

Doctrine of the Flesh

The Christians Conflict with the Flesh

1. The term “flesh” is used in the Bible to refer to the physical bodies of humans or animals.
2. From inside the flesh of Adam, God took a rib, with which he created Eve. Then, the Lord closed up the flesh.
 - *Genesis 2:21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;*
3. The apostle Paul spoke of the variety of the flesh of men, beasts, fish, and birds.
 - *1 Corinthians 15:39 All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.*
4. The term flesh also refers to the entire body.
 - *Galatians 5:13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*
5. The term flesh is used in Scripture to speak of a human bond, based upon intimacy, either marital, or filial.
 - Marital. *Genesis 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*
 - Filial. A man can tell his family that *"I am your own flesh and bone"* (Judges 9:2).
6. The term "flesh" is used occasionally in a comprehensive manner to describe all of mankind, and even animals.
 - *Genesis 6:3 And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.*
7. The flesh is considered to be weak in Scripture, which is why a person must trust in God.
 - *Psalms 56:4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.*
8. Because the flesh is weak, the disciples were not able to stay awake with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- *Mark 14:38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*
9. Every Christian is challenged by the flesh, which is defined Biblically as referring to that baser part of the soul that represents inordinate lusts and desires that are displeasing to the Lord.
- *Ephesians 2:3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*
 - *Romans 13:13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

Special Note.

One day a dissolute young man was walking in a garden when he heard a child's voice cry, "Take up and read! Take up and read!" He looked around, saw a copy of the New Testament, and took up the manuscript to read the words of Romans 13:13. In that moment, Augustine (354 – 430) was convicted of sin, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Confessions of Saint Augustine

Chapter XII

But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm, bringing a mighty shower of tears. Which that I might pour forth wholly, in its natural expressions, I rose from Alypius: solitude was suggested to me as fitter for the business of weeping; so I retired so far that even his presence could not be a burden to me. Thus was it then with me, and he perceived something of it; for something I suppose I had spoken, wherein the tones of my voice appeared choked with weeping, and so had risen up. He then remained where we were sitting, most extremely astonished. I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long? how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long, "to-morrow, and tomorrow?" Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read." Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find.

For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me: and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.

Then putting my finger between, or some other mark, I shut the volume, and with a calmed countenance made it known to Alypius. And what was wrought in him, which I knew not, he thus showed me. He asked to see what I had read: I showed him; and he looked even further than I had read, and I knew not what followed. This followed, him that is weak in the faith, receive; which he applied to himself, and disclosed to me. And by this admonition was he strengthened; and by a good resolution and purpose, and most corresponding to his character, wherein he did always very far differ from me, for the better, without any turbulent delay he joined me. Thence we go in to my mother; we tell her; she rejoiceth: we relate in order how it took place; she leaps for joy, and triumpheth, and blesseth Thee, Who are able to do above that which we ask or think; for she perceived that Thou hadst given her more for me, than she was wont to beg by her pitiful and most sorrowful groanings. For thou convertedst me unto Thyself, so that I sought neither wife, nor any hope of this world, standing in that rule of faith, where Thou hadst showed me unto her in a vision, so many years before. And Thou didst convert her mourning into joy, much more plentiful than she had desired, and in a much more precious and purer way than she erst required, by having grandchildren of my body.”

10. The flesh is at war with the Spirit.

- *Galatians 5:17 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.*

11. The works of the flesh are contrasted with the works of the Spirit. By the works of the flesh, no person can ever be saved.

- *Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 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. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*
- *Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

12. Care must be taken not to hold the flesh in total condemnation, for Christ came in the flesh.

- *1 John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:*

13. Augustine was converted by a passage that spoke directly to life, and to the conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

Special Note.

Rod Sterling, creator of the Twilight Zone, reviewed the Confessions of Saint Augustine, and decided it was the ravings of a neurotic. What disturbed Sterling most was the emphasis Augustine placed on an incident in his youth of stealing pears from an orchard, not out of hunger or need, but for the thrill of stealing. While certain sins are not excusable, but understandable, such as sexual drives, other sins are done out of sheer evil. Augustine did not need any stimulus to steal except the joy of doing something he knew was wrong.

14. One of the most selfish sins of all crimes is vandalism. There is no benefit except the joy of doing evil.

Special Note.

The history of the holocaust offers many examples of incredible evil, such as forcing women in cattle cars to give birth to a child, and then perishing with the baby. There was no reason for this atrocity, and so many others like it, except for the joy the Nazis found in causing pain to others. In Auschwitz, 8,000 people were cremated each day. Those who did the cremating had, what Joseph Conrad called, "a heart of darkness." Paul too wrote about having "a heart of darkness", but he called it a heart of "flesh."

15. The depravity of the human heart is described by Christ.

- *Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

16. The depravity of the human heart is what Paul meant by "flesh." It is the struggle between the human heart and the known will of God. It is not a struggle between the body and the mind, but between the heart of man and the Spirit of God.

- *Romans 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. 5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

17. This struggle between the flesh, and the Spirit of God, is a war. If the victory is not won by Christ, the heart will become hardened, or worse, seared.

18. Care must be taken not to equate the “flesh” with only speaking about bodily impulses, such as having a sexual appetite, or enjoying food. Prohibitions on the body does not exclusively deal with the heart of the flesh which wars against God, and which cannot please Him. There are physical sins, but there are nonphysical sins as well, such as envy, hatred, and anger.
19. The Greeks longed to be freed from the body. Christianity believes in the resurrection of the body. The Bible does not say that matter is evil, and the spirit is good. The Bible says that both body and spirit are made by God, and for God.
20. A person who pleases God, is a person who seeks the fruit of the spirit in life.