

The Spirit and the Flesh

by Andrew Murray

The sermon emphasizes the importance of worshiping by the Spirit of God, glorying in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh, in order to persevere in the Spirit and avoid the danger of confidence in the flesh.

Scripture: Romans 8:5, Galatians 3:3, Philippians 3:3

Topics: "Surrender to the Holy Spirit", "Spirit vs. Flesh"

Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh, urging believers to recognize that true worship and service to God must be led by the Holy Spirit rather than relying on human effort or self-righteousness. He warns against the subtlety of the flesh, which can masquerade as religious zeal while actually hindering spiritual growth and obedience. Murray highlights the importance of complete surrender to the Spirit, as only through this can one truly glory in Christ Jesus and experience the fullness of life in Him. He calls for a deep trust in the Spirit's leading, reminding believers that confidence in the flesh ultimately leads to spiritual failure. The sermon concludes with a prayer for revelation and strength to overcome the flesh and live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

'Are you so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?'- Gal.3:3

'We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh; that I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.'- Phil 3:3

The flesh is the name by which Scripture designates our fallen nature, - soul and body. The soul at creation was placed between the spiritual or Divine and the sensible or worldly to each its due, and guide them into that union which would result in man attaining his destiny, a spiritual body. When the soul yielded to the temptation of the sensible, it broke away from the rule of the Spirit and came under the power of the body-it became flesh. And now the flesh is not only without the Spirit, but even hostile to it; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit.'

In this antagonism of the flesh to the Spirit there are two sides. On the one hand, the flesh lusts against the Spirit in its committing sin and transgressing God's law. On the other hand, its hostility to the Spirit is no less manifested in its seeking to serve God and do His will. In yielding to the flesh, the soul sought itself instead of the God to whom the Spirit linked it; selfishly prevailed over God's will; selfishness became its ruling principle. And now, so subtle and mighty is his spirit of self, that the flesh, not only in sinning against

God, but even when the soul learns to serve God, still asserts its power, refuses to let the Spirit alone lead, and, in its efforts to be religious, is still the great enemy that ever hinders and quenches the Spirit. It is owing to this deceitfulness of the flesh that there often takes place what Paul speaks of to the Galatians: 'Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?' Unless the surrender to the Spirit be very entire, and the holy waiting on Him be kept up in great dependence and humility, what has been begun in the Spirit, very easily and very speedily passes over into confidence in the flesh. And the remarkable thing is, what at first sight might appear a paradox, that just where the flesh seeks to serve God, there it becomes the strength of sin.

Do we not know, how the Pharisees, with 'self-righteousness and carnal religion, fell into pride and selfishness, and became the servants of sin? Was it not just among the Galatians, of whom Paul asks the question about perfecting in flesh what was begun in the Spirit, and whom he has so to warn against the righteousness of works, that the works of the flesh were so manifest, and that they were in danger of devouring one another? Satan has no more crafty device for keeping souls in bondage than inciting them to a religion in the flesh. He knows that the power of flesh can never please God or conquer sin, and in due time the flesh that has gained supremacy over the Spirit in the service of God, will assert and maintain that same supremacy in the service of sin. It is only where the Spirit truly and unceasingly has the entire lead and rule in the life of worship, that it will have the power to lead and rule in the life of practical obedience. If I am to deny self in: intercourse with men, to conquer selfishness and temper and want of love, I must first learn to deny self in the intercourse with God. There the soul, seat of self, must learn to bow to the Spirit, where God dwells.

The contrast between the worship in the Spirit and the trusting in the flesh is very beautifully expressed in Paul's description of the true circumcision, -the circumcision of the heart,-whose praise is not of men, but of God: 'Who worship the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.' Placing the glorying in Christ Jesus in the centre, as the very essence of the Christian faith and life, he marks on the one hand the great danger by which it is beset, on the other the safeguard by which its full enjoyment is secured. Confidence in the flesh is the one thing above all others that renders the glorying in Christ Jesus of none effect; worship by the Spirit the one thing that alone can make it indeed life and truth. May the Spirit reveal to us what it is thus to glory in Christ Jesus!

That there is a glorying in Christ Jesus that is accompanied by much confidence in the flesh, all history and experience teach us. Among the Galatians it was so. The teachers whom Paul used so earnestly were all preachers of Christ His cross. But they preached it, not as men taught by the Spirit to know what the infinite and pervading influence of that cross must be, but those who; having had the beginnings of God's Spirit, had yet allowed their own wisdom and their thoughts to say what that cross meant, and so reconciled it with a religion which to a very extent was legal and carnal. And the story of the Galatian Church is repeated to this day even in the Churches that are most confidently assured that they are free from the Galatian error. Just notice how often the doctrine of justification faith is spoken of as if that were the only teaching of the Epistle, while the doctrine of the Spirit's indwelling as received by faith, and walking by the Spirit, is hardly mentioned.

Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. The confidence in the flesh, in connection with the glorying in Christ, is seen in confidence in its own wisdom. Scripture is studied, and preached, and heard, and believed in, very much in the power of the natural mind with little insistence upon the absolute need the Spirit's personal teaching. It is seen in the absolute confidence with which men know that they have the truth, though they have it far more from human than Divine teaching, and in the absence of that teachableness

that waits for God to reveal His truth in His own light.

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is not only the Wisdom but the Power of God. The confidence in the flesh, along with much glorying in Christ Jesus, to be seen and felt in so much of the work of the Christian Church in which human effort and human arrangement take a much larger place than the waiting on the Power that comes from on high. In the larger ecclesiastical organizations, in individual churches and circles, in the inner life of the heart and closet--alas! how much unsuccessful effort, what oft-repeated failure, is to be traced to this one evil! There is no want of acknowledging Christ, His person and work, as our only hope, no want of giving Him the glory, and yet so much confidence in the flesh, rendering it of none effect.

Let me here ask again, whether there be not many a one striving earnestly for a life in the fullness of consecration and the fulness of blessing who will find here the secret of failure. To help such has been one of my first objects and most earnest prayers in writing this book. As in sermon or address, in book or conversation or private prayer, the fulness of Jesus was opened up to them, with the possibility of a holy life in Him, the soul felt it all so beautiful and so simple, that nothing could any longer keep it back. And perhaps, as it accepted of what was seen to be so sure and so near, it entered into an enjoyment and experienced a power before unknown. It had now learnt to glory in Christ Jesus! But it did not last. There was a worm at the root. Vain was the search for what the cause of the discomfiture was, or the way of restoration. Frequently the only answer that could be found was that the surrender was not entire, or faith's acceptance not perfect. And yet the soul felt sure that it was ready, as far as it knew, to give up all, and it did long to let Jesus have all and to trust Him for all. It could almost become hopeless of an impossible perfection, if perfect consecration and perfect faith were to be the condition of the blessing. And the promise had been that it would all be so simple,--just the life for the poor and feeble ones.

Listen, my brother, to the blessed teaching of God's word today. It was the confidence in the flesh that spoilt thy glorying in Christ Jesus. It was Self doing what the Spirit alone can do; it was Soul taking the lead, in the hope that the Spirit would second its efforts, instead of trusting the Holy Spirit to lead and do all, and then waiting Him. It was following Jesus, without the denial of self. It was this was the secret trouble. Come and listen to Paul as he tells of the only safeguard against this danger: ' We are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' Here are the two elements of spiritual worship, The Spirit exalts Jesus, and abases the flesh. And if we would truly glory in Jesus, and have Him glorified in us, if we would know the glory of Jesus in personal and unchanging experience, free from the impotence which always marks the efforts of the flesh, we must simply learn what this worship of God by the Spirit is.

I can only repeat, once again, what it is the purpose of this whole book to set forth as God's truth from His blessed word: Glory in Christ Jesus. Glory in Him as the Glorified One who baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. In great simplicity and trustfulness believe in Him as having given His own Spirit within you. Believe in that gift; believe in the Holy Spirit dwelling within you. Accept this the secret of the life of Christ in you: the Holy Spirit is dwelling in the hidden recesses of your Spirit. Meditate on it, believe Jesus and His Word concerning it, until your soul bows with holy fear and awe before God under the glory of the truth: the Holy Spirit of God is indeed dwelling in me.

Yield yourself to His leading. We have seen that leading is not first in the mind or thoughts, but in the life and disposition. Yield yourself to God, to be guided by the Holy Spirit in all your conduct. He is promised to those who love Jesus and obey Him: fear not to say that He knows you love and do obey Him with your

whole heart. Remember, then, what the one central object of His coming was : to restore the departed Lord Jesus to His disciples. ` I will not leave you orphans,' said Jesus ; ' I will come again to you.' I cannot glory a distant Jesus, from whom I am separated. When I try to do it, it is a thing of effort; I must have the help of the flesh to do it. I can only truly glory in a present Saviour, whom the Holy Spirit glorifies, reveals in His glory, within me. As He does this, the flesh is abased, and kept in its place of crucifixion as an accursed thing: as He does it, the deeds of the flesh are made to die. And my sole religion will be: no confidence in the flesh, glorying in Christ Jesus, worship by the Spirit of God.

Beloved believer! having begun in the Spirit, continue, go on, persevere in the Spirit. Beware of for one single moment, continuing or perfecting a work of the Spirit in the flesh. Let 'no confidence in the flesh' be your battle-cry ; let, a deep trust of the flesh and fear of grieving the Spirit by walking after the flesh, keep you very low and humble before God. Pray God for the spirit of revelation, that you may see how Jesus is all and does all, and how by the Holy Spirit a Divine Life indeed takes the place of your life, and Jesus is enthroned as the Keeper and Guide and Life of the soul.

Blessed God and Father! We thank Thee for the wondrous provision Thou hast made for Thy children's drawing nigh to Thee, glorying in Christ Jesus, and worshipping by the Spirit. Grant, we pray Thee, that such may be our life and all our religious service.

We feel the need of asking Thee to show us how the one great hindrance to such a life is the power of the flesh and the efforts of, the self-life. Open our eyes, we pray Thee, to this snare of Satan. May we all see how secret and how subtle is the temptation to have confidence in the flesh, and how easily we are led to, perfect , in the flesh what has been begun in the Spirit. May we learn to trust Thee to work in us by Thy Holy Spirit, both to will and to do.

Teach us, too, we pray Thee, to know how the flesh can be conquered and its power broken. In the death of Thy beloved Son our old man has been crucified: may we count all things but loss to be made conformable to that death, and have the old nature kept in the place of death. We do yield ourselves to the lead and rule of Thy Holy Spirit. We do believe that through the Spirit Christ is our life, so that instead of the life of effort and work, an entirely new life works within us. Our Father--in faith we give up all to Thy Spirit to be our life in us. Amen.

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