

Enslaved to the Desires of the Flesh (Part 4)

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Okay, brethren, we find ourselves in Ephesians 2 once again. This is part four of a five part series on these first three verses of Ephesians 2. We can read those together. I've called this series: "How Dead is Dead? The Five-fold Fallenness of Man." Today's part four. Today, we're going to focus on the flesh. We've looked at man dead in sin, dead with regards to the world, dead with regards to the devil. Today, dead with regards to the flesh. Next week, Lord willing, the wrath of God. Our deadness to God.

Ephesians 2:1, "And you were dead..." You were. Only if you're a Christian, you were. If you're not a Christian, you are. Let me just tell you up front here, nobody needs to embellish how bad man is. All we need to know is the reality of the situation, and it's bad. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived, in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind." So there you have it. Three verses that spell out this five-fold fallenness of man.

Last week, when I got done preaching, one of our younger theologians came up after I was done and asked me why I hadn't included any application. I preached about the prince of the power of the air. This young man wanted to know how do I apply that to my life. And brethren, what I told him, is that sometimes when we're confronted by the Word of God, I told him it's enough if at times we're just simply left worshipping. Brethren, that is not a bad application of Scripture. If we simply are confronted by it and we come away seeing God as big and ourselves as incredibly small. That is profitable. That is good.

Look, I recognize that in these verses that we're dealing with - following the course of this world - you know, we could just get consumed with the world, and how do we overcome the world, and how do we not love the world, and you know what? Scripture deals with those things in other places. But what I want to do is what Paul wants to do. And right now, Paul is not telling us how to overcome the world. Right now, Paul is not telling us how to overcome the devil. He's not telling us how to overcome the flesh. You know what he's doing right now? He is concerned that we have some recognition of the exceedingly immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe. He wants us to measure it. And by measuring it, what he wants to do is he wants to take us down into the depths of the pit from which we came over against the exaltation to which we've been saved. And it's in that contrast; it's in that difference that he wants us to step back and just be amazed and be in awe at the power of God.

And brethren, if we look at these things - the wretchedness, the brokenness of mankind and we're left saying, "Wow!" You know, that's enough? Do you know if you're left coming away from the Word of God and you fall down on your face, don't we get the sense that that's exactly why God does everything that He does? Because in the end, it's not so much just about the application to our lives in the sense that, you know, I have to walk out this door and now I have a list of things to do. Brethren, what God really wants us to do is walk out this door, and fall down on our faces and say, "Wow! Thank You, Lord! Thank You! Thank You!" You know what

He wants us to do in this? He wants us to recognize what sort of people we were that He rescued us from His wrath. That's what it is. The end in view is worship. The end in view is awe. Brethren, we need to be gripped. We need to be changed and amazed that God would actually unleash His great might on such people as we were. That's the issue.

So, today, part four. Turn our attention towards the flesh. Brethren, what we have is man like an animal, but worse. Because we have a mind. Look at it. Right at the end of v. 2, "the sons of disobedience." The devil was at work in these sons of disobedience - look what it says - "among whom we all..." All of us. Among them we lived. In other words, we were one of them. All of us. This is a summation, a summary statement of all mankind in their natural condition. We lived among these sons of disobedience "in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind." Now, just get a feel for this. The New King James: "We all once conducted ourselves in the lusts..." the lusts. Lust. What a word. Just let that roll of your tongue. Lust. That produces imagery in our minds. "...The lusts of our flesh." Or the New American Standard, "We too all (all!) formerly..." We - Christians. This was us too. "We all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh." King James Version: "We all had our conversation..." That doesn't mean just what we speak. That's the full-orbed life of the man. "We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh." So, here we have it. Man - dead in sin is very much alive to the lusts of the flesh. Man, like an animal, like I said, he's an animal: base. Animal: lust. But worse, because what he breaks this out into as he seeks to go deeper, as he seeks to break this thing out into some subcategories, he goes to the mind. You see, we have a mind unlike the animals, but even that mind is just an expression of the lusting, the cravings of the flesh. Pollution. That's what we're talking about. We're talking about the dirtiness and the filthiness of man. He's one big bag of lusts. This is man like an animal, lusting. Lusting. Brethren, like a dog driven to its vomit. You say, oh, that's about people who once made a profession or maybe even were teachers and they came back. Yes, but you think about that. For Scripture to liken a man like that to a dog that returns to its vomit, you know what that implies? He was once at the vomit, left it, and came back. Man at his vomit is a picture - or dogs at its vomit.

You know how many times Scripture likens sinners to animals? We're likened to pigs and we're likened to dogs. And you think about a dog licking up its vomit. You say, that's gross! That's us. That's mankind. That's ugly. This is the ugliness of mankind. This is the dirt, the filth, the muck. You think about a pig. Listen, my uncle raised pigs. You ought to see a pig and hear a pig and watch them eat and watch what they swim in. You may have some refined idea. You know, you walk out of here after it's been raining, your footsteps in grass and it's a little muddy. You ought to see it firsthand. You get an idea of what God sees when He sees man in all the lusts. Just like a pig greedy to plunge into the slime.

Brethren, what I'm saying here is, again, this isn't embellishing on the badness of man. This is the picture. So often Scripture is likening us to some sort of animal. Believer, this was you. Unbeliever, this is you. All of us - we lived in lusts. Somebody says, "I'm not a murderer." "I'm not part of the drug cartel." "I'm not like these homeless drunks out here." "I'm not like that." "I'm not like the woman that prostitutes her body so that she can satisfy her drug addiction." "I'm not like that." "I wasn't born on the wrong side of the tracks." "I'm not like those sinners." "I wear a white shirt when I go to work." You know what Paul does? He puts out his finger, and he places it on our lips. Shhh... Stop. Just stop. This is you. Or this is what you were. He closes our

mouth here. All of us. "Among whom we all once lived." Shhh... Stop the boasting in what you were, because this is you. This is me. Lusts of the flesh. It's an ugly picture, I know. Paul means it to be. This is man as he is. His base, polluted, vulgar, offensive, lusting self. But brethren, this is where we ought to go out and just fall down before the Lord. The absolutely astounding thing is that God would ever ever ever want something to do with us. Thank You, Lord.

The flesh. Look at it. "The passions (or the lusts) of our flesh." The flesh. We've got to be confronted by this term. The flesh. Because it's used in Scripture. It's used quite often. Paul especially uses this terminology. Perhaps you're not aware. We have friends in different places that have been involved in various degree of debate over the meaning of this word. There is a debate among men who we know concerning what does it actually mean? And what are the consequences of what it means? And what should we expect from Christians because of what it means? We have to ask the question: What is Paul referring to? And the first thing we need to recognize is much like we looked at when we dealt with the world, so it is with the flesh, that it's a word that carries different shades of meaning. So we need to recognize that right away that when you come across the word flesh in your Bibles, it's not just enough to say it means the same thing all the time, so it must mean that right there. We actually have to examine the context to really figure out what in the world we're dealing with.

I'll just tell you this right off, in the ESV, you don't see it, but if you've got another translation in your hands, you may well see that the term "flesh" is actually used here twice. The ESV says "flesh" the first time, "body" the second time. But in the original, same word. Same word. What's he doing? Is he just redundantly repeating himself? He talks about the passions or the lusts of the flesh, and then he talks about the passions or the lusts of the flesh again. No, he's actually giving us an overall, and then he's subdividing it into two categories. He's not just redundantly repeating the same thing. And the reason it's not the same thing is because he's actually using flesh with two different meanings here. And you have to recognize from the context what's going on.

But just very quickly, I want to run through some shades of meaning that you find in the term "flesh" when you find it in Scripture. For instance, it can just simply mean "human nature." In other words, Paul is using it in a very negative way, when he talks about the lusts of the flesh. That obviously is the ugliness of mankind. However, we have the word used this way: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Or, "tabernacled among us." Christ became flesh. That obviously carries no negative overtones or undertones. Not at all. What does that mean? He became a man. It has to do with our human nature. "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears." So, just like the world can, flesh can carry meaning that is no way negative.

Or how about this? It can mean our common ancestry or our bloodlines. For instance, the New King James Version, Romans 11:14, Paul is speaking about provoking to jealousy those who are "my flesh." And I refer to the New King James because it actually translates it "flesh." He wants to provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. Well, the ESV says, "fellow Jews." The New American Standard says "fellow countrymen." You see, what he's talking about there. Flesh are those that he's related to. My own flesh and blood, we might say.

It has to do also with just this earthly life. Single people, Paul would say to you - again, I'm going to read from the New King James because it's actually not trying to translate this away from the original meaning. Paul says, look, if you marry, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned, nevertheless, such will have trouble in the flesh. The NAS translates that: "this life." Single people, you really badly want to get married. Paul says I'll spare you. You'll be spared problems. I know he says that - I've tried both. I prefer the married life a whole lot better. I commend that. But anyways, you see, that's getting away from the flesh. The flesh. This life.

Or how about sometimes it just means all mankind. It means human beings in general. Luke 3:6, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." That's just all humanity. Or John 17:2 where Jesus is speaking of His Father having given Him authority over all flesh. The New American Standard says "over all mankind." "...To give eternal life to all whom He has given Him."

Sometimes flesh means the soft part of our body. For instance, Luke 24:39. Jesus says, remember - they're blown away. Here's the risen Christ. He just kind of appeared in the room. You can imagine they're a bit amazed. They're not certain what they're seeing, and He wants to assure them, "I'm here. I'm here as a man. I'm here in flesh and blood." And He says this to them, "See My hands and My feet that it is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." See, flesh is over against the bones. The flesh is that which covers the bones. It's the soft part of us. It's the stuff our bones are covered with.

And I often think, Brother Charles Leiter, he often refers to the fact that the Romanian translation of the Scripture literally translates this "meat." In our Bibles, it's "flesh." In the Romanian Bible, every place you see "flesh" it says, "meat." "The lusts of the meat." What a word. Sometimes, this idea of flesh, it's the whole body. "For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." Just our mortal bodies. It's interchangeable with that.

But brethren, the most sinister, the most dark - that way that it is used when it's just the base ugliness of man. If you search it out in all of its uses, you know what you so often see? It is that which pertains to our humanity which is contrary to the Spirit of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It is that which is separated from, contradictory to. You've got flesh. You've got spirit. Oh, that separation - that distinction, yes, right there is made by our Lord Jesus Himself, but so often it's Paul who sets that on the table for us. "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Or this, "the desires of the flesh." They are against the Spirit. And the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. Flesh is used in this fashion to express that which is in complete antithesis to the Spirit of God. It is opposed. The flesh is all that man is. It's his man-ness. It is his humanness apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in him.

Just think about these words that Paul spoke to the Corinthians. You know them. Remember, they're acting carnal. Even there - carnal. Some of the translations use carnality in 1 Corinthians 3. Carnal. Remember the Romanian translation: meat. What is the Spanish word for meat? Carne. Carnal. It's the meat. It's the lusts of the meat. It's the lusts of the man-ness of man - the humanness. Listen to this. 1 Corinthians 3:3, "You are still..." and he's speaking to Christians here. You don't want this said of you if you're a Christian. "You are still of the flesh." You are still of the meat. You're carnal. You're carne. "For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" Or, your translation

says, "behaving like mere men?" You say, well, that doesn't sound that bad. Just to behave like a mere man? That doesn't sound so bad. Don't you hear what Paul is saying? All men are sons of disobedience and we all lived - or still live - among the sons of disobedience carrying out the lusts of our mere man-ness. That's the issue. You say that doesn't sound that bad to merely be a man, but to merely be a man means everything rotten about man who is without God; who is separated.

Mere man-ness - don't you recognize? Mere man-ness is ugly. It is depraved. He looks at these Corinthians. They were whoring after prostitutes still. 1 Corinthians 6 He has to talk to them about drunkenness. The rich are getting together and despising the poor, and they're glutting themselves and getting drunk. They're taking each other to court. They're full of envy. They're full of jealousy. They are pitting one another against each other in disunity and exalting man. That's mere man-ness. It's ugly. It's horrible.

Now these different shades of meaning are important, because just look at the text. "The sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived..." First, "in the lusts of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh (or body) and the mind." The word flesh shows up here twice. It carries two different meanings. I mean, this is clear to the translators of the ESV. That's why they translate it two different ways. First, flesh, then body.

The first use of flesh - it's this broad concept which contains - notice - it's the broad concept. It contains both the desires of the flesh or the desires of the body and of the mind. And you see, the ESV translators are right. Body - because what? It's that part of our humanness over against the mind. You have it used flesh in this broad ugly way, and then it's used of the body. When it's used of the body, it doesn't necessarily need to carry any negative connotation, just like "mind" by itself doesn't carry any negative connotation. But because these are outworkings of the lusts of the flesh, it's all negative here. And what Paul does is he narrows in on these two particular ways in which these lusts of the flesh manifest themselves. The desires of the body, the desires of the mind. So let's look at these two things.

First, think about the body. The desires of the body. You know, what's interesting here is we first have the term passion or lust - isn't that a desire? Yeah, that's a desire. And then he uses the term that's translated "desire" again. It almost can sound like he's being redundant here. The second word that he uses is the idea of the will. It's determination. You need to think about this. As lost people, our bodies - they are determined. They are willed. There is something at work that is driving - driving. It's the will. Paul is hitting on what slaves we were to our bodies as they willed to have done to them certain things. There was the determination. This is sin. We see this concept over in Romans 6. Sin that seeks to reign in the mortal body and to have us obey the passions of the body. Sin is at work. It's pressing us. The will of the body. The determination of the body to gratify. There's an urge. There's a driving. There's a lusting to gratify its passions in a way that opposes God. That's the issue. That's how sin seeks to reign.

Look, we have to recognize, the appetites of the body were created by God. And it was good. He created us to hunger. That's good. He created us with these appetites. Thirst. You know, He designed pleasure. Do you know He designed the nerves that release that into our brains which get processed and produce feelings that are good and pleasurable. He did that. (incomplete thought) Some of my children, you know, you try to scratch their backs when they were younger, and it just tickled them, and they couldn't stand it. To me, it's wonderful. You

massage my wife's feet, she just melts. You touch mine and it's like, ugh, I can't stand that. But God created in His kindness, He created our ability to have somebody scratch our back, and it's like, ah, that feels so good. Isn't that kind of Him? He didn't have to do that. Kind of Him. Have you ever taken a big scoop of carrot cake or cheesecake, and it's like, that's wonderful! He's created that. I mean, men and women look forward to their honeymoon. Why? They are going to experience such things as - I mean, they're a picture of our relationship with Christ. Just absolutely good. Very good. That's how He created us. And so, we don't want to despise these things, but listen. He created these appetites for us to be in control of, not for them to control us. And He created these appetites to serve Him. He created these appetites to be for His glory. Not for His glory to be dragged through the muck. That's the issue.

What happens is sin seeks to reign - reign! It seeks to commandeer these appetites and use them against God. That's what happens. This is the ugly part. And these passions, these appetites, they're in the grip of sin. And what happens? They scream at us to be satisfied, and they're relentless in their demands. And they don't care what God has said or what has commanded. Just do it because it's going to feel good! Do it! Do it! And they drive us! Do it! Oh, God will understand. God will understand. You hear that. "I'm going to leave my wife because I don't love her anymore." Why? "I think God just wants me to be happy." No, designed us to glorify Him. And He gave us these appetites to glorify Him. And we're just driven. We'll go from one woman to the next or one man to the next. You just see this works out in such a hideous, ugly way when you get the drug addict who they've just got to have their next fix.

And you say, oh, I'm not like that. Yes, you are. Even if it hasn't manifested itself like that. You are. Our will held captive. We love to think, oh, we're free. We're free. The guy dragging on his cigarette - "I could give it up anytime I want. I just don't want." That's exactly right. You could if you wanted. But you see, your body screams for nicotine. And you know what? When these lusts scream at us, we don't have the power to resist. One lust may trump another. I've seen plenty of sinners get rid of one for another. But you don't have power over them. One stronger than the one you're presently if you're lost, controls your life. A stronger one may come along and boot that one out. Kind of like the stronger demon comes along and boots out the lesser one. That may be true. You've heard of the bondage of the will - here we are. We are given to the will of the body. That's what he's talking about here. God gave us appetites to be subordinate to us. He wants us to keep them under control, but they dominate. They dominate. What happens is we buckle to their authority. God is to be on the throne. But what happens? Sin takes the place on the throne, and our passions take a place on the throne. We get down and we bow before them. And we bow, and we bow.

You find people out here, they eat when they're not hungry. There's enough fat on their bodies. They don't need to eat. And they eat. Undoubtedly throughout this city, people will drink today who are not thirsty. And they will drink to get drunk. And they will bow down to that. Drug use. Prescription painkillers. People just bowing down, bowing down, bowing down. And then there's sex. Sex is a god in this country. And how many people bowing down - sex-crazed, pornographic society.

And brethren, the thing is, we're not talking just about the society out there. Paul is saying this - Christian - this was you. Unbeliever, this is you. This is man in his ugliness. We all

know about these things. We all know about the relentless demands of our bodies and how we serve them.

Now, let's go to the other subcategory here. Look at the text. It's not just carrying out the desires of the body... "and the mind." Paul doesn't stop. There's more. And see, both of these things are subgroups of the overriding lusts - lusts of the flesh. There is this other subdivision, this other component. What? The mind. Think about the filth of the mind. The thoughts of fallen man. I know there may be those who imagine, look, I'm not some great sinner like you're describing. I never got drunk in my life. Never fornicated with my neighbor. I've not done drugs in my life. Well, it's true, you may not have. We may think ourselves not like the gluttons, not like the drunks, not like the drug addicts, but you know what Paul says? He said you just wait a second. Again, before there's any boasting, shhh... Hear what God says about your condition. There's the mind. What are we talking about here? That part of the flesh that has to do with the thoughts, the thinking, the intellect, the affections. This is just as much an expression of the carnal lusting of our flesh as is sexual immorality, gluttony, sloth.

What are these desires of the mind or the will of the mind that is such an expression of the flesh? We're talking about anything you live for and dwell on in your thoughts apart from God. We're talking about godless thoughts. We're talking about the things that you're after. And see, this is the thing, what God has designed us for is Him. God has designed us to worship Him. God has designed our minds to be used for His glory. And when your mind is after other things than Him, and not after them for His glory, but after them because that's what you've got to have, and you've got to have them at any price, and that's what you're driven. And it's lust, and it's driving. And there you go. You're plowing deeper and deeper into this thing. And you're dwelling on these things. And you're filling your mind full of them. What you have to understand is God looks at that and He says, that is like a dog running to the vomit. That is that disgusting. That's what that's like. It is unclean. It is dirty. It is the pollution of man. It's in the mind. When we think about the dog going to its vomit, it isn't just like the man - you know, the man, you try to clean him up. He's been a drug addict. He goes to drug rehab. He comes back out again, and he runs back to it.

Brethren, don't you recognize what we're talking about here? We're talking about people who in their mind are full of jealousy. You can't escape that. We're talking about minds full of hatred. Bitterness, malice, envy, jealousy. Jesus hits on it. It's not the guy that sleeps with prostitutes and you try to clean him up and he keeps going back. It's the man who sits at his office and lusts after the secretary. Day after day. And his mind is filled with the pornographic thoughts. It's everything you go after in your mind apart from God. It may be learning. It may be having books, having classes, being in the university, just lusting after more knowledge; lusting to learn; lusting after degrees. It can be very white collar. It can be very clean. It can look really neat. You're not visiting the brothels. You're not over in India dealing and plying with the sex trade over there. No, but you're in the college classroom and you're doing the same thing in your dirty, filthy mind. And you're full of hatred towards others because you're a god in your own mind and other people challenge that and you're jealous because you want what other people have. And you're envious.

Brethren, this is mankind. And we know the filth of it. We know the dirt of it. This is where Paul is saying, do you not recognize the power of God that takes you up out of this? There may

be those here that have never gotten drunk. I know it. Never been high on cocaine. Never had sex outside of marriage. Never... never, but you just simply can't escape jealousy. Because it's right there. You want what they have. Covet. Covet. You need wealth. You need popularity. You need a car like the neighbors. You need your children to succeed like theirs. You need this. And we're just driven all our lives.

Brethren, is that not how it was when we were lost? No care for God. No care for His glory. Even religious. Religious. Do this. Self-righteous. Earn your way. Be something before God. Be good enough! You don't need that Christ. You don't need that. You don't need justification. You need to be good. Work it out. Keep the law. Keep going. Just driving, driving. The lusts of the flesh. This lust of pride to be able to stand before God and say, "Look at me, and look what I've done." Rather than bowing and saying, "Thank You, Lord. I know what I was." Brethren, this is it. Just think. Think. Think. A desire to be right. A desire to win the debate. A desire - this desire - lusting after social media. Lusting after all the gossip of it. Just wanting to hear the latest thing. Hear the garbage. Hear the trash. Have something to debate about out there. You want to win. There's just this lust after video games. Why? It makes me feel good. It does something in my mind. It produces these things in my mind. I need more. I need more.

You make your resolutions. Anybody ever been there? As a lost person, I made resolutions. Okay, I'm not going to do this anymore when I get out of high school. And I did it and I did it worse. Okay, I'm not going to do this when I get out of college. And you know what? Shortly before God saved me, I just came to resign myself: I'm never giving those things up. I didn't have the power to do it. The first time it was really sinking in - all our resolutions are trash. They don't go anywhere. Why? Because inside of us there is this craving, there is this driving - that's the idea: lusting. Lusting, lusting. We've got to have. See, we so often think about it just in the category of sexual immorality. But we're talking just our desire in our mind to have whatever it is. Movies coming in or TV - just lusting after it. I've got to know the next episode. Just some new thing - fill my mind. We've just got to have - always looking, always some new thing in this world. Never content in God. Always needing something more. That's why our sin just gets worse and worse. That's why the drug addict, they can handle a little bit at first, but then they've got to have more and more. The drunk - a little bit in the beginning. More and more and more. Sexual people that reach these stages of perversion. It doesn't start that way. It's more and more. Why? Just lusting, lusting, lusting!

Brethren, this is what we were. Can you imagine God looking at such people as us and saying, "I think I'm going to send My Son to die under My wrath in their place." Paul wants us to look at that and say, "What have You done, Lord?" What have You done? In such a state of lust, none of us can stand before God. Can you imagine walking before the holy, holy, holy God? Children of wrath like the rest of mankind. We'll be engulfed. We'll be consumed. Paul seeks to put his finger to our lips now. I have heard sinners say, "Well, when I stand before God, I'm going to tell Him..." One sight of the holy God, you won't be saying anything. You may cry "mercy," but it's too late. But God has unleashed such power through the Son of God and His coming and His life and His death and His exaltation far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. And there is such a power here. A power like Peter talks about. We no longer live for the passions of the flesh, but for the will of God. There is a power whereby we no longer surrender our members as these servants of unrighteousness. But now, to righteousness, the

body becomes the dwelling place of God. The very temple of the Holy Spirit. Brethren, there is power in regeneration. Transforming power. That is where the power of God unleashed. It's in His Son. It's in the cross. And that's what Paul is doing here. He's just wanting to show us this wretchedness of man, so that it magnifies the power and the grace of God.

Isn't our salvation just amazing? Amen. Thank You, Lord. You're dismissed.