

**Articles and Sermons :: Flesh and Spirit - Andrew Murray**

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Flesh and Spirit

"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" I Corinthians 3:1.

"I am carnal, sold unto sin: to will is present with me, but to perform that which is good I find not. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" Romans 7:14,18; 8:2,9.

"Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" Galatians 3:3; 5:18,25.

It is of great importance for the young Christian to understand that within him there are two natures which strive against one another.¹ If we study the texts noted above, we will see that the Word of God teaches us the following truths on this point.

Sin comes from the flesh. The reason why the Christian still sins is that he yields to the flesh and does not walk by the Spirit. Every Christian has the Spirit and lives by the Spirit, but every Christian does not walk by the Spirit. If he walks by the Spirit, he will not fulfil the desires of the flesh.²

So long as there are strife and envy in the Christian, the Word of God calls him carnal. He would like to do good, but he cannot. He does what he should not, because he still strives in his own strength and not in the power of the Spirit.³

The flesh remains under the law and seeks to obey the law. But through the flesh the law is powerless, and the endeavour to do good is vain. Its language is, "I am carnal, sold under sin: to will is present with me, but to perform that which is good is not."⁴

This is not the condition in which God would have his child remain. The Word says, "It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). The Christian must not only live by the Spirit, but also walk by the Spirit. He must be a spiritual man, and live entirely under the leading of the Spirit.⁵ If he walks in this way, he will no longer do what he should not. He will no longer be as in Romans 7--a newborn babe seeking to fulfil the law. But, as in Romans 8, the Spirit will set him free from the law which gives no power but brings death, and he will no longer walk in the oldness of the letter but, rather, in the newness of the Spirit.⁶

There are Christians who begin with the Spirit, but end with the flesh. They are converted, born again through the Spirit, but fall unconsciously into a life in which they endeavour to overcome sin and be holy through their own exertion--through doing their best. They ask God to help them in these endeavours and think that this is faith. They do not understand what it means to say, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). They do not know that they are to cease from their own endeavours so that they may do God's will, wholly and only through the Spirit.⁷

Child of God, please learn what it means to say to yourself just as you are, even after the new birth--"I am carnal, sold under sin." No longer strive to do your best under your own strength, merely asking God to help you in your endeavours. No, learn to say, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Every day, let your goal be to have the Spirit work in you. Walk by the Spirit, and you will be redeemed from the life of complaining about your inability to do good into a life of faith, in which it is God who works in you both to will and to do (Philippians 2:13).

Lord God, teach me to acknowledge with all my heart that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells nothing good. Teach me also to cease from every thought, as if I could with my own endeavours serve or please You. Teach me to understand that the Spirit is the Comforter, who frees me from all anxiety and fear about my own powerlessness, in order that He may work the strength of Christ in me. Amen.

Footnotes

- 1) Gal. 5:17,24,25; 6:8; Eph. 4:22,24; Col. 3:9,10; 1 Pet. 4:2
- 2) Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:16,25
- 3) Rom. 7:18; I Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:15,26
- 4) Rom. 4:14,15; 7:4,6; 8:3,8; Gal. 5:18; 6:12,13; Heb. 7:18
- 5) Rom. 8:14; I Cor. 2:15; 3:1; Gal. 6:1
- 6) Rom. 7:6; 8:2,13
- 7) Rom. 7:18; Gal. 3:3; 4:9; 5:4,7

Notes

1. In order to understand the conflict between flesh and Spirit, we must especially seek to have a clear insight into the connection between Romans, chapters 7 and 8. In Romans 7, verse 6, Paul spoke of the twofold way of serving God, the one in the oldness of the letter, the other in the newness of the Spirit. In Romans 7, verses 14-16, he describes the first way; in Romans 8, verses 1-16, he describes the second. This appears clearly when we observe that in chapter 7 he mentions the Spirit only once, the law more than twenty times; while in chapter 8, he mentions the Spirit sixteen times. In Romans 7 we see the regenerate soul, just as he is in himself with his new nature--desirous, but powerless to fulfil the law, and mourning as one who "is captive under the law of sin." In Romans 8 we hear him say, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Romans 7 describes the ever-abiding condition of the Christian, contemplated as renewed, but not experiencing by faith the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 describes his life in the freedom which the Spirit of God really gives from the power of sin.

2. It is important to understand that the conflict between grace and works, between faith and one's own power, between the Holy Spirit and confidence in ourselves and the flesh, always continues to go on. This applies not only to conversion and the reception of the righteousness of God, but even further into a walk in this righteousness. The Christian has to watch very carefully against the deep inclination of his heart to still work in his own behalf when he sees anything wrong in himself, or when he would follow after holiness, instead of always and only trusting in Jesus Christ, and so serving God in the Spirit.

3. In order to clarify the opposition between the two methods of serving God, let me consecutively cite, in their entirety, the passages in which they are expressed with special distinctions. Compare them with care. Pray to God for the Spirit in order to make you understand them. Take deeply to heart the lesson as to how you are to serve God well, and how not to serve Him.

"The circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29).

"To him that worketh not but believeth, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5).

"Ye are not under the law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

"We are delivered from the law, that we should serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6).

"We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14).

"The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

"Ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15).

"The righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? Who shall descend into th

deep? But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart" (Rom. 10:5-8).

"If by grace, then it is no more of works" (Rom. 11:6).

"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal.2:20).

"The just shall live by faith; yet the law is not of faith; but the man that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal. 3:11,12).

"If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise" (Gal. 3:18).

"So that thou art no more a servant, but a son" (Gal. 4:7).

"Wherefore, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. 4:31).

"Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

"If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18).

"Who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

"Another priest, who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:16).

4. Beloved Christian, you have received the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus to reveal Him and His life in you, and to mortify the working of the body of sin. Pray often to be filled with the Spirit. Live in the joyful faith that the Spirit is in you, as your Comforter and Teacher, and that through Him all will be right. Learn this text by heart, and let it live in your heart and on your lips, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).