

## THE CROSS AND THE FLESH - STEPHEN KEUNG

*Galatians 5:24—But they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts.*

We will repeat it. As we read it, I hope we will notice every word in that sentence. *Galatians 5:24—But they that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts.*

Let's have a word of prayer:

*Dear Lord, we pray that Thy cross will be before each and every one of our eyes so vividly that it may deeply touch our hearts and draw each one of us into that cross and allow that cross to enter into our very being, that Thy glory may be manifested even in us earthen vessels. We commit this time totally into Thy hands. With man it is impossible, but with Thee all things are possible. So we expect Thee to do the impossible things, to plant Thy cross into our very being. And we give Thee all the glory. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.*

We have fellowshiped on the cross and the old man. Now we would like to continue on with the cross and the flesh. First of all, we need to recognize what flesh is. What is the difference between the old man and the flesh? As you read the Bible, you will find the word *flesh* is used in many different ways.

Sometimes the word *flesh* refers to our physical body. For instance, in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live, I, but Christ lives in me; but in that I now live in flesh, I live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself for me." The word *flesh* there refers to our physical body.

Then you find the word *flesh* can mean one substance of our body. For instance, in I Corinthians 15:50, it says "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." So we find that flesh is part of the body.

This word is also being used as the expression of union. For instance, in Ephesians 5:21 it says, that man and woman are united into one flesh.

This same word *flesh* can refer to man, to yourself. In Romans 7:18 it says, "In me, that is, in my flesh, there is no good."

Again you find in the Bible that the word *flesh* can refer to the unregenerated man. Therefore, sometimes in English, it is translated the "natural man." The natural man refers to the unregenerated man.

So we find that this word *flesh* is used in many different ways. Even in the Old Testament, the English word *flesh* is used in various ways. It may refer to the body. You remember in Genesis 2:21 how God did a surgery on Adam and took out something from him, and then God closed his flesh. That means his body was being restored. And after God led Eve to Adam, Adam looked at her and said, "This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." In other words, it is part of the human body. Then in verse 24 they are united into one flesh—unity.

When you come to Genesis 6:3, man had sinned so much that God said, "My spirit will not strive anymore with man because man has become flesh." In other words, man's spirit was dead and it remained the soul and the body. He did not have the Holy Spirit and his whole life was governed by his soul and his body.

This morning, when we talk about this matter of the flesh, we limit ourselves to one meaning and that is the unregenerated man, a man who is motivated by his soul and body without the Holy Spirit. So this is the flesh that we will be talking about.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD MAN AND THE FLESH

What is the difference between the old man and the flesh? The old man is a corporate man. In other words, the old man is Adam and all who are in Adam. And the flesh refers more or less to the personal, individual being. When we talk about the old man, we touch the objective truth; that is to say, in the old man, every one of us who are born of Adam was there. But thank God, Christ is the last Adam. So when He was crucified on the cross and died, every one of us who believe in the Lord Jesus died in Him and with Him. You do not personally experience that death because you were already dead before you were born. You were dead in Christ Jesus because He was the last Adam and the second Man. So this refers to the objective truth. It is something that we must believe, and as we believe and receive it, we find that it is ours. But when you talk about the flesh, it more or less emphasizes the subjective side; that is to say something that we will experience ourselves. So in one sense, the old man and the flesh are one, but in another sense, you find that these are the two sides of one thing.

On the cross our old man was crucified with Christ; this is what He has done for us. And remember, the old man is always singular in number. In other words, there is only one old man and that is Adam. All of us are in that Adam. So when Christ was crucified, that old man, that Adamic race was terminated in His crucifixion. Therefore, we can reckon that we are dead to sin in Christ Jesus and alive to God in Christ Jesus. There is nothing simpler than this accounting because you have a fact there, an eternal fact that has been completed, and it never changes. You just reckon it as yours, and it is yours. Thank God for that!

When you talk about the flesh, we all are flesh, but your flesh and my flesh are different because the combinations are all different. We all inherit from Adam, but the combinations are so varied. Therefore, your flesh is different from my flesh, and yet it is flesh. So just remember that when we come to this matter of the cross and the flesh, we are moving on into the subjective side of experience.

Before we were saved, our spirit was dead unto God; we had no contact with God. But thank God, when we believed in the Lord Jesus as our personal Savior, He washed our sins away by His shed blood, because the Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins no matter what you do. You may try to accumulate your merits, but that cannot wash your sins away. It is through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus that our sins were all remitted. But God did something more than that. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, our dead spirit was quickened into new life because our Lord Jesus has cleansed our conscience and made our spirit a new spirit, a living spirit that can communicate with its proper environment, our God Himself. So the moment we are saved, we will cry out, "Abba Father" because that connection was made. The life of Christ came into our new spirit by the Holy Spirit and we are born again. We receive the life of God. Christ Himself dwells by the Spirit in our new spirit. That is what we usually call initial salvation. Christ dwells in our spirit. His life is the life of our spirit and that begins our spiritual life.

Even so, we find that the old nature, the Adamic nature, is still in us. So far as our spirit is concerned, we have a new life, a new spirit; we have the Holy Spirit in us. But so far as our soul and body are concerned, we find that life in our soul is still the old Adamic nature, and that can be easily experienced.

In I Corinthians 3:1 it says, "And I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly; as to babes in Christ."

When the apostle Paul was in Corinth, he preached nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and many Corinthians turned to the Lord. Paul continued to minister to these believers, but he said, "I have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual." Now we would think that after we have the

new spirit, the new life, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in our spirit, surely we should be spiritual now. But strangely, Paul said, "I cannot speak to you as to spiritual because I can only speak to you as fleshly, as babes in Christ."

Now brothers and sisters, even though we do have a new life, we have a new spirit, and the Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit, but so far as our soul is concerned, it is still being animated by that old Adamic life. We are not instantly becoming spiritual because so far as the rest of our being is concerned, it is still under the life of the old Adam. It is still in a fallen state, and our flesh, our self is still the very life of our being. Gradually, we need to grow out of the old life and grow in Christ Jesus. Then we will enter into more of the spiritual condition. So when we are first saved, do not think that we are instantly spiritual now. We are still babes in Christ and because we are still babes in Christ, we are still fleshly.

### A CARNAL CHRISTIAN

In the Greek this adjective has a little variation. For instance, in I Corinthians 3:1 it says, "But as to fleshly." The word "*fleshly*" there refers to the substance, the material of a thing. So it is neutral.

When you come to verse 3 that say, "Ye are yet carnal," this word *carnal* is another variation of the adjective. But that word can mean the material or substance of a thing, or it can refer to the moral sense, or it can be a combination of both. For the sake of simplifying it let us use it this way. In I Corinthians 3:1: "But as to fleshly," let us translate it to, "But as to fleshy." In other words, it is the material. It does not include any moral sense in it and in the Bible sometimes this word is translated into "natural man." For instance, I Corinthians 2 says, "The natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit." It is the same word. In other words, we can say it refers to a person who is a fleshy man, and that means he is a babe in Christ.

We all love babies because they are so natural; there is no pretension. But at the same time, they are terrible because they are so self-centered. Even at midnight when they are hungry, they will cry. They do not mind who you are. "I am the most important person in the world. Everybody has to serve me." That is being fleshy. So when we are babes in Christ, we are very fleshy. Thank God we do not pretend. Unfortunately, the more we grow, the more we become not very true. But a babe does not care what you think about him. This is what he is. So it is very natural, but very fleshy.

When we first believe in the Lord Jesus, that is what we are in the spiritual world. So Paul said, "When I was with you, in the very beginning of your being saved, I treated you as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk because you could not digest hard food." But that condition should not last too long. We will be able to consider you because you are a babe, but if you remain a babe too long, then something is terribly wrong. After so long a time, Paul said, "I still cannot give you solid food because you are yet carnal." In other words, you are still fleshly. That old Adamic nature is still dominating your life. You should outgrow it that Christ may become your life. And this is being abnormal. We will endure brothers and sisters who are newly saved. If they are fleshly, in a sense, we enjoy it because they are so real, but such a situation should not last too long.

You remember that the Corinthian believers were not the only ones who were in that situation. Even when you go to the book of Hebrews, you find the same thing. They were still not being spiritually exercised, and they remained as babes in Christ. They had not left the foundation and pressed on to full growth, and that is a tragedy.

When a baby is first born in your family and he is in his babyhood, everyone enjoys him. But after ten or twenty years, if he remains the same, that will be a tragedy to the family. Spiritually, this is the same. When we are talking about the flesh, actually we are referring to the condition of being fleshly. So Paul said, "You are still carnal."

The flesh is the natural man. It should refer to the unregenerated people, but unfortunately, this same term is now being applied to Christians. Why? Because we act like the people of the world. It shows that we are not much different from the people of the world. This is something that should not be.

### **SIGNS OF A CARNAL CHRISTIAN**

What are the symptoms of being fleshly? What are the signs of the carnal Christian? In the first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul gives us all the symptoms manifested by the carnal Christian. Remember, Paul did not refer to the people of the world. He refers to the carnal Christian, Christians who are still living in the flesh instead of living in the spirit. Now what are the symptoms?

#### ***A Babe in Christ***

The first one, of course, is a Christian who remains in the carnal state; he is still a babe in Christ. As a baby he cannot take solid food because he has not been exercised. So he has to be fed with milk. What is milk? Milk is predigested food. Your mother takes food and digests it, and then you suck the milk out of your mother. In other words, it has been already digested, so you can just absorb it without exercising yourself.

That is one of the signs of being in the flesh. Now today, among Christians, there are people who really appreciate ministry. They appreciate ministry more than the Lord's Table, because at the Lord's Table we give to the Lord. What He has given us, we give back to Him. We remember Him; we honor Him; we express our appreciation to Him; and we serve Him. But when we listen to a message, we receive and receive. We receive what has been digested so we do not need to exercise ourselves before the Lord. And because we never exercise ourselves, we never grow. We hear and hear and hear, and nothing happens because we never exercise. So that is one sign of being in the flesh.

#### ***Walking According to Man***

The second sign is found in I Corinthians 3:3b: "Are ye not carnal, and walk according to man?" In other words, our walk, our life upon this earth is according to man. What the people of the world do, we do too. Even what the people of the world think, we too think. What the people of the world seek after, we also seek after. We are no different from the people of the world. Even though we do have eternal life in us, that eternal life has not been expressed because we are still living according to the flesh.

#### ***Divisions***

As you read on, you find there are divisions among God's people. How they followed man instead of following Christ! "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas." And some say, "I am exclusively of Christ." Paul said, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Are you baptized in the name of Paul? Christ is not divided." So when we see divisions among God's people, this is a sure sign that we are walking according to the flesh.

#### ***Immorality***

Among the Corinthians, there were people committing fornication to such an extent that even the world rarely saw it. And the whole church thought nothing about it. They thought they were so liberal. They were able to allow anything and everything. There was no sense of righteousness.

### *Love of the World*

How they loved the world! They loved socials. They loved to eat and to drink, and because of that, they went to the idol temple to do that because in Corinth this is the social time. It is always being in the temple. So they said, "Well, there is only one God; these idols are nothing so we can go in and enjoy ourselves.

### *Defrauding One Another*

How they defrauded one another! They even accused one another before the worldly court.

### *Love of Self*

And then they just loved themselves! They enjoyed themselves and neglected the other brothers. They did not care about the weak brothers and sisters. They said, "We have the truth, so we can do whatever we want to." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

### *Disorder*

Then there was disorder among them. Even at the Lord's Table, some got drunk and some were hungry. There was no order among them. Even in the exercise of spiritual gifts, it was a display of themselves, and it was not edifying.

### *Unbelief*

There was unbelief. They did not believe in resurrection. How can you believe in resurrection if you live such a life?

### *Disobedience*

They were very disobedient. There was no authority, no order. All these are the symptoms of men and women of the flesh.

## **LIVING ACCORDING TO THE FLESH**

Romans 7 show us that those who walk according to the flesh cannot please God. The apostle Paul describes himself when he was still in that stage, when the flesh was still dominating his life. Verse 14 says, "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am fleshly, sold under sin." In other words, sin was still ruling over the flesh.

Verse 18: "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell: for to will is there with me, but to do right I find not."

Romans 8:5-8: "For they that are according to flesh mind the things of the flesh; and they that are according to Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit life and peace. Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be: and they that are in flesh cannot please God."

Do not think that you can live according to the flesh and please God. Do not think that we can serve God according to the mind of the flesh because so far as God is concerned, God has condemned flesh to death. So people who are walking, living according to the flesh, can never please God.

## **THE WORKS OF THE FLESH**

Galatians 5:19 says, “Now the works of the flesh are manifest.” When the flesh works, it is very clear; you can easily recognize them—“which are fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness.” I think these three refer to the passions of the flesh because they all refer to the passions, the physical urge of the body.

Then, “idolatry, sorcery.” These refer to some of the lusts of the flesh. In Colossians it says, “will worship” because our will is darkened, is against God. They are alienated from the life of God. So instead of worshipping the true God, they worship the idols. Instead of seeking to know God’s will by His Spirit, they go to sorcery to seek for mediums. It is the degradation of the human will.

Then, “hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, contentions” are the emotional things. It shows that our emotions are all being distorted.

“Disputes, schools of opinions, envyings...” These refer to our mind, and our mind is all darkened.

“Murders, drunkennesses, revels...” These refer to how we are so earthly because we are natural. If it is natural, it is earthly. And the Word says that they who do such things shall not inherit God’s kingdom.

So we find that the flesh can be easily detected because its deeds, its works are very manifested. And we need to ask a question. Since we have believed the Lord Jesus, have we grown out of our babyhood? If we are measured by what we have read, whether it is in 1 Corinthians, Romans, or Galatians, do we still walk according to the flesh? Do we still serve according to the flesh? Or are we now walking according to the spirit and serving God in our spirit? I think this is a very practical question that we have to ask ourselves. We must go to the Lord and let His light shine upon us, that in His light we may see light, that we may repent and abhor ourselves, and then turn to the Lord to seek for deliverance.

### **DELIVERANCE FROM THE FLESH**

How can we be delivered from our flesh? This is a very personal question and it is a very subjective one. It is not like the old man, something objective, something that Christ has done for us. All we need to do is to reckon it and believe in it. But now we come to our personal experience. How can we be delivered from our flesh? And you find the way is the cross. But it is more than the cross that was erected on Calvary. It is that cross that has to be implanted into our very soul. The objective cross has to become the subjective cross. The cross of Christ has to become my cross and your cross. Now how do we experience it?

In Galatians 5:24 it says, “But they that are of the Christ.” First of all, we need to remember that we are in Christ. Oftentimes we forget it. Experientially speaking, we come out of Christ. When we live in the flesh, we do not live in Christ. So, oftentimes we come out of Christ; that is from the experience point of view. From the truth point of view, it will not happen. We are in Christ, and we are always in Christ. So we need to remember that we are of Christ. In other words, we need to take our new position in Christ Jesus. Today, we are in Christ, and in Christ the old man was crucified. No longer live I; it is Christ who lives in me. So first of all, we have to take that stand in Christ Jesus.

What is temptation? Temptation is leading you out of Christ and taking you back into Adam. When temptation comes, it cannot touch Christ; it only has that living relationship with Adam. Outside of Adam, it has no power. In Christ, he is finished. So temptation is drawing us out of Christ, and then we find ourselves being in Adam. And if we are in Adam then sin has dominion over us.

So first of all, by faith we have to take our stand in Christ Jesus, declaring that the old Adam was crucified. We are dead to sin in Christ Jesus and we are alive unto God in Christ Jesus. And when

you take that position, when you take that stand, how does it work? Galatians 5:16 says, “But I say, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall no way fulfill flesh’s lusts.”

This is the subjective work of the Holy Spirit. Two thousand years ago, Christ died on Calvary’s cross, and God has already put the whole Adamic race in Christ. So when Christ died, the whole Adamic race was terminated. That is an eternal truth. You stand on that, then the Holy Spirit begins to work, and He will bring the finished work of Christ on the cross into your experience. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He will bring us into all truth.

After we have taken that stand in Christ Jesus and we learn to walk in the Spirit, what happens? You find that the flesh will lust after the Spirit, and the Spirit will lust against the flesh. “And these things are opposed one to the other, that ye should not do those things which ye desire.”

In other words, the fight is not done by you or me. If we try to fight against the flesh, we will fail no matter how determined we are. Let the Holy Spirit strive against the flesh. It is a battle between the Holy Spirit and the flesh, not between you and the flesh, because you are the flesh. So let the Holy Spirit work against the flesh. And when the Holy Spirit strives against the flesh, you are not able to do what your flesh wants to do because the Holy Spirit will put to death the deeds of the body. Then you will be delivered from the flesh.

Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to flesh, ye are about to die; but if, by the Spirit, ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

### GRAFTING

Let me use the illustration of grafting. Suppose you have a peach tree and the nature of that peach tree is very bad. All the peaches that are produced are sour. How are you going to improve that peach tree? You use this matter of grafting. Near the root of that peach tree you cut off, and then you make another incision. You take a twig out of a good peach tree that bears sweet fruit. You graft this twig into the old tree, and then the tree begins to grow. When it grows up, all the branches will bear sweet peaches because it has taken up the new nature. But you have to be very careful because below that cut branches will also come out, and when these branches come out, they will bear sour peaches. Above the incision you have sweet peaches; below that incision, you have the old, sour peaches. What will the farmer do? He will watch, and whenever branches come out below that incision, he will cut them off. Then the whole peach tree will bear sweet fruit.

That is our story. We are the poor, bad fruit, but the cross cuts into our life, and Christ is being grafted into us. So naturally, supernaturally-naturally, you find that it will bear the fruit of the Spirit. But unfortunately, underneath that cut, branches are still coming out. So, the Holy Spirit will do this work. He will put the deeds of the body to death that you may live. “They who are of the Christ have crucified their flesh with the passions and the lusts.” This is how the Spirit of God will work. This is how we experience the cross in our daily life. So may we believe in what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and let us obey the Holy Spirit as He works the cross into our daily life. This is the way of deliverance. Thank God.

*Dear Lord, we just lay this word at Thy feet. If it is of Thee, use it. If anything is not of Thee, put it to death. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

