

FLESH v SPIRIT



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'Flesh v Spirit'
by
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Flesh v Spirit

Jesus said in John 3:6 – “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” This is a black and white distinction that Jesus made between flesh and Spirit. But what did He mean? What is flesh and what is Spirit?

Spirit, Soul and Body

We are made up of three parts – our spirit, our soul and our body. When we were born-again, God took away our old spirit, our sinful spirit which we were all born with, and replaced it with a brand-new, perfect spirit which is just like Jesus. This spirit (small ‘s’) is then joined together with the Holy Spirit

(capital 'S') who God also gave us, making one spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17 says – *'he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.'* It is then sealed so nothing can ever get in and corrupt it.

(To read more about being born-again, go to the end of this booklet.)

So What Is the Flesh?

'Flesh' in the Bible refers to us apart from God. It doesn't mean the physical flesh of our body and it can't have anything to do with our spirit which is full of God. It's to do with our soul – where we think, feel and make decisions. So the flesh is thinking, feeling and making decisions without any reference to God at all.

And What or Who Is the Spirit?

When the Bible compares flesh and Spirit, Spirit always has a capital 'S'. This means it is talking about the Holy Spirit who comes to live in us once we are born-again.

'In' or 'According To'

The Bible talks about being 'in the flesh' or 'in the Spirit', which refers to a fixed place or position that cannot change. It isn't something that varies. Everyone lives either 'in the flesh' or 'in the Spirit' and it is impossible to live in both at the same time. We were all born 'in the flesh', but when you are born-again, you instantly change from being 'in the flesh' to being 'in the Spirit'. This is something that God brings about. And this position is then fixed. You cannot

become 'in the Spirit' any other way than by accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

But the Bible also talks about living 'according to the flesh' or 'according to the Spirit'. Some translations say 'after' or 'by'. This describes our life style. If you haven't been born-again, you are 'in the flesh' and have no choice but to live 'according to the flesh'. If you have been born-again, you are 'in the Spirit' but can either live 'according to the Spirit' or 'according to the flesh'.

Let's look at these phrases in more detail –

Living 'In the Flesh'

This is how we all used to be and how many still are. It can only describe someone who still has their old sinful spirit, because they have not been born-again.

Romans 7:18 says – *‘For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing.’* If there is nothing good in our flesh then no-one can please God by living ‘in’ it. Romans 8:8 says – *‘Those who are in the flesh can’t please God.’* There is no way you can please God if you have rejected or ignored His Son Jesus, who is the only way to get out of the flesh and live ‘in the Spirit’.

Trying to serve and please God through our own will, strength or goodness will never achieve what we want it to. It is like living under the Old Testament law. It just leads to frustration.

Living ‘In the Spirit’

This can only describe someone who is born-again. When you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, God took out your old

sinful spirit and gave you a brand-new perfect spirit just like Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says – *‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.’* And He also put His Holy Spirit in you. These two mingled together to become one. So now you are no longer ‘in the flesh’, but ‘in the Spirit’.

Be reassured, if you are born-again, you are ‘in the Spirit’. Romans 8:9 explains – *‘But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if it is so that the Spirit of God dwells in you.’*

Living ‘According To the Flesh’

Living ‘according to the flesh’ is trying to do things in your own strength and wisdom without reference to God. Instead of looking to God for His direction and help, when you

live ‘according to the flesh’, you don’t even think about God – your mind is set on the way you want to do things or the way the world thinks. Romans 8:5 says – ‘*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.*’ You do everything according to your five natural senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, instead of looking to God. This is what the Bible calls being carnal.

So what does living ‘according to the flesh’ look like? Galatians 5:19-21 says – ‘*the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.*’ You might think these are extreme ways of behaving. Maybe you haven’t committed murder, but do you

ever envy other people for what they have or can do? Do you sometimes cause strife by how you react to the way people talk to you or treat you? Do you idolise someone or something – maybe a sports team or a celebrity or even a Christian teacher? Are there things in your life that are so important to you that they influence the decisions you make?

Romans 8:6 says – ‘*the mind of the flesh is death.*’ Death is the end result of living this way – not necessarily physical death, but the death of your dreams and aspirations, the death of what God wants you to do, the death of your experience of true joy and peace. It achieves absolutely nothing of any lasting worth. Jesus says in John 6:63 – “*The flesh profits nothing.*” It profits nothing for you or for anyone else. Is that how you want to live?

And the following verse says in Romans 8:7 – *‘the mind of the flesh is hostile towards God, for it is not subject to God’s law, neither indeed can it be.’* Living ‘according to the flesh’ doesn’t take God and His truth into account at all, therefore it isn’t neutral, and so it is actually anti God.

Living ‘according to the flesh’ is the only way people who are not born-again can live. But people who are born-again may still fall into this way of living either permanently or from time to time. In Romans 7:15-24 Paul describes what it is like when we live ‘according to the flesh’ as born-again Christians – *‘For I don’t understand what I am doing. For I don’t practise what I desire to do; but what I hate, that I do.’*¹⁶ *But if what I don’t desire, that I do, I consent to the law that it is good.*¹⁷ *So now it is no more I*

that do it, but sin which dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing. For desire is present with me, but I don't find it doing that which is good. ¹⁹ For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practise. ²⁰ But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me. ²¹ I find then the law that, while I desire to do good, evil is present. ²² For I delight in God's law after the inward person, ²³ but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am!

But God, in His love, has provided a way out of this frustration. He goes on to say in Romans 7:24-25 – *'Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? ²⁵ I thank God*

through Jesus Christ, our Lord! Thank God indeed!

If, as a born-again Christian, you find yourself living ‘according to the flesh’, pull yourself up short and consciously turn your thoughts onto God and His truth. You can’t get rid of your flesh, so you need to decide to turn your thoughts away from it and onto God’s Word and all that Jesus has done and won for you. You will begin to see the difference it makes in how you feel and how things work out for you. You will start to experience life and peace instead of death. That sounds so much better doesn’t it!

Living ‘According To’ the Spirit

This can only be done by someone who is born-again and it is such a better way to live. Romans 8:6 says – *‘the mind of the Spirit is*

life and peace. Isn't life and peace better than death?!

Remember that list of things describing the deeds of the flesh? Well, in Galatians 5:22-23 there's a list describing the fruit of the Spirit – *'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, ²³gentleness, and self-control.'* What a difference! This describes an infinitely better way for us to live, both for our sake and for the sake of the people around us.

How To Live 'According To the Spirit'

We can't get rid of the flesh – it will never go away in this life. But we can deny it and this is what we need to do. It sounds like hard work but, as always with God, when we

choose His truth, He gives us the help we need.

Instead of concentrating on denying the flesh and all it wants to do, focus on the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says – *‘walk by the Spirit, and you won’t fulfil the lust of the flesh.’* So concentrate on the Spirit, not the flesh, because the two can’t operate at the same time. If we live ‘according to the Spirit’, we won’t be living ‘according to the flesh’.

Romans 8:5 tells us that – *‘those who live according to the Spirit, (set their minds on) the things of the Spirit.’* Learn to think about God and His truth, His direction and His way. It’s all there for you in His Word. Jesus says in John 6:63 – *“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and are life.”* To live ‘according to the Spirit’, renew your mind in God’s Word and determine to live your life by what the

Word says, rather than by what you think or the world says. Philippians 4:8 says – *‘whatever things are true, whatever things are honourable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report: if there is any virtue and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.’*

Romans 12:2 says – *‘Don’t be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.’* Get into God’s Word and renew your mind in the truth of God, in all His promises which are already yours in Jesus, and in all that Jesus has done and won for you. This is absolutely key. The more you renew your mind, the easier it is to live ‘according to the Spirit’.

Galatians 6:8 says – *‘For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.’* As you live ‘according to the Spirit’ you will find yourself on an upward spiral. It’s the only way you can experience all God has for you in this life, and avoid reaping all the negative outcomes of living ‘according to the flesh’.

As you renew your mind in God’s Word and focus on the things of the Spirit, the default of living ‘according to the flesh’ will gradually change to a new default of living ‘according to the Spirit’ and you will be able to reap all the wonderful blessings God has for you.

Your Choice

So are you ‘in the flesh’ or ‘in the Spirit’? If you’re ‘in the flesh’, then make today the day

you change that. Be born-again and you will instantly be living 'in the Spirit' instead. There can be no better choice.

Now you're 'in the Spirit', how are you going to live – 'according to the flesh' or 'according to the Spirit'? God has given you free will and will not force you to choose the Spirit's way of living. But He is guiding you towards it and desiring that you should choose it because He knows that it is the only way for you to live a truly fulfilled life. God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die for you, that you may be able to come into a personal love relationship with Him in this life and for eternity. He is drawing you to live 'in the Spirit' and 'according to the Spirit'. Choose the Spirit and allow God to lead you and help you – it's a decision you will never regret! Thank You Lord.

Being Born-Again

When you acknowledge Jesus as God and decide to follow Him, you make Him your Lord. When you accept His sacrifice on the Cross for you personally, you make Him your Saviour. You are then born-again. God becomes your Father and you His child, and you can start to enjoy your personal relationship with Him.

Romans 10:9 says – *‘If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’* Say this prayer out loud and believe it in your heart – “Jesus, I declare that You are Lord and that God raised You from the dead to live forevermore. Thank You for dying for me personally. I receive my forgiveness and my

salvation now. Thank You Jesus, my Lord and Saviour.”

You are now born-again and Jesus has come to live in you. All your sins are forgiven, past, present and future, and you have a new perfect spirit. And after this life is over, you'll live in love, peace and joy with your Father God for ever.

As a child of God, you now have a whole new family of brothers and sisters. Tell a trusted Christian that you are now born-again so they can help you in your new life in Jesus. And you have the Bible to help you understand and experience more of God's love for you and all Jesus has done and won for you. It will help you to live your life in the best possible way – His way.

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The Bible talks about living in the flesh or the Spirit.

And it also talks about living
according to the flesh or the Spirit.

What's the difference?

And what about you?

Are you in the flesh or the Spirit?

Do you live according to the flesh or the Spirit?

Find the answers to these questions and more.



Katherine Hilditch has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the

booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

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