

Flesh and Spirit

The comparative principle of Adam's test, and our test.

He was specifically required by God to make a choice between two alternatives, which would determine the eternal outcome of his life, and affect his earthly existence.

We are given an effectively similar test, by which the faithfulness and obedience of our earthly lives are affected, with certain heavenly consequences.

Essentially, Adam, in a state of free will innocence, could choose good or evil. God's way, or his own way! We know what happened, and have great difficulty understanding his wrong choice—especially in view of the gravity of the results.

But, what about us? How do we make a similar choice? Well, realizing that even though we are made new spiritual creations when we are saved (regenerated), and given new natures to live by, we still retain the old, carnal nature that we inherited from Adam and Eve's fall from grace.

And, while we cannot fully understand the complexity of this dichotomous makeup (two natures in one person), we know from God's word, and our own experience that such a situation exists—if from no other reasoning than to acknowledge that we are not sinless (even though our new nature does not, cannot sin).

God says to us “walk in the Spirit (the new nature) and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (the old nature)....., or “put off the old man,.....and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, andput on the new man”. Gal. 5:16, and Eph. 4:22-24.

So, then, this spirit vs. flesh principle is the Christian's continual test of whether he will obey God, or yield to his own fleshly nature (which is always under the influence—even control— of Satan, because its operating principle is the “law of sin and death”. The new nature being a product of the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. Rom. 8:2.

Adam was required to either partake of the “tree of life” (God's way), or the tree of the “knowledge of good and evil” (Satan's way, which is the “law of “sin and death”.

My purpose here is to lead in to a discourse on the effect of our old nature on the quality of our Christian lives, both personally and interactively.

I have long been disappointed in our failure to be more fully open and honest in the feelings, observations, reactions, and other aspects of our relationships. Why should any legitimate issue, or matter, (especially one that needs attention, or resolution) be out of bounds for honest, thoughtful discussion?

The cause, I believe you would agree (if you didn't know already), upon reflection and adequate consideration lies in the reality of the two-nature conflict that constantly confronts us. There is a very appropriate admonition on this lifelong situation, that I believe serves as a

continual reminder (a watchword) of our responsibility to make sure that we think, act, and otherwise live in the spiritual realm of our existence, instead of yielding to our fleshly, carnal side. In other words, trying to live the Christian life in the natural way we lived, before we were spiritually converted. No act of which is acceptable to God—even if outwardly it looks the same as a spiritually governed act, decision, etc. God surely knows what is genuinely motivated and produced by his spirit, and what isn't—and so, too, must we be conscious and aware of what is truly faithful to him, and what is feigned!

The scriptural admonition on the subject is “make not provision for the flesh”. It is a demanding, all-inclusive warning to us not do anything by the habitual, natural dictates of our minds, but only by conscious submission to our new spiritual nature. This is a full-time requirement, and therefore probably the No. 1 command to follow, to maintain our walk with God, and to ensure a victorious Christian life. In essence, then, when a Christian walks in the spirit (by his new nature), he walks with God. But, when he walks in the flesh (by his old nature), he walks with the devil.

Note that this process is not automatic, like the former life fleshly principle was, because of the constant warfare between the flesh and the spirit, which is technically between Satan and God. God cannot lose in this battle, but we can, if we fail to exercise our God-given power to overcome the temptations and solicitations to evil of Satan, and our old nature.

Even unintentional, but independent acts motivated and controlled by our fallen nature are not innocent, but culpable, or at fault. So, how does all this apply to the main objective of this commentary? At the beginning I said how I have been troubled by the universally prevalent fact that Christians are not nearly honest, and open enough with each other about certain personal feelings, and other relationship issues.

In a word, it always comes back to the root cause of “making provision for the flesh”, which unfortunately is exacerbated by the universal problem that most Christian's lives are often lived in the flesh!

For example, if I can't mention or discuss some particular valid issue with you, because I know or anticipate an unfavorable reaction from you, and therefore, I avoid the subject—am I not making provision for the flesh?

In other words, I did exactly what God's word says I should not do. That is, I acted, or walked in the flesh—not the spirit! Then we multiply this over a lifetime, and it has been a colossal failure to follow an explicit principle—which not only doesn't permit this wrong action, it won't excuse it, but rather impose judgment against it. Censure, loss of commendations and rewards, at the judgment seat of Christ, if not repented from and somehow corrected, if possible. Plus incalculable loss of blessings, answers to prayers, well being, and other negative consequences in our earthly lives.

All in all, it is dishonest, contradictory and shameful conduct which discredits what might otherwise be a favorable testimony of faithfulness to the Lord, and his church!

An awful lot of our decisions and actions appear to be made on bad natural instincts, without careful thought and spiritual consideration (before, or after). Just think, if you dare, how many ways and times we “make provision for the flesh.” Our’s and someone else’s, and neither case is ever justified. When God says “make not”, there are no exceptions to that command. No ifs, ands, or buts!

This underlines the principle of accepting God’s word, whether it is doctrine, ethical instructions, or any other revelation—literally as he meant it. Which is for us to determine, by diligent study and application until the subject truth is learned and established in our hearts and minds--making us “approved workmen, that are not ashamed”, now, or at his coming.