

February Devotional: The Crucial Choice: Flesh or Spirit

By Jerry Furniss

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (Romans 8:5-6)

We move toward Easter, which many of us know is preceded by the Lenten season and starts with Ash Wednesday. As you may also know, this time represents Christ's 40 days of fasting in the desert and being tempted by Satan before he began his official ministry. This is a time when we begin to think about how we may fast in the world, a spiritual desert, and how we may resist temptation, in preparation for His ultimate sacrifice for all of our sins for all time. As you may have heard Julie Guenther mention in church, many are busy preparing by submitting Lenten devotionals. Perhaps you may want to prepare for Lent and Easter by preparing a devotional. It is an excellent way to strengthen yourself, which helps in resisting temptation. That would be great, but ...

The crucial choice that believers in Christ face day by day is between living by the flesh or living by the Spirit. The difference concerns facing life by our resources and perspectives or by God's. When a Christian deals with life by his flesh, he typically thinks about "what *I want out of my life*" or "what *I can do with my life*." Conversely, when a Christian deals with life by the Spirit, he typically thinks about "what *God wants from His given life*" or "what *God can do through His given life*."

The consequences related to this choice are monumental. When a believer allows his mind to be set in a carnal direction, he will be thinking about worldly self-indulgence ("what I can get out of this") or religious self-accomplishment ("what I can do for God"). The result of either carnal perspective is "*death*" (spiritual deadness). On the other hand, when a follower of Jesus sets his mind on heavenly matters, he will be considering issues of humility ("how much I need the Lord") or faith ("how great the Lord is"). The result of such spiritual thoughts are "*life and peace*" (spiritual vitality and spiritual tranquility).

Another analysis of these two options can be seen in the contrast between the "*works of the flesh*" and the "*fruit of the Spirit*." When we put our hope in our own capabilities, our flesh produces deeds such as "*adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like*" (Galatians 5:19-21). Contrariwise, when we place our expectations upon the Lord, His Spirit brings forth through us fruit like "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23).

To put this into perspective, what miracles have or can you perform? Now, what miracles has God already performed for you? Let me help you with a list: our universe, your given life, your country, your parents, your friends, families (birth and spiritual), your senses, and the gift of choice. All good things are from Him. So, name one thing that did not originate from God. Sin! No, we chose that through choice; through disobedience.

Consider this fundamental truth. These "flesh-Spirit" choices are what all of us will face every day of our lives. The persistency of these issues is inherent in the fact that God only offers two choices for every issue of life; namely, "*live according to the flesh*" or "*live according to the Spirit*". Stated another way, choose your desires and beliefs using your power, or His will and His truth using His Spirit.