

What Is “the Flesh”?

Tim Conway | *illbehonest.com*

Question: Eddie says, "I was meditating on our struggle with the flesh." Is this you, Eddie? No? Different Eddie. "I was meditating on our struggle with the flesh, and came upon the thought of: did Adam and Eve have the flesh? I know the deceiver/serpent tempted Eve, but what I'm not sure about is whether Adam and Eve actually had a sinful flesh. They would have had to in my thinking due to the flesh taking over to disobey God and them sinning. I was just really wondering if flesh entered the world upon Adam's sin or was flesh something that always had been there? My thoughts were that if they sinned, they must have lost the battle of spirit and flesh. But then, that would put them in the ranks of fallen man, wouldn't it?"

Discussion:

Tim: You guys see what's being asked? Basically the question is this: Did Adam and Eve have "the flesh" prior to their fall into sin? Well, the first thing we need to ask is what's "the flesh"? In fact, the first thing that I would say is you folks know that the term "flesh" is used more than one way in the Bible, right? In fact, it's used in more than just two ways. Let me give you a few examples. 1 John 4:2, "By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." What does that mean? Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. What does that mean? Right - physical body. He's come in a physical, human body. That doesn't mean that Jesus Christ came in the sinful flesh because He was without sin. And so, sometimes when flesh is used, obviously it has no connotation or connection with sin, right? Because Christ had no connection with sin. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, but He was without sin.

How about another usage? Romans 1:3, "Jesus was descended from David according to the flesh." What does that mean? According to what's physical. Again, it really directs back to what's physical. It doesn't have any connection with what's sinful. Luke 24:39, "Jesus says, '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.'" What does flesh mean there? Flesh and bones? It means the soft part of our skin and muscle and tissue. Right? This is flesh. If I cut a piece off and threw it down there, it's a piece of flesh. Not necessarily connected with sin, right? I mean it's down there. It's not sinning. It's not nice, but it's not sinning. Right? How about this one? Luke 3:6, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." What does that mean? That doesn't mean that chunk that's down there on the ground can see the salvation of God, right? That's not speaking necessarily specifically about that which is sinful. There it just means mankind, humankind, right? See, it's really got a rather broad usage in Scripture.

Hebrews 5:7 says, "In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications." What does it mean there? In the days of His flesh? It doesn't just mean His humanity, because He's human still. In the days of His flesh seems to be His earthly humanity - when He was here on this earth. But then you have this, Romans 8:13, "If you live according to the flesh, you will die."

Now, we've got a usage here that seems to have to do with that which is sinful, that which is corrupt. "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God." Romans 8:7. You see that again. Galatians 5:19, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality..." and so on. So you have that usage of flesh which obviously Eddie - that's what he's referring to, right? That which by nature is corrupt.

Now let's go a little further with our concept of flesh. When a person is converted, what's true about their relationship to the flesh? They battle with it. So the battle isn't done when you're saved, right? It's not done. In fact, what would be maybe one of the most prominent verses that you could refer to that tells us such a thing? The one I'm thinking of is in 1 Peter. 1 Peter 2:11, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles..." So he's speaking to Christians. "...To abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul." So basically there are passions of the flesh which wage a battle, a warfare, against our soul. So, just because you're saved, we don't lose the flesh.

Why? Because think about it, flesh - now, see, there's a connection here. I talk about this - the flesh. There's a connection between that and what is sinful because that's where it dwells. You remember what Paul says in Romans 6:12? Sin seeks to reign in this mortal body. This mortal body is where the corruption rests. That's where the battle is. And that's why when we die and we cast off this corruption, we're perfect. We're set free. There's no longer a flesh that wages war. But, what's something else we can say about the flesh when we're converted? I mean, we still battle, however, what's true? The flesh is massively subdued when we come to Christ. What might be a text I would refer to there?

Well, let me give you three of them. Romans 7:5, "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions were aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." While we were in the flesh... but we're not in the flesh anymore. In fact, you go on further. Romans 8:13, "If you live according to the flesh, you will die." So what's true of every believer? They're not living according to the flesh. In fact, "by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body." You do that, you'll live. Galatians 5:24, listen to this verse, "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." So here's the thing we can say, flesh has a lot of different meanings. One of the meanings definitely has to do with that part of our old selves, that part of this unredeemed flesh. Because that's the only part of our old self that's still here - the inner man is a new man. This on the outside - this shell - this is the remnant of what I used to be. I still wage war with it, but if I'm in Christ, the passions and desires of this flesh have been crucified, which means I live above it. Even though it wages war, I live above it. Now yes, there may be periods when I fall to it, but as a whole, by the Spirit, I live above it. You see, the Spirit and the flesh are at war with each other, and when the Spirit comes in, the Spirit's far stronger than the flesh. And the Spirit will give me victory. And if that victory isn't happening, Paul says you live according to the flesh, you die. By the Spirit, if you're putting it to death, you live. So there's that fact as well.

Now, here's the thing. What's true of somebody who's living in the flesh? Romans 8:7 says they're at enmity with God. It says they cannot keep the law. Right? It says whoever is in the flesh will die.

Now let me ask you this: Was the sentence of death upon Adam before he committed the first transgression? You see, if you're living according to the flesh; if you're in the flesh, the sentence of death is upon you. I mean, listen to this again. There in Romans 7. It says, "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death." You see, if you're in the flesh, it's bearing fruit for death. If you live according to the flesh, you will die. The fact is, the sentence of death was not upon Adam. It says those who are in the flesh can't please God. But you know what it says about Adam? It says that God created everything and looked at it and said what? It's good. Not that it's bad. Not that it's corrupt. God didn't say death is already on you from the time I've created you. He says, "the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die." So basically everything that's true about a person that was living in the flesh was not true of Adam. Basically Adam was created in the image of who? Of God. He was created in the image of God. God looked at him and said it's good.

And in fact, there's an interesting text in Ecclesiastes 7:29 that says, "God made man upright." Ecclesiastes 7:29. But then the question comes, well, if man was made good; if man was made upright, how did he ever sin? Right? Well, the fact is, Adam was created with a free will. He was given the ability to choose good or bad. And he chose bad.

Now, you know what? The Bible doesn't get into the fine details about how it was possible for a good being to come to the place where they determined to sin. We don't know what happened, but I'll tell you what - you say, well, how did he ever sin? Willingly. I'll guarantee you that. I mean, Scripture says - Romans 5:16, "that one man's sin..." It attributes that sin to that one man. It's not God's fault. It's that man's sin. Romans 5:17, "Because of one man's trespass..." Romans 5:19, "One man's disobedience..." It was his disobedience. It was his trespass. It was his sin. He did it willingly. He did it willfully. How does a good and upright man created in the image of God come to the place where he chooses sin? Well, he did it willingly. He did it willfully. And at that point, condemnation came upon men. Death came upon men. Sin came upon men and death. It was at that point that anything corrupt settled into the nature of mankind. It's at that point where the corruption of the flesh took place. So that's what I would say about the flesh.