

Walk Not After the Flesh, But After the Spirit

Romans 8:1-11, Septuagesima Sunday

February 4, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....In the heart of every believer, there is a continual struggle between the spirit and the flesh. Our flesh, which we call the Old Man is our sinful human nature. It is that part of us, the corrupted and perverted soul, which is always bent upon doing evil or gratifying itself. At the same time each believer also has the spirit, which is the New Man. For wherever God by the Gospel Word, has worked faith in the heart, there lives and thrives the New Man. This New Man within seeks only to do God's will and thinks of nothing else. The Bible says, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things become new!" The spirit then, the New Man, desires only to do what is good and pleasing to God according to His Word. In the believer then, the flesh and the spirit (the old man and the new) have a constant struggle, the one with the other. This struggle is to the death. The Old Man, our sinful flesh wishes to overthrow the New Man and extinguish our faith. The Old Man cannot stand this New Man which God has created, for it keeps him from doing the evil he wants to do. At the same time, that New Man within works to put that Old Man to death. The New Man desires to serve God alone, and sin is unthinkable to him. Both body and soul become a battlefield between the Old and New Man. Both battle and rage within our heart, soul, and mind, for the supremacy. Galatians 5 says, "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."

So in life we often find that even though we want to obey and follow God perfectly every day, we often find and discover our bodies committing sin. Sinful thoughts creep into our minds, and they surprise us. Or out of our mouths come sinful and hateful words which we know we should not say, and we feel bad about it. There are also strong passions within our bodies that constantly pull and tug at our soul. We fall into sin and then feel terrible afterward. The apostle Paul writes, "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." So even though Paul wanted to do good and serve the Lord always, his sinful flesh was always present with him, doing those things Paul did not want to do. Often in our battle against our own sinful flesh we become discouraged. Often our own sins depress us and we despair. Sometimes we reach the point where we are ready to throw in the towel and just give up, because this battle is so difficult. Paul writes, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death." But then Paul answers his own question and says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." That is really what our sermon is about today. It is about how to continue our fight against

our Old Man by having faith in Christ. We walk in the spirit and not in the flesh.

I. No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Chapter eight begins, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." If we are to fight against this old man within, we must have strength for the battle. This strength is love from God: it is His Gospel. His Gospel Word tells us that God does not condemn us, because Christ Jesus has taken our condemnation upon Himself. I Peter 2:24 of Christ says, "His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." It was our own sins which He bore upon the cross. "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." The righteous, holy, and innocent Christ became on that cross the most vile and wicked criminal that ever lived - our sins being upon Him.

By this incredible payment, Christ conquered the power which sin and death had over us! "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Here then is the glorious freedom of the Christian! It is not that we are free to do as we please, but we are freed from the bondage and slavery of sin. "The law of the Spirit of life" is the Gospel-law, God's New Testament, His New Covenant with you. He promises you in His own blood, that all your sins are forgiven! Jesus says, "This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Mt. 26:28 When we receive Holy Communion, God is swearing to us, by the power of His own blood, that all - every single one- of our sins are forgiven. In Holy Communion God gives you His own body and blood as a promise that God's condemnation is not upon you, but rather His grace. "Given and shed for you, for the remission of sins."

And so "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." Truly, all the righteousness of Christ is upon all believers by faith. When we rightly despair of our own righteousness, we need only remember that God's righteousness is upon us by the faith! "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are at peace with God when we realize God is at peace with us, through Christ. That is why there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." For who can condemn us when Christ has redeemed us? Christ has made us free from the law of sin and death! And so our spiritual strength to continue our battle against the Old Man comes from God's forgiveness! When body and soul become the battlefield between the Old Man and the New, we remember that through Christ we are dead to sin. "The body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Through

Christ we are righteous. "They that are after the Spirit [mind] the things of the spirit."

II. Those who mind the things of the flesh. But the Bible also says, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." This is the unbeliever. The unbeliever walks after his own flesh. He is ruled by the Old Man alone, for there is no New Man within the unbeliever to fight against sin. The Bible says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Where there is no faith in Christ, there is only a desire for sin. Where there is no faith in Christ, there is no desire to fight sin. There is no spiritual battle. While the unbeliever outwardly might try to do what is right, since their works do not proceed from faith, their works are always self-centered. The unbeliever expects a reward for doing good. The unbeliever might believe in a god, but it is always a god which must be appeased by good works. God's commandments are like a dark cloud overhead which continually thunder striking fear into the heart. They that are "in the flesh cannot please God" because their works do not proceed from faith, and they are self-centered. Luther says, Corrupt "human nature....seeks, desires and strives after itself. Whatever intervenes, even God Himself, it ignores as though He did not exist.....such is the froward and wicked heart."

In these words we see a picture of ourselves. Because of our Old Man within, often we will try to outwardly keep God's laws. We often obey God's Word outwardly, while inwardly our heart is far from Him. We do this any time we sing a hymn to God without thinking about the words. Or we pray with our lips, while our heart is far from Him. Hypocrisy is often the greatest sin of a believer. Whenever and wherever good works do not proceed from faith, they are actually evil works. And so the more a sinner tries to please God by his outward works, the more he digs himself into debt! So when it comes to man keeping God's laws, we must remember that outward obedience of the law means nothing to God. If there is not first repentance and faith in the heart, we merit only God's wrath.

III. The New Man happily serves the God who has redeemed him from sin. True obedience of God's Word begins first inside the heart with repentance and faith. "But [you] are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." These words are to the believer. To be in the spirit first begins by faith in Jesus Christ. Such a faith knows that we cannot be saved by our own good works. The Law cannot save or redeem us from sin. We are justified by faith alone in Christ Jesus who fulfilled the Law for our sake. To be "in the spirit" is to be in the New Man which believes only in salvation through Christ Jesus. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And

they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." By faith, we crucify our own flesh with its sinful lusts and desires. God's law alone is the delight of each believer. By faith we follow and obey God's law, doing God's will from the heart which knows only of Christ's redemption. Faith alone justifies, while good works follow. This is what we just sang in verse nine of our last hymn (#377), "Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone, And rests in Him unceasing; And by its fruits true faith is known, With love and hope increasing. Yet faith alone doth justify, Works serve thy neighbor and supply, The proof that faith is living."

Good works do not make the Christian, they only help to identify the Christian. I John 2:3 says, "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." If we know Christ by faith, we will keep His commandments by faith. While we keep God's law quite imperfectly in this world, and even our best works are tainted with sin, through Christ the New Man within always keeps God's law perfectly. The New Man keeps God's commandments, while our Old Man within doesn't. We can be thankful that we are not in this struggle alone. God's Spirit then works with our spirit by love, and good works flow from the believing heart. And so good works always begin, continue, and end in faith. The faith of Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the law for our sake.

And so beloved of the Lord, let us rejoice that through the forgiveness of sins, Christ has enabled us to serve Him freely. We live and move and have our being under the light of the Sun, God's only-begotten Son. We live under His grace and not His wrath. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Our righteousness comes from Christ Jesus. His will is our own. And so, "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit." O how we can thank God that these bodies of sin will one day go to the grave! For what a joy it will be for our soul to ascend without sin into heaven! Yet God in His mercy on the Last Day will once again reunite body and soul together! "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." On that joyous day we shall forever sing Alleluias to Christ our King! Therefore rejoice dear brethren, and walk in the spirit and not the flesh! Through Christ there is indeed righteousness and everlasting life! "There is.....no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit!" Amen!