

## **Spirit -vs- Flesh**

### **Galatians 5:24-34**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul, moved by God's Holy Spirit writes, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Dear friends, you and I find ourselves in a terrible dilemma. Our flesh and the Spirit are constantly at war. You know what the desires of the Holy Spirit are for your life, and you know what your flesh would like you to do. Each and every day it is struggle of flesh versus the Spirit, and too often our flesh wins.

Scripture proclaims, For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:6-8)

Our flesh cannot please God! Some people do not like to hear that. But, as proof that is true, let me ask you a few questions. If any of these questions upset you, it is because they upset the Holy Spirit? Or because your flesh is upset?

*Are you planning to get drunk this Friday?*

Have you forgiven Hank Hanrahan?

Have you reconciled with Renata Rifflebach?

Which gets the nod on Sunday morning, time in God's house or an athletic event – for the children, Packers, Brewers, whatever?

Is that pornography on your computer?

Are you jealous of Kurt Kierkengard's new truck?

Do you say "Oh my God" without thinking about it, taking God's name in vain?

See how our flesh is weak and succumbs to sinfulness so easily? And according to God's Word, we are not to do these things. We are not to gratify the desires of the flesh. We are not to sin. And if we practice those things which come from the flesh, we are in danger of not inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

Notice that I said, “those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Practice is a better translation of the Greek word which is translated “do” in our text. You see, it isn’t simply those who “do” such things that are in danger, but those who “practice” them. That is, those who make a practice of doing those things, those who regularly do them and are impenitent. These that show the Spirit is not ruling in their hearts and lives.

Dear friends, repent! That is, turn away from such things. Crucify your flesh and its passions and desires! Beg God to grant you forgiveness. Ask God’s Spirit to come make His dwelling within you so that you might love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Dearly beloved of God, as baptized Christians, you have crucified the flesh with all its passions and desires. Baptism is not your distant past, it is not, “I **WAS** baptized.” But too often it is seen as that, and baptism is pretty much forgotten. Baptism is not to be forgotten, nor does it lose value in your life. Instead, it is the daily formation of who you are as Christians.

In his Small Catechism Luther reflects teaching with the question and the answer: ***What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.***

In baptism, you are united to Christ’s death. And how did He die? He was crucified. Paul says that in Christ we have crucified the flesh. We daily repent and cling to Christ, to His death.

We also cling to His resurrection, for the Spirit within us raises us to new life.

Today you are living in your baptism. You are here because you are saddened that too often the flesh has won the battle. Today, you have come into God's house. You are here because you know that you have failed to live fully according to God's Spirit within you. Your flesh has struggled against that Spirit. You have come in the hopes of hearing some good news.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus heals 10 lepers whom He then sends to the priests. He sends them to the priests because it was the priests who would publicly declare

them to be clean and holy. It was the priests who would declare that they could again be part of the community, that they are a part of the kingdom of God.

Dear friends, you are a part of the kingdom of God, for God has made you such. And you have gathered here to receive the blessings of membership in that kingdom.

God has given me the authority, and commanded me, to bestow on you the blessings and gifts that Jesus purchased for you when He gave His life unto death to free you from your bondage to your flesh. Christ has commanded me to speak in His behalf to you – your sins are forgiven you! Your failures to live 100% according to the Spirit are forgiven. He grants you His Spirit who come to you in the word that you hear, and makes a change in you.

Here on this altar is the banquet feast of the Lamb, the table which Christ sets before all His subjects, those who are in heaven and those who yet reside in their flesh. Jesus says, "Take and eat, this is my body. Take drink, this is my blood." These are the gifts of the Lord's goodness to you – His body and blood, broken and shed for you – for the forgiveness of sins. He gives to you His body and blood, and His Spirit fills you – strengthening your faith that you might walk in the Spirit.

Jeremiah said it so well when he wrote, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise." In our Gospel, lepers came to Jesus, their sinful flesh was outward evidence of their sin sickness. Two weeks ago, a deaf mute was brought to Jesus, his sinfulness evident in his ailment. In both cases Christ healed them.

Today, Christ has done just that for you. Today the Spirit moved you to crucify your flesh with its passions and desires by your contrite repentance. You have heard the Word of God and been united to Christ's crucifixion. You have been healed from your sinfulness and given a new Spirit, Christ's Spirit, the Spirit of forgiveness and life. Walk in the Spirit! Let the fruit of the Spirit flow; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And others are blessed in and through you. Amen.