
Words of Truth

In The Flesh, But Not Of The Flesh

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The word of God makes a distinction between us being in the flesh and being of the flesh. The fact is, we are not just spiritual beings. We have a spirit that is contained in our mortal flesh (James 2:26).

The Bible does say we are "in the flesh": *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh... I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me... For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you"* (II Corinthians 10:3, Galatians 2:20, and Philippians 1:21-24). Clearly, in the Scriptures we just read, we can see that those verses are talking about living in the mortal flesh. You are a spirit inhabiting a fleshly body (Genesis 2:7). Some day, your flesh will cease but your spirit will live on (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

The Bible also makes a distinction that brings about the need for studies such as this. For example, consider this statement: *"I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord"* (Philemon 1:10-16)? Take a moment and consider the statement, "in the flesh and in the Lord".

What makes this particular subject somewhat confusing is that there are verses that use language that is unclear out of context. For example, out of context, two verses say this: *"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"* (Romans 8:8-9). In context, you find that we are talking about the difference between the carnal mind and the spiritual mind (Romans 8:4-9). Context is always vital to proper understanding of the truth. Nonetheless, I shall stress again, this subject is not clear upon surface alone. We have to dig a little bit in discovering how we can be in the flesh, but not "of the flesh". The verses above, out of context, have us lost as long as we are living in fleshly bodies. In context, the subject is clearly the mindset. Thus, we cannot get hung up on the phrases we read in regard to "the flesh" in the Scriptures. We have to allow honest contextual studies to show us how we can live in the flesh, but not be of the flesh. That is, alive in fleshly bodies, but governed by spiritual rules.

Keying In On Being Alive In The Flesh, But Living Spiritually

Consider these Scriptures: *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others”* (Ephesians 2:1-3). What do you learn from reading what you just read? Did you learn that walking according to the world makes you fleshly/carnal in mind (1 John 2:15-17)? Did you see the corruption that occurs in man by following the lusts of the flesh (Ephesians 4:22)? Did you see that being fleshly minded leads to giving into carnal desires (Matthew 26:41)? So, what do you do with that information?

Use That Information To Avoid Carnality

Before I proceed, I must be clear that there are some carnal things that God gives us freedom to engage in (Ecclesiastes 2:24, John 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, 1 Timothy 4:1-5, 1 Timothy 6:17, etc.). God does expect us to control those areas of the flesh wherein He permits us to have some carnal desires fulfilled (Proverbs 23:2 and Hebrews 13:4). Having said that, how do we control fleshly desires since we live in the flesh, but are not supposed to be of the flesh? Let's allow the Scriptures to answer that for us.

Here is what God says: *“Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak... I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God... Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof... Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God... This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would... Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil... Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”* (Mark 14:38, Romans 12:1-2, Romans 13:13-14, II Corinthians 7:1, Galatians 5:16-17, I Thessalonians 5:21-22, and I Peter 2:11).

Conclusion

We live in a world that appeals constantly to our fleshly desires. We have to be strong enough not to put ourselves into submission of those things that our flesh so strongly is tempted to desire. We will not be in Heaven if we allow ourselves to be a people who are not just in the flesh, but of the flesh. We cannot allow ourselves to become servants of carnality. God is clear on that. Notice His words that conclude the matter: *“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”* (Romans 8:13).