

Living with the Flesh

Genesis 16:1-12

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"Walking by Faith" Series on the Life of Abraham - Lesson 20 of 20

Man is comprised of three parts: body; soul; and spirit. The spirit of man is the unseen you. It is the spirit of a man that is born again when we receive Christ as our Lord and Savior. The spirit is the part of us with which God communicates. God intends for our spirits to control and influence us in all matters of life. The soul and body of man is referred to in Scripture as our "*fleshly nature* or *carnal nature*." The Apostle Paul often referred to the partnership of the soul and body of man as being our "*old man*." This is the partnership which seeks to control and influence us.

After waiting for ten long years for God to fulfill His promise concerning a son, Sarah suggests a plan to Abraham that would help God fulfill His promise; *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai* (Genesis 16:1-2).

Sarah's plan for a surrogate mother for the promise of God was construed because she was not successful in giving Abraham an heir. The women of that culture viewed childbearing as evidence of their fruitfulness. Childbearing was seen as having worth and favor with God.

Sarah's plan was not wrong due to the sexual aspect, for God allowed this practice in the culture of that day. Sarah's plan was wrong because they were choosing to take matters into their own hands. Instead of waiting on God, they decided to take a short-cut across His time line and help God out. Sarah's plan may have been well intentioned, but it was birthed out of her flesh.

The Way of the Flesh

God had already spoken to Abraham about the promise of a son, but he chose to listen to his wife instead of listening to God. Genesis 15:1 states, *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."* In other words, God was saying to Abraham, "Your reward (the fulfillment of the promise) is in Me!" God went on to say to Abraham in Genesis 15:5, *Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."* Again, God is saying to Abraham, "If you will trust Me, this is what My promise will look like when it is fulfilled!"

The failure and the blame for this whole problem is to be laid at the feet of Abraham. He was the spiritual head of his family. Sarah may have suggested the plan, but he acted on it. His lack of leadership soon led to a rift in his family. As soon as Hagar realized that she had conceived, she began to mock Sarah and rub it in her face; *So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress (Sarah) became despised in her eyes* (Genesis 16:4). It is not hard to imagine Hagar saying to Sarah, "I'm better than you! I'm no longer just a servant. I am also Abraham's wife and I'm giving him his first child!" As you would imagine, a serious conflict arose between Hagar's pride and Sarah's jealousy. The conflict between these women divided Abraham's heart and his home.

Consequences of Yielding to the Flesh

Make no mistake; there are always consequences when we yield to our flesh. Remember Paul's warning to the young church at Galatia; *Don't be misled. Remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it. You will always reap what you sow! Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful desires will harvest the consequences of decay and death. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit* (Galatians 6:7-8).

The problem with so many Christians is that they insist on sowing their wild oats. Then the guilt sets in over what they have done and they plead with God to kill the crop. If they perceive that God is not going to kill the crop, and they are indeed going to reap what they have sown, they again plead with God to let their wild seeds produce roses and raspberries ... not thorns and weeds.

It is a misguided belief among Christians that, just because they are saved, they can live in any manner they choose. They still do not think they should be any consequences to their decisions or actions. It is as if the law of sowing and reaping no longer applies to them. However, there are certain undeniable laws. Just as no one can violate the law of gravity without consequences, so it is with the law of sowing and reaping.

Moses was considered to be "*a friend of God.*" He was a man with whom God spoke "*face to face as one speaks to a friend.*" Yet, Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. Moses did not obey God's instruction to speak to the rock to bring forth water at Meribah. He, instead, yielded to his anger and struck the rock twice.

King David is another example of one reaping the consequences of yielding to his flesh. David was referred to by God as being "*a man after God's own heart.*" Yet, when David yielded to his lust for Bathsheba, he reaped a lifetime of heartache, rebellion, and tears in his family.

Abraham is called "*the father of faith,*" and he was "*a friend of God.*" Abraham was intimately acquainted with God; however, he yielded to the plan of the flesh. Through his actions he unleashed a rivalry and hatred between two half-brothers that reaches into the twenty-first century. Ishamel (Abraham's son by Hagar) and Isaac (Abraham's son by Sarah) are at war even today. These two factions bring unrest to the entire world.

Don't Get Confused about the Flesh

We must not confuse our sinful flesh with the works of the devil. When Jesus died on the cross, He forever broke the power of the devil to hold any man captive. Anyone who chooses to be free from the controlling influence of the devil can be free by turning to Christ for deliverance.

Demons can be cast out, but the flesh is a different issue altogether ... it can't be cast out. The flesh must be **subdued** and **overruled**. The only way to successfully deal with our flesh is to ask the Holy Spirit for His help to overrule its mandates and directives. It is only with the Holy Spirit's help that we can conquer our carnal and fleshly conduct. Only the Holy Spirit can change the attitudes that are rooted deep within our fleshly natures.

It is impossible to yield to our flesh if we are yielded to the Holy Spirit; *Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16). Read with me the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25, as he openly discusses his struggle with his flesh. You must remind yourself to carefully read his conclusions as each sentence appears to contradict the former thought and action of his flesh:

The law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

How to Live with the Flesh

Sarah decided she no longer liked her plan. It didn't turn out as she had hoped and she could no longer live with the taunting of Hagar. Sarah blamed Abraham for the mess even though the mess was her creation. She ordered Abraham to get rid of Hagar; *Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me"* (Genesis 16:5).

Abraham refused to deal with Hagar. He told Sarah to do what seemed right in her eyes ... so ... Sarah gave her a piece of her mind and threw her out; *So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please."* And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence (Genesis 16:6).

As far as Sarah was concerned, she had solved her problem by throwing Hagar out of her life. However, God responds to Sarah's actions by sending Hagar back to Sarah. God is going to teach Sarah His way to deal with the flesh; *The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand"* (Genesis 16:9).

Just like Sarah, we want God to cast out the sin issues of our flesh. However, God will always throw it back in our faces. He expects us to learn how to conquer our flesh as we live with it and He is insistent it is done His way. We are to live with our flesh by **subduing** it and **overruling** it on a daily basis. In order to **subdue** and **overrule** our flesh, we must totally surrender to the Holy Spirit. We must choose to allow Him to produce the nature of Christ within us. His nature will then give us the power to overrule our flesh.

God does not intend for anything, or anyone, to dominate us ... we belong to Him! We need to learn to live with our flesh in order to walk intimately with Him. Writing to the church at Rome, Paul explained to them the distinctions between being dominated by their flesh (which leads to death) and being controlled by the Holy Spirit (which leads to peace). Consider Paul's words in Romans 8:1-6 ...

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.

God doesn't need your help to work out His plan for your life!

There will always be consequences when you yield to your flesh!

***The only way to live with your flesh is to ...
SUBDUE IT and OVERRULE IT!***