

Spirit vs. Flesh The Oldest Battle Of All

Most of us have uttered this old cliché just before we yielded to temptation: “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Dr. E. P. Walker, wife Audrey’s legendary veterinarian daddy, often used to say just as he treated himself to a third helping, “I shouldn’t but I shall.”

My subject here is the ancient biblical war between “the works of the flesh,” and the “fruit of the Spirit.” All of us are daily engaged in that war, as we all know. My purpose here is to discuss their different demands to open a better way to cope with them..

The first thing we must realize is that we are really *spirit* beings, living in fleshly houses, controlled, hopefully, by our soul – our mind, our will, and our emotions. This fact is just basic Christianity 101. (I Thess 5:23). It also helps us see what is meant by our being “created in the image of God:” Just as He is three in one: father son and holy spirit, His children are three in one: spirit soul, and body.

Now “*the works*” of the flesh, differ greatly from “*the fruit of the spirit,*” their exact opposite. Here is Paul’s list: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, wrath, strife, envying, murders, drunkenness, revelings; ... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of Heaven.”(Gal 5:17)

By contrast, the *fruit* of the spirit are “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, patience, temperance. Against these there is no law.” One can easily see here that the fruit of the spirit are the products of grace. Like natural *fruit*, they grow effortlessly out of the well of love which is the

true nature of our gracious, merciful, forgiving, Father in Heaven. And says Paul, “If you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law.” (Gal. 5:18)

Furthermore, Paul adds, “If we walk in the spirit, we will not fulfill the works of the flesh. Keeping these two ancient enemies, grace and works, separate is the true duty of ministers, who too often confuse their flocks by telling them to do “works” of various kinds not only to earn their salvation, but to keep it. That mixed message discourages many, leaving them uncertain as to whether they’ll go to Heaven. Many at this point stop going to church all together. But frankly, anyone who, by faith, has invited Jesus into their hearts should ever grow old still fearing death and possible damnation. If you are truly “born again,” IE. born of the spirit, your mansion in Heaven is waiting for you, “Let not your heart be troubled.” (John 14: 1-3)

Still, confusion sets in if we forget: it is one’s *spirit* that is reborn and sealed by the Holy Spirit into immortality; meanwhile our flesh, remains mortal and subject “to all the shocks that flesh is heir to.” (Hamlet) Between these two, sits our soul, trying to obey one and resist the other. That’s why Shakespeare calls the soul a *thrall* or slave to “these rebel powers”(Sonnet 100) “For the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.” (Gal 5:17)

But the good news is simple; “If you believe in your heart the Lord Jesus, and confess with your mouth that God raised Him, from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9,10) And that’s the Top and bottom line. God keeps His promises.

Gene Pinkney 24-07-21- For the Daily News