

Chapter 20

THE WORKS OF THE FLESH ARE THESE

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:16-21)

To better understand the *walk in the Spirit* it must be contrasted with its opposite: *the lust of the flesh*. The walk in the Spirit has its source in *the spirit of [the] truth*, and the flesh has its source in *the spirit of [the] error*. The flesh manifests itself in *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*. It also manifests itself in the commandments and doctrines of men, both in the realm of the truth and outside of the realm of the truth, in an attempt to establish man righteous before God. Solomon referred to this aspect of the flesh as *a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*.

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This aspect of the flesh is not commonly understood because of the general assumption that man's morality is the product of his creation in the image of God. Indeed Adam was created in the image of God, but he fell from that image by wilful disobedience to God and assumed an image more like the one who caused his fall than the image in which he was created. Thus the flesh is defined by its source: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Prior to Eve's deception and Adam's wilful sin, their lives were to be lived in dependence upon God through faith in His Word: *trusting in the Lord with all of their heart and not leaning to their own understanding*. In other words, their lives were to be lived much the same as believers are to live their lives today. Even so the serpent persuaded Eve to consider the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that it was *good for food*, it was *pleasant to the eyes*, and it was *a tree to be desired to make one wise*. Oblivious to God's warning and deceived by the lie of the Devil: *Ye shall not surely die: For [Elohim] doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as [Elohim], knowing good and evil*, Eve ate of the tree and *gave also to her husband, and he did eat*.

The events of the Garden of Eden introduced into the world a declaration of independence from God. The new condition produced by this declaration of independence is called *the world*. *The world* is not to be confused with the earth upon which we dwell but is a system of thought derived from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by independence from and rebellion against God and His Word. Therefore John wrote:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (I John 2:15-16, emphasis mine)

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From this we learn that the three aspects of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil observed by Eve correspond to three types of temptation (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life) and these are *not of the Father*. We have learned that these three things have produced all of the sins that a man can commit, as well as producing those things that man substitutes for the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We have learned that the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes have produced all of the overt sins of man, while the pride of life has produced what mankind generally regards as *good*, such as the various religious systems in this world, with the exception of Biblical Judaism and Biblical Christianity.

It is this aspect of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that beset the nation of Israel. Despite her past history during the ten trials in Egypt, she did not see herself as she really was but believed she could live a life well pleasing to God by the terms of the law. The reason for this was: *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits* (Proverbs 16:2).

In our last two chapters we learned that the basic difference between Old and New Testament saints is that the New Testament saint has lived in the era of the fulfillment of *the promise*, whereas the Old Testament saint lived in the hope of *the promise*. The essential difference between the two, then, is that the Old Testament saint was not privileged to have seen the fulfillment of the first advent of Christ and the consequent blessings associated with the permanent indwelling of the believer by the Holy Spirit of God. We learned that this was not a diminishing of the Old Testament saint, or of his faith in anywise, but was a manifestation of the fulfillment of prophecy in its proper time and with its accompanying blessings. Nevertheless there

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have been many theologians who have not understood the mitigating circumstances which allowed for the gift of the Holy Spirit in this age and not in the past.

They have produced theories respecting Israel and the Old Testament saints which do not do God justice. By their theories they have denied God's Omniscience and Immutability, making God a respecter of persons. By their theories Israel is the recipient of only an earthly inheritance in the kingdom of God, and the church has been glorified to the highest heavens. These theologians have somehow forgotten that all of the redeemed (without respect to the age in which they lived) were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The basis for this election was in the redemptive purpose of Christ, Who, in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, was crucified before the foundation of the world.

They apparently have not seen that the Old Testament saint's faith was very much like the present situation of the redeemed, relevant to the promise of the return of our Lord to this earth. We have longed for the day of His return, but we have not yet experienced the joy of the fulfillment of that promise. Even so the promise is sure. Consequently every faithful believer, from the time of the ascension of Christ into heaven until now, has lived in the hope of the second coming of our Lord, just as every faithful believer from Adam until the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ lived in the expectation of the promise of the *Seed of the woman*.

Thus the walk of the Old Testament saint was essentially the same as the walk of the New Testament saint, except for certain covenant responsibilities and the degree of the revelation provided him, which may have been far greater than we understand from the Old Testament Scriptures. For example: Enoch, *the seventh from Adam*, prophesied of the second coming of our

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Lord and the judgment of false prophets, when he said, *Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him* (Jude 1:14-15).

In declaring the walk of the believer, Solomon wrote, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* And the apostle Paul wrote, *Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.* When these statements, one out of the Old and the other out of the New Testament, are analyzed in the light of the Word of God, they declare, essentially, the same truth. For example: the passage in the third chapter of Proverbs declares that if a believer trusts in the Lord with all of his heart and is not inclined to lean to his own understanding (i. e., to walk after the flesh), the Lord will direct his path. A path is descriptive of where one walks, so Paul wrote *walk in the Spirit*, which is to walk in the direction supplied by the Lord.

Since God no longer speaks directly to man, man's direction comes from the Word of God (given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God), *rightly divided*. The Old Testament saint believed God and lived his life by faith, and the saint of the New Testament era is to do the same thing: for *without faith it is impossible to please God*. The source of faith is *by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*. Thus the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews testifies to the fact that those listed therein (Old Testament saints) lived their lives by faith. Therefore, whether it was then or now, the truth remains, *The just shall live by faith, and the law is not of faith*, and we could properly emphasize: the law never was of faith!

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Further our Lord testified that *He is the way, the truth, and the life and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him*. Therefore it is not possible for anyone in the Old or New Testament eras to come unto the Father other than by faith in Jesus Christ. He has been the focal point of the faith from before the foundation of the world. If it were otherwise Christ's vicarious death was a hopeless suicide, for He willingly gave Himself as an offering for sin. If it were otherwise, the Father would have delivered Him from the ignominy of the cross, for Jesus prayed, *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt* (Matthew 26:49).

It should be evident, then, it is impossible for the Spirit of God to lead anyone contrary to the truth of the Word of God. Despite this, there are those under the canopy of Christianity who have claimed to have done many things by the power of the Holy Spirit. Of course anyone can claim anything, but the proof of those things claimed is not the claim, but whether the thing claimed agrees with the Word of God, rightly divided, or not. It cannot be otherwise. God cannot deny Himself. Thus to be led of the Spirit is to be led of the truth of the Word of God.

Throughout the New Testament era the church (the Lord's called-out assembly) has been given various gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the whole body of Christ. These resources have given the believer within the body of Christ the opportunity to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Growth in grace enables the believer to see himself as God sees him, through the judicial reckoning of God by virtue of the vicarious life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the believer deviates from this walk and leans to his own understanding, whether in overt sins generated by *the lust of the flesh* and *the lust of the*

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eyes, or whether in conduct generated *in the pride of life*, he can *grieve* the Holy Spirit. He can also *quench* the Spirit by refusing to listen to the clear instructions of the Spirit through the Word of God.

In this regard, I would not go so far as to say it is impossible to walk in the Spirit without an association with a local church, where the Word of God is clearly taught, but I would say we greatly hamper ourselves when we do not avail ourselves of all that God has provided to His body by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Remember, in Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church respecting the gifts of the Spirit, he said:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man [i.e., to every believer] to profit withal [i.e., to the profit of all]. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized [with the Holy Spirit] into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. (I Corinthians 12:7-14)

We know some of these gifts cited by Paul were temporary *sign* gifts, used of God to establish the authority of the church and its message before the nation of Israel. The Scripture says, *the Jews require a sign*. Paul also prophesied that the *sign* gifts were to be done away with after the completion of the writing of the New Testament Scriptures. This did not happen all at once. Those who had these gifts continued to exercise them until their deaths, but as evidenced in the book of Acts, their frequency was greatly lessened towards the end of the first century. Then, with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the primary need for them was gone.

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This prophecy is found in I Corinthians chapter thirteen, where Paul wrote, *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. That which is perfect* in this text is not the Lord Jesus Christ as is commonly supposed, but is the New Testament Scriptures. Thus when the New Testament Scriptures were completed, the apostles no longer preached from a partial revelation but from the complete revelation of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The authority of the church was then established by *Thus saith the Lord*, rather than by the display of sign gifts (of healing; of working of miracles; of divers tongues; of interpretation of tongues, etc.). The church had graduated from its infancy (the things necessary at its beginning), and Paul was able to say, *but when I became a man I put away childish things*.

The Old Testament saint's life was similar to the New Testament saint's life in some respects and quite different in others. Like the New Testament saint, he was brought to faith through the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit was with him for special service, but he was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Unlike believers in this age, God appeared to some Old Testament saints in Theophanies and Christophanies prior to the giving of the law; but after that, in dealing with the nation of Israel, God always used a mediator, like Moses, or one of the prophets, to speak to them. God provided some Old Testament saints with special covenant relationships which, in the shadows and types of the Old Testament, revealed the purpose of God to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Consequently the Old Testament saint's life was a reflection of his faith in as much of the truth of the Word of God as God had revealed to him at that point in the progressive revelation of God.

As previously stated, the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews certainly bears testimony

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to a sampling of those who lived their lives by faith. We have also seen that the differences between them and us was in no way a reflection of partiality by God towards the New Testament saint over the Old, but was a matter of allowing the fulfillment of *the promise* of God in its time. Thus it is clear, the salvation provided for them was the salvation provided for us, so that Jude wrote:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 1:3)

The faith which was once delivered unto the saints was their's, but as Jude pointed out, it is also our's, because it is *the faith* which he exhorted his audience to *earnestly contend for*. There is no question that there were distinctions in the manifestations of their faith compared to the manifestations of our faith. The primary reason for this is not a difference in *the faith*, but that *the promise* of God had to await its fulfillment in the fulness of the times by the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is *the way, the truth, and the life: and no man cometh unto the Father, but by [Him]*, it should be evident that certain aspects of salvation could not come to those who lived before the Lord actually fulfilled *the promise* of God, but had to await the fulfillment of *the promise* in order to be manifested. This is clearly seen in the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers in this age.

Unfortunately some of these distinctions and differences have been grossly misunderstood and have produced myriad concepts about the salvation of those who lived in the many different ages of the Old Testament. Their particular covenant relationships with God have confused many regarding *the faith*. Nevertheless as we have seen, there is but *one faith* put forth in the

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Scriptures. It is *the faith that was once delivered unto the saints*. It is *the faith* regarding Jesus Christ in His Person and in His work. It was never a faith of salvation by law, or animal sacrifices, or human performance of any sort. It is *the faith* that was authored by the Lord Jesus Christ *before the foundation of the world*, and it is *the faith* which He came to fulfill in the fulness of time in His first advent upon this earth. It is faith in the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ on behalf of sinners.

Consequently it is absolutely absurd to hear preachers exhorting their congregations to serve God in the energy of the flesh, by attempts at law works, thinking they are exhorting them to holiness, and all because they do not perceive that *the way that seemeth right unto a man* was not of God, but of the Devil. They do not perceive that the law was not given to show man how to live, but to show him that it is impossible for him to meet the demands of a Holy and Just God in the energy of the flesh by self-determination.

Thus it is this misapprehension of the law that has produced all of this emphasis upon the conduct of the believer. If the believer could be accepted of God on the basis of his conduct before the law, then Christ died in vain. On the one hand the law reveals the Holy character of God, and on the other hand it reveals the unholy character of man. The first four commandments reveal the unholy character of man with respect to his worship, because that man, in his fallen state, chooses to worship a god of his own making rather than the God of the revelation of the Word of God. The last six commandments reveal the unholy character of man in his relationship with man. In essence they reveal that he is to love his neighbor as himself, but he does not have the capacity to do so with any degree of perfection. Thus the law reveals that man is in the flesh;

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and the flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary the one to the other:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest [by the law], which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

When Ishmael (who represents the law) sought to abuse Isaac (who represents grace and faith), Sarah cried, *Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac;* and at his death, *Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.* Consequently there is no inheritance in the things of God by human effort but by grace through faith. Continuing, Paul wrote, *So then, brethren we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.* Thus through the judicial reckoning of God, the believer is dead to the law and alive unto God by faith in Jesus Christ. *For we are the circumcision [crucified with Christ] which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh* (Philippians 3:3, emphasis mine).