. Group opportunities will be open the week of Jan. 19th