

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (30) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#18. Three Great Foes: Second, the Flesh**

Introduction:

Let us begin our consideration of God’s Word by reading 1 Peter 2:11 and 12, which read,

¹¹Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from *fleshly lusts which war against the soul*, ¹²having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:11f)

God set forth through the hand of his apostle the nature of the Christian life in just a few words. Christians are dwelling temporarily in a foreign place, while living in this world. They are pilgrims but passing through this fallen world on their journey to their true and final home, in which they will dwell with the Lord and His people forever. But this passage toward their homeland is not an easy one. The Christian is battling throughout this journey, for he has a foe that would stop him, would block his path to his promised land of eternal Sabbath Rest. This enemy is his own “fleshly lusts”, which war against his soul, which would stop his progress, if that were possible, frustrating and defeating him in his journey.

Christians are as Israel, having come out of “Egypt”, the place that depicts our life in bondage to sin, the place from which the Lord Jesus has set us free. As Israel journeyed to their Promised Land they met with resistance. The Edomites would not let them pass on “the King’s Highway” that traversed their land. We read of this in **Numbers 20:14-21**.

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. “Thus says your brother Israel: ‘You know all the hardship that has befallen us, ¹⁵how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. ¹⁶When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. ¹⁷Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King’s Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.’”

¹⁸Then Edom said to him, “You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword.”

¹⁹So the children of Israel said to him, “We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more.”

²⁰Then he said, “You shall not pass through.” So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. ²¹Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

And so, the Christian life is set forth in Holy Scripture as a great war which Christians wage. It is not a physical warfare that we fight. Our Lord Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). But our conflict is not the less intense because it is spiritual in nature rather than physical. In some ways the spiritual war that we wage is greater and more intense than any physical warfare. For the foe we battle is greater than any physical foe that could ever take a stand against us. Moreover, the outcome of our warfare is far greater in importance. In earthly, physical warfare the

destiny of nations in this earthly, temporal sphere is at stake, but the eternal destiny and well-being of our souls is the outcome of our spiritual engagement.

We have shown that our spiritual enemies are three in number, all allied against us. We fight against the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*. The Apostle John wrote of the Christian's victory in our battle with the *world*: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). The Apostle Peter gave attention to the war we wage against our own *flesh*, or sinful desires, as we seek to live before God. We read in our passage of "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." And then the Apostle Paul wrote that we should be prepared for a spiritual battle against *spiritual forces*. We read in Ephesians 6:11-12, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Paul was speaking of the need to clothe oneself with the whole armor of God, in order to stand against the wiles of the *devil*. These three passages depict the spiritual warfare that we wage in our lives. We are continuously engaging in battle on three fronts against three enemies that are allied with one another against us. We fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Over the last five Sundays we addressed the first of these three--the world. We have shown that the world is primarily in the realm of our thinking. The world as our spiritual enemy is *the culture of this fallen world, its ideas, values, and practices that are in opposition to the will of God*. The world as an enemy would *deceive* us. We are not to be worldly, but rather godly; we are not to think like the world thinks, value what the world values, or seek what the world seeks. We are not to be conformed to this world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Cf. Rom. 12:1f).

Today we will consider the second of this hostile spiritual threesome with which we battle. This is in the realm of *our sinful desires and actions*, which the Scriptures frequently refer to as our "flesh", which Peter referred to as our "fleshly lusts."

I. The use of the word "flesh" in the New Testament/

Actually, the word, "flesh", has quite a broad range of meaning in the Holy Scriptures, more so in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. Sometimes "flesh" is a reference to the physical body, whether human or animal (1 Cor. 15:39), but commonly "flesh" is a reference to the human body (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 10:3; Phil. 1:22). When the word is used with this meaning, it does not connote the sinfulness of man, but simply his physical body. Flesh in this sense is also used to depict the physical body of the Lord Jesus. We read in John 1:14, "And the Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." We see this also in Hebrews 5:6-8:

As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";
⁷who, in the days of His *flesh*, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,
⁸though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

Obviously in these instances the word "flesh" does not speak of the seat of sin, for we read of our Lord, "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26). It speaks of his physical body while dwelling among us prior to His crucifixion and resurrection.

On occasion the word is used describe the weakness we have as frail and fallen human beings to live before God as we should. Our Lord Jesus said of some of His disciples, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41). He was not speaking here of their sinfulness, but rather of their weakness. This is the similar meaning to flesh in Romans 8:3f,

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the *flesh*, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the *flesh* but according to the Spirit.”

We see, then, that the word itself—flesh—may have a range of meanings.¹ Ultimately the immediate context suggests the nuance of the word.

But there are places in the Scriptures in which “*flesh*” denotes *the sinful principle that continues in the life of every Christian*. Clearly Paul was conveying this idea in this context of Romans 7:14ff:

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but *sin that dwells in me*. ¹⁸For I know that in me (that is, in my *flesh*) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but *sin that dwells in me*.

²¹I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²²For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to *the law of sin which is in my members*. ²⁴O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from *this body of death*? ²⁵I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but *with the flesh the law of sin*.

Now what Paul says here of his “flesh” cannot be said of our Lord Jesus. Here, therefore, “flesh” is not a reference to the human body, but rather to the sin principle which is in every one of us. This “flesh” is the enemy of our soul, which our true self, that new creation which God has made us in Christ Jesus, battles with daily. It used to be who we were before conversion, but now, because we are in union with Christ and have received new life in Him, our flesh is the foreign principle of sin that dwells within us. This is true, of course, only of Christians. Non-Christians are identified with their sinful flesh; that is who they are.

Let us consider more precisely what are...

II. Sins of the flesh

Again, we battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have already spoken of the sins that are characteristic of the fallen world. When we speak of the world as the spiritual enemy of the Christian, we are speaking of the culture of this fallen world, including its ideas, values, and practices that are in opposition to the holy will of God. Worldliness is largely in the realm of our *mind*, or our thinking. Worldliness is evident in how we think, what we value, what we intend to do or not do. But what of the sins of the flesh? It is probably an oversimplification or generalization, but we might say that the sins of the flesh are in the arena of our *senses, what we see, touch (feel), smell, hear, and taste*.² Sins of the flesh involve the forbidden or excessive stimulation of pleasure or excitement, the perversion in one or more of the five physical senses. For example, the sins of the flesh may be in *the arena of drug and alcohol abuse, or, in sexual licentiousness*. For example, we read of drunkenness in the KJV as the “excess of wine.”

¹ Vine lists 13 nuances of the word, flesh, in the New Testament. See W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell, 1966), pp.107f.

² To sharply distinguish between the sins of the world and the flesh is not always possible. For example, John links them with one another in 1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For *all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh*, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” We are distinguishing the sins of the world and flesh in order to explain and distinguish the spiritual enemies we battle.

To be overcome by our spiritual enemy the world, we think wrongly and thereby act wrongly. Again, Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” To be overcome by the world results in confusion and errant thinking, in assessing and evaluating, and in our aspirations and our planning. But to indulge in the sins of the flesh results in the loss of freedom. It results in slavery, bondage, helplessness, and self-destruction. Consider these verses that speak to this matter:

(1) Peter wrote of false teachers that were *enslaved* to the sins of the flesh who employ the lusts of the flesh to make a spoil of Christians.

¹⁸For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure *through the lusts of the flesh*, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. ¹⁹While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. ²⁰For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. (2 Peter 2:18-20)

(2) Paul wrote of our being set free from *enslavement* to sin through salvation in Jesus Christ.

¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²***But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*** ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:15-23)

(3) The Lord Jesus spoke of *the slavery to sin* of His detractors:

³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³²And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

³³They answered Him, “We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, ***whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.*** ³⁵And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. ³⁶Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:31-36)

In this reading we see that the Lord Jesus is the only One who is able to set free people who are enslaved in sin. We also see in the response of the Jewish leaders the common attitude and self-assessment of people who are enslaved to sin. They said to Jesus, “We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?” People who are enslaved to sin commonly do not understand their real condition.

To indulge in a sin of the flesh results in slavery to that sin, which the modern world calls addiction. After people give themselves over to sin, they are brought into captivity by that sin. They cannot escape the bondage they are in, even if and when they become aware of the serious condition in which they find

themselves. We understand the Holy Scriptures to teach us that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of sinners, who can both pardon them and deliver them from the power of sin that binds them.

Interestingly, **Alcohol Anonymous** was formed in 1935 by two men, Christian men, Bill Wilson and Bob Smith and in Akron, Ohio. They attempted to set forth principles from the Bible in their battle against alcoholism, principles which they taught and applied to all people, whether Christian or not. Now aside from stripping the Biblical message of Jesus Christ as the only Savior of mankind from sin, they did glean some principles that have helped men and women to a degree with the problem of alcohol. Their 12 Step Program includes an acknowledgment of helplessness and personal inability to break free of the bondage of alcohol. The following are the original twelve steps as published by **Alcoholics Anonymous**:³

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Now again, lest anyone misunderstand, I do not advocate AA, or any similar 12 step program, in order to fight against sin. Any plan or effort to fight against sin that does not look directly and clearly to the person of Jesus Christ alone, is not of God. It ultimately will not end well. Nevertheless, the founders of AA did rightly identify several important principles that the Word of God teaches regarding the Christian's battle against the sins of the flesh. The first of these is an acknowledgment that this sin (although they do not call it sin) is too powerful for them to break free of its control. Some Christians have not come to this truth respecting their own sin. Commonly Christians with a real sin problem think that it is either not a real bad problem, or they think that they can manage it on their own apart from Christ. They are as foolish as these Jewish leaders whom our Lord addressed in John 8.

III. The decent into sin.

When a person commits a sin of the flesh, he sets himself on a course that leads to his certain, inevitable ruin, destruction, and damnation, unless the Lord Jesus sets him free. A progression, or perhaps better, digression invariably takes place over time. This is due to several spiritual realities about the nature of sin. We might attempt to set forth these in number and development. And so, let us consider **sin's degradation**. Here is the process that commonly takes place when one commits the sin of the flesh.

1. The initial sin may seem to be a trifle thing, an indulgence that is not seen to be a serious infraction. It is a compromise of one's convictions, a yielding to temptation. Perhaps it is the viewing of a movie, the reading of an enticing narrative, the click of a mouse unto a website that has enticing images. And so it happens. You know that you have done what you should not have done. Perhaps there is an accompanying

³ Bill Wilson (June 2001). "Chapter 5: How It Works." Alcohol Anonymous (PDF) (4th Ed.). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. ISBN 1-893007-16-2.

sense of guilt and remorse. Perhaps a word of confession. But if true brokenness is not experienced, and full repentance does not occur, that initial sin will not be the end, but only the beginning of sorrows.

We have not yet addressed the devil as a spiritual enemy, when we do, we will need to speak of him as the tempter, who knows how to entice anyone to sin against God. If we yield to his temptation and commit this initial sin, we are set on a course that will become increasingly difficult to reverse, from which to recover.

2. That initial sin may have been committed in the face of a sensitive conscience. You knew better than to go there, but there you went anyway. But the second occasion to sin in the same manner then comes easier. And with the second or third occasion of the same sin perhaps again there is a violation of one's conscience, but perhaps not to the same degree as the initial transgression. But already a pattern may have been established, and a return to that sin becomes increasingly frequent. There is a hardening of one's heart to the gravity of sin with the ongoing commission of sin.

3. But the second and even third occasion of sin, leads to more egregious sin, for interestingly, we mistakenly think that indulging in a sin will satisfy a craving, a desire for that sin. It may do so, in the short term. But actually sin indulged leads one to be tempted to commit a more egregious sin than what he had first committed. It is like a drug junkie needing more of his drug to obtain the high that he no longer receives. Sin does not stand still. Sin leads to more sin, greater sin, more frequent sin, more egregious sin.

4. The consequences of sin affect the spiritual well-being of his soul. He does not have the same desire for the Lord and the things of the Lord as he once had. His interest and delight in the people of God are not as they were formerly. Perhaps the outward show of piety continues, perhaps for a prolonged time, but he eventually arrives to the place of those that our Lord had once addressed: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8). He comes to justify himself. Perhaps he is quick to discover the failures in other Christians about him, justifying his own behavior because "they do the same things."

5. It may be that a sense of guilt becomes quite acute at times. He makes resolutions to change his ways. He confesses his sin. He perhaps prays, but he increasingly discovers himself to be in bondage. He cannot break away, for he keeps going back to his sin repeatedly, maybe feeling miserable even while he surrenders to it. He is in despair, and finds little hope for he now has little faith, if any.

Perhaps the man in the **iron cage** in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrates the sad case of such a man. In the story Christian was speaking with Interpreter, who was guiding him through his house, room by room, in which scenes instructed Christian in the way of the Christian life. Christian desired to depart the house and continue his journey to the Celestial City. But the Interpreter would have him learn one more lesson.

'Now,' said Christian, 'let me go hence.' 'Nay, stay,' said the Interpreter, 'till I have showed thee a little more, and after that thou shalt go on thy way.' So he took him by the hand again, and led him into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an iron cage.

Now the man, to look on, seemed very sad; he sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if he would break his heart. Then said Christian, 'What means this?' At which the Interpreter bid him talk with the man.

Then said Christian to the man, 'What art thou?' The man answered, 'I am what I was not once.'

CHRISTIAN. What wast thou once?

The man said, 'I was once a fair and flourishing professor, Luke 8:13, both in mine own eyes, and also in the eyes of others: I once was, as I thought, fair for the Celestial City, and had then even joy at the thoughts that I should get thither.'

CHRISTIAN. Well, but what art thou now?

MAN IN THE IRON CAGE. I am now a man of despair, and am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out; Oh, now I cannot!

CHRISTIAN. But how camest thou in this condition?

MAN IN THE IRON CAGE. I left off to watch and be sober: I laid the reins, upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the Word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit, and he is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger, and he has left me: I have so hardened my heart, that I cannot repent.

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, 'But is there no hope for such a man as this?' 'Ask him,' said the Interpreter.

Then said Christian, 'Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the iron cage of despair?'

MAN IN THE IRON CAGE. No, none at all.

CHRISTIAN. Why, the Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.

MAN IN THE IRON CAGE. I have crucified him to myself afresh, Hebrews 6:6; I have despised his person, Luke 19:14; I have despised his righteousness; I have counted his blood an unholy thing; I have done despite to the Spirit of grace, Hebrews 10:29; therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises, and there now remains to me nothing but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, fearful threatenings, of certain judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour me as an adversary.

CHRISTIAN. For what did you bring yourself into this condition?

MAN. For the lusts, pleasures, and profits of this world, in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight; but now every one of those things also bite me, and gnaw me like a burning worm.

CHRISTIAN. But canst thou not now repent and turn?

MAN IN THE IRON CAGE. God hath denied me repentance. His Word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, himself hath shut me up in this iron cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out. O eternity! Eternity! How shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity!

Then said the Interpreter to Christian, 'Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee.' 'Well', said Christian, 'this is fearful! God help me to watch and be sober, and to pray that I may shun the cause of this man's misery! Sir, is it not time for me to go on my way now?'

Is there hope for someone like this? There is always the possibility for a sinner to come to Jesus Christ for salvation. Our Lord has promised, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter" (Mark 3:28). But it is true, however, that for those who have intentionally sinned against the grace of God in face of a clear knowledge of Him and His truth, God Himself may purpose not to save him. There is such a thing as the Lord judicially hardening the heart of the one who has refused repeatedly his warnings and exhortations. We read of this in the prophecy of Isaiah and as quoted by our Lord Himself.

¹⁰And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

¹¹He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
¹⁵For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.’

¹⁶But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matt. 13:10-17)

IV. Sins of the flesh—the digression and bondage of sexual sin

We live in a culture that has abandoned its Christian heritage regarding sexual sin as it is set forth in Holy Scripture. I can remember when the occurrence of a divorce in a community was a rare event and it was regarded as a great scandal. Adultery was viewed as a terrible, egregious sin. Everyone believed that sexual relations were only legal and righteous between a husband and wife within the marriage relationship. Premarital sexual relations happened, but it was always viewed as a defect of character and a cause of shame. Today there is no sexual sin forthrightly condemned in our society apart from some more bizarre and debased practice. While, as Christians, we attempt to hold forth God’s law as the standard by which all human behavior should be evaluated and judged, the world has digressed to “norms” that have been condemned in western society since the final days of the Roman Empire (a. AD 500). We are a society that is wholly surrendered to the sins of the flesh. Paul wrote, “***Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness...***” That is what characterizes our society today. The other day I was in a waiting room at the hospital. The television monitor was on “The View”, a program aired daily. It was Valentine Day, and they were celebrating. They showed couples in love, who were happy and embracing, and the viewing crowd cheered them on. They showed two homosexual men embracing in a long passionate kiss, again, with everyone cheering and celebrating the demonstration what they regarded as true, wholesome love between two people. Christians are now viewed as hardhearted, insensitive, bigots, for not celebrating such things. We are seen to be the bearers of hate within our society. The hostility toward us will only worsen with the passing of time. But we will remain true to God and His Word, as He enables us. We will declare what God has declared in the Holy Bible, God’s authoritative Word to all people in all places at all times.

Now without going into graphic detail, I think that it is important that we affirm biblical truth regarding these matters. Even as we do so, I am very mindful that the Scriptures declare that “it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret” (Eph. 5:12).

1. God created and established sexual relations between a husband and wife as a lawful, beautiful and enjoyable act of love and commitment. Sexual relations, between the husband and wife of a legitimate marriage in the sight of God, is blessed of God. (Cf. 1 Cor. 7:3-5).

2. All sexual relations or sexual activity that would tempt or lead to sexual relations outside of a God-ordained marriage is sin against God; it is transgression against God's law. The Scriptures declare: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, **for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous**" (Heb. 13:4). Yes, it is possible for defilement to take place in the marriage bed, but it is clear that all sexual relations outside of marriage is fornication and adultery. God will damn them in judgment who transgress His law unless they repent and believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior who alone can bring forgiveness of sin before God. God has declared in the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exo. 20:14). Fornicators and adulterers will not have salvation. They will be damned on the final Day of Judgment (Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

3. Since this is true, that God will damn those who commit sexual acts outside of the marriage relationship that He deems legitimate, the important question must be answered: What is, and what is not, a legitimate marriage in the sight of God?

(1) A legitimate marriage in the sight of God is one in which a man and woman are joined in marriage in a civil ceremony before witnesses. Roman Catholicism teaches that marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the church. They are wrong regarding this. Martin Luther rightly corrected this belief and practice, declaring that the Scriptures set forth marriage as a creation ordinance, not a church sacrament. Even non-Christians have the right and the responsibility of entering marriage, and God honors their marriages.

(2) A legitimate marriage in the sight of God is only between a man and woman who have not previously been married. Our Lord Jesus taught quite clearly, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:11). It is God's purpose and ideal for one man to be married to one woman for life. The Lord Jesus declared, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:5f).

There are, however, cases when a legitimate subsequent marriage is legitimate before God and blessed by Him. A man or woman who has been widowed, may remarry (Cf. 1 Cor. 7:39). Moreover, the Lord Jesus made allowance for a legitimate divorce and remarriage in the case of sexual sin on the part of a spouse. The Lord Jesus declared, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9).

Now it is sad but very common that every church contains marriages that have not conformed to the biblical standards which are set forth. How are Christians in those marriages to think and respond to the knowledge of the will of God in the Scriptures? First, if you have determined that your marriage was not entered into legitimately, that does not leave you in a place in which you cannot hope for and enjoy God's blessing on your marriage and family. It does not mean that your marriage is cursed and therefore doomed. But it is important as a married couple to acknowledge before one another and before the Lord of your failure, seek the forgiveness of God through confession of sin and faith in Jesus Christ, and then, without justifying your past action, seek to hold forth God's biblical ideal for marriage before others. God is in the forgiveness and restoration business. He brings beauty from ashes. He restores the days of the locust.

(3) To envision and fantasize committing sexual sin is itself sin that must be acknowledged and repented of before the Lord. Jesus declared, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). God regards that man as having sinned against Him.

But a point of clarification are in order. Although lusting after another who is not your spouse is sin, it is not as egregious as physically committing sin with another. It is always more serious to act out sin than just conceive sin in one's heart. Each is a damning sin, but the actual act of adultery is much more egregious. Second, I have known of a wife who has wrongly thought that she has biblical grounds for divorce because of her husband lusting after other women. "After all", it is reasoned, "he has committed

adultery in his heart, which is the same as actually doing it.” But if this were true, probably every Christian wife who has ever lived would have a legitimate grounds for divorce. No, legitimate divorce is in the case of actual, physical adultery.

(4) It is great error to believe that what people do in private does not have an adverse effect on others within a society. There is really no such thing as a private sin. The Holy Scriptures speak of corporate responsibility and accountability for the sins of a community which are not justly judged and punished. This is easily demonstrated in Scripture, and we would do so, if we had the time to do so.

(5) Some sins are enormously evil in the sight of God. Here is a common misunderstanding regarding the nature of sin and its gravity before God: some wrongly think that every sin, even all sins, are alike in the sight of God. This is not true. Yes, any one sin warrants God’s wrath. But to say that every sin is equal in degree of evil before God is not true. Under the Old Testament economy, some sins required sacrifice and restitution to various degree depending on how serious the infraction. But some sins warranted the death penalty. There are some sins that are more egregious sins than others. There are some sins which are an abomination before God.

Homosexual behavior, incest, and bestiality are set forth in God’s Word as warranting God’s unrelenting eternal wrath. We read in Leviticus 20 God’s laws respecting these sins:

¹⁰“The man who commits adultery with another man’s wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. ¹¹The man who lies with his father’s wife has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. ¹²If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion. Their blood shall be upon them. ¹³If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. ¹⁴If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you. ¹⁵If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. ¹⁶If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them. (Lev. 20:10-16)

But it has now come to pass in some so-called “free” nations of the world, that the law punishes with fines and imprisonment those who would even read and advocate what we have just read from God’s Word. The days are coming when this will be true in our own land, I suspect. I think it is inevitable, unless the Lord returns first or if He chooses to bring revival to our land. But the threat of government, or friends and family for that matter, does not our conviction nor does it any way dampen our resolve to proclaim the truth of God’s Word to our world.

No, we do not advocate putting to death these egregious transgressors of God’s law. We desire the salvation of their souls and for God’s mercy and grace in bring them to salvation. We desire to proclaim the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to them. He is able to deliver them from the power of their sin, pardon them of the guilt of their sin. Through Jesus Christ God will enable them to escape His just damnation of them for their sin, and to restore them to a life of holy living before Him. Paul could write of the Christians in the church at Corinth:

⁹Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹***And such were some of you.*** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

The Lord is in the business of saving sinners, and thankfully, great sinners. No sinner need despair, if he will come humbly, believing, yielding, submitting to King Jesus. God the Father has entrusted Him with all authority to pardon sins and to damn people in their sins. It is Him with whom we each have to do.

It is very clear that the Lord has given over our world to egregious sin. It is a downward slide into darkness and debauchery. Paul wrote of this in Romans 1, of which most of us are familiar, but needs to be read and repeated before all. Paul wrote:

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, ***not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*** (Rom. 1:18-32)

Take note of that final clause. God's Word declares that not only those who practice these things are damned by God, but those who approve of them in their debauchery, they also will suffer the same just end.

V. Paul's prescription on how not to live according to the flesh

Let us now turn to a familiar portion of Scripture in which the flesh as the sin principle within us is set against

¹⁶I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill ***the lust of the flesh.*** ¹⁷***For the flesh*** lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against ***the flesh***; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹Now ***the works of the flesh*** are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴And ***those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*** ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:16-26)

The only way we can escape the sin of the flesh is to resort to one who is able to both pardon and deliver us. May He give us grace to do so. And may He do a great work of salvation in our midst and through our witness as a church. The world is in desperate need of the Savior, whom we freely declare to them in the gospel.

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.
If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies,
that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ,
to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)
