

## Doctrine of the Flesh

### The Battle with the Flesh

1. Because the Christian struggles with fleshly desires, no provision is to be made to fulfill them.
  - *Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 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.*
2. As a young man, Augustine gave himself to a life of licentiousness, until one day, his immorality was arrested by divine grace. Augustine was converted based on a passage that directly addressed the conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

#### ***Special Note.***

In Milan, Saint Augustine came under the influence of Saint Ambrose the bishop; he began to go hear his sermons, not so much with an expectation of profiting by them, as to gratify his curiosity, and to enjoy the eloquence. He found that the discourses more learned than the heresies he adopted, and began to read the New Testament, especially Saint Paul's writings. In the same time, the mother of Adeodatus, his son, went back to Africa leaving the child behind.

Saint Augustine's spiritual, moral, and intellectual struggle went on; he was convinced of the truth of Christianity, but his will was weaker than the worldly temptations, and delayed his return to Christ for many months. "Soon, in a little while, I shall make up my mind, but not right now" he kept telling himself. In his half desires of conversion he was accustomed to beg of God the grace of chastity, but was at the same time in some measure afraid of being heard too soon. He realized that his problem was a moral one. The Divine truth for which he was seeking would never be his unless he first overcame his weakness.

Soon after, Pontitian, an African, came to visit Saint Augustine and his friend Alipius; he told them about two men who had been suddenly turned to the service of God by reading about the life of Saint Anthony. His words had a powerful influence on the mind of Saint Augustine. He was ashamed his will has been so weak, and said to Alipius:

"What are we doing to let the unlearned seize Heaven by force, whilst we with all our knowledge remain behind, cowardly and heartless, wallowing in our sins? Because they have outstripped us and gone before, are we ashamed to follow them? Is it not more shameful not even to follow them?"

He rushed to the garden, greatly upset; tears filling his eyes, he threw himself on the grass under a fig tree, and reproached himself, bitterly crying out:

"And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long? Is it to be tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour put an end to shame?"

As he spoke these words he heard a child's voice singing "Tolle lege! Tolle lege!" (Take up and read! Take up and read!). He could not remember any childhood game he played with any such words. He remembered that Saint Anthony was converted from the world by hearing a single verse. He took up Saint Paul's epistles and read the first chapter that met his eyes: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; 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, fulfil the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:13-14)

When he told Alipius what he had experienced, Alipius took the book and read, he found the next words to be: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye" and applied them to himself and joined his friend in his resolution.

This high point in the conversion of Saint Augustine took place in September of AD 386, when he was 32 years old. He, his son Adeodatus, and Alipius, were baptized by Saint Ambrose at Easter the following year in the presence of Saint Monica. She knew that her prayers were answered and died shortly after (Coptic Orthodox Church Works).

3. When a person is converted, memories of sin bring shame. As an old man, writing his Confessions, Augustine remembered stealing pears when he was sixteen years old.

***Special Note.***

"There was a pear tree close to our own vineyard, heavily laden with fruit, which was not tempting either for its color or for its flavor. Late one night – having prolonged our games in the streets until then, as our bad habit was – a group of young scoundrels, and I among them, went to shake and rob this tree. We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden. Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart – which thou didst pity even in that bottomless pit. Behold, now let my heart confess to thee what it was seeking there, when I was being gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved my own undoing. I loved my error – not that for which I erred but the error itself. A depraved soul, falling away from security in thee to destruction in itself, seeking nothing from the shameful deed but shame itself" (Confessions, Book II).

4. Augustine understood a man starving, stealing a loaf of bread. He knew personally the overwhelming impulse of succumbing to inappropriate sexual urges. But what alarmed Augustine was that he stole pears when he did not like pears. He committed an act of evil for no rational reason. He committed sin for the sheer joy of doing something wrong. That is the nature of the flesh.
5. One of the greatest crimes of all is that of vandalism for vandalism, gives nothing to the person committing the act except a perverse sense of pleasure of harming someone else, or their property.

6. While reading the accounts of the Holocaust, it is hard to contemplate how much evil was performed by multitudes of individuals due to their hearts of darkness. There is evil in the world. There is evil in the human heart, which the Bible calls, flesh. The flesh must be put to death.
  - *Colossians 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:*
7. There is only one way the flesh can be mortified, or put to death, and that is through the Holy Spirit.
  - *Romans 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*
8. Though the power of the flesh is broken in conversion, and though the flesh can be subordinate to the Spirit, the power of the flesh is not totally annihilated. Paul acknowledged this, and cried out in anguish.
  - *Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*
9. Only by walking after the Spirit can a Christian hope to please God, and know peace.
  - *Romans 8:5 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. 9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*
10. “Christian, do you want to please God?” Then a way must be found to mortify the flesh.
11. This does not mean that the body has to be denied. Christian asceticism is not what is in view. The physical world is good, according to the divine commentary in Genesis 1. The physical is good, and life is to be enjoyed. The Christians hope is for a resurrected body.
12. The works of the flesh are plainly stated in Scripture. Some works of the flesh are united with physical actions, but other works of the flesh deal with the heart.
  - *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.*

**13.** The flesh refers to the old fallen nature, and that leads to death, physical death, and eternal death. A spirit filled life will emphasize the works of the Spirit.

**14.** A person who pleases God is a person who seeks the fruit of the Spirit in his life.

- *Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.*