

# The Flesh and the Spirit

by Dennis Kinlaw

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*The sermon highlights the contrast between the flesh and the spirit, emphasizing that only God can produce the line that has a saving power within it.*

**Duration:** 1:02:23

**Scripture:** Genesis 17:17, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:1-2, 1 Corinthians 3:11

**Topics:** "Flesh And Spirit"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the two ways one can live - in the flesh or in the spirit. He refers to the book of Romans and Galatians to emphasize this point. Living in the flesh leads to death, while living in the spirit leads to life. The preacher also shares the story of Thomas Aquinas, highlighting the importance of having a personal relationship with Christ rather than relying on one's own accomplishments.

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## Transcript

Chapter Four of Paul's Galatian Letter Reading from verse twenty-two For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants.

One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves. This is Hagar. Now, Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem because she is in slavery with her children.

But the Jerusalem that is above is free and she is our mother. For it is written, Break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains. Because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.

Now, you brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time, the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

But what does the Scripture say? Get rid of the slave woman and her son. For the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son. Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

Let's bow our heads again for a moment of prayer. Lord Jesus, we thank you for giving to us your word. We know that apart from yourself, you've never given us a more priceless treasure.

And we want to understand it. But to understand it, we need your Spirit to help us. And we would like to ask you tonight to give him to us to quicken our minds and hearts to where we can understand your ways and think your thoughts.

And we will give you praise through Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen.

I'm going to have to teach a course at Asbury Theological Seminary this fall, filling in for someone else in Old Testament theology. And as a result of that, I've been trying to get myself ready to do something that I haven't done for about 11 years. And the whole field has changed in that time.

So I've gone back and began working my way back through a portion of the Old Testament. One of the things that I've done has been to try to work my way back through the book of Genesis. And as I have, I've found it extremely interesting.

I don't know how many times I've been through Genesis before because I'm 71 years of age and I started reading the thing seriously when I was 13, so you can figure. But it's interesting to me the things that I see now as I read it I've never seen before. Now, some of the things I will say to you are old hat to you too, but just let me go through them.

Isn't it interesting that this is a seed plot for the whole Bible? And at that time, what you get in that book is basically the story of certain people. You get the story of Adam and Eve. You get the story of Noah.

You get the story of Abraham. You get the story of Isaac. You get the story of Jacob.

And you get the story of Joseph. And that's all there is to the book of Genesis. Now, what is more significant to me is that in that period of human history there was no church.

And the people who lived in that day had no Bible. And the people who lived in that day had no church ritual or liturgy. And they had no hymn book.

They'd never been to communion, didn't know anything about baptism. They were a people without any of the things that mark religion for you and me in the sense of biblical Christianity. Well, let me tell you the astounding, one of the more astounding things to me is they didn't even know the Ten Commandments.

Because they hadn't been spoken yet. There was no moral spiritual law as we know it. And there's no discussion in the book of Genesis about sin.

Now, we know that the world was evil and so the judgment came. But there's no discussion of what the sins were particularly. And in the life of Abraham who is the model for us all, there's no discussion of the sins from which he was saved.

But let me really blow your mind. In the book of Genesis there's no discussion of life after death. Can you feature presenting the gospel without talking about the eternal consequences of sin? But what catches me the most is that Abraham in the New Testament is the model for justification by faith.

And we use that reformed language and biblical language to describe becoming a Christian. And he's the example for us all. Paul in Romans and Galatians, the writer of the book of Hebrews, James, none of

these guys pick up the later.

They don't pick up Peter as an example or one of the apostles. They don't even pick up John the Baptist, nor Isaiah, nor David, nor even Moses. But the model for us all is Abraham.

It goes all the way back to the first. Now, what is it that's most significant in Abraham's life? The main thing is we're told he walked with God. You remember he lived in Ur of the Chaldees, and God came to him and said, I want you to go on a long journey with me.

And he said, Lord, where are we going? And the Lord said, That's my problem, not yours. And Abraham said, I'd be a lot more comfortable if you'd tell me where we were going and what it was going to be like. And the Lord said, No, I'm not going to tell you why we're going or where we're going or what you're going to find.

All I'm going to tell you is whom you're going with. Now, I wish I knew how to preach that right, because do you know that's the essence of Christianity? More than anything else, the essence of it is you get him and you walk with him. And Abraham is picked out as the model for us all.

But do you know there is a story in Abraham's life that I've always regretted being there? It's really a miserable story. You remember how God came to Abraham and said, You're going to have a son. Out of that son will come a family.

Out of that family will come a nation. In that nation there will be kings. You will have royalty and your descendants.

And to that nation I will give a piece of real estate. I'll give a land that will be yours, the promised land. And through your seed, your descendants, I will give a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

Now, that promise was given to Abraham, and so Abraham began to walk with him in the hope that that promise would be fulfilled. Now, he was 75 when God said to him, You're going to have a son. And Sarah was 65.

And I'm sure Abraham and Sarah had some interesting conversations about that. And I can hear them saying, How's he going to pull this? I hope Abraham or Sarah, one looked at the other and said, Well, he's the one that put the woman's reproductive system together. He's the one that turns the clock on when a woman can and turns it off when she can't.

And I guess he can turn on one where it never works. And so, anyway, they believed. And they left their home, their country.

They left their social position, their securities. And they went out with the Lord to walk with him. And ten years passed.

Can you imagine the breakfast table conversations and the suppertime and bedtime conversations between Abraham and Sarah? And Sarah would get antsy. One day and another day it would be Abraham. Sarah said, I'm 70.

No baby. Abraham said, Yeah, I'm 75 with no child. I'm 85 with no child.

And you can imagine their discussion. Abe said, Did I hear him right? Sarah said, That's my question. Did you hear him right? Did we make a mistake in understanding? And then one day they began a discussion.

And Sarah said, You know, I think we're going to have to help him out because nothing's happening. It's been a whole decade. I'm 85, they've been 85, she's 75.

And so Sarah says, I've got a slave girl named Hagar. Maybe God meant to give you a son through somebody else and we'll help him out. She says, You take Hagar and sleep with her and let's see if we can help God fulfill his promise that way.

And so the first great man and the model for us all slept with his wife's slave girl. And she got pregnant. And when she got pregnant, she was elated.

And it wasn't long until she began saying, You know, I can do something my mistress can't do. That woman may be married to him, but I'm the one who's going to give him a son. And she began to think more highly of herself.

And as she did, she began to feel negatively and contemptuously against Sarah. Now this is the story that I wish all of that up to now about Hagar. I wish it weren't in there.

But wait. Sarah goes to Abraham and said, She's contemptuous of me. And I think something has to be done about it.

And he said, Well, what would you suggest? She said, I'd suggest you boot her out. And so Abe said, Okay, boot her out. And so the father of the faithful, in collaboration with his wife, booted out the woman who was going to give the father of the faithful a child.

And so she was excluded from the camp. There's a horrible scene where they're away and they don't have food. And the baby is crying, of course.

And the mother knows the baby's going to die and knows she could die. And so she lays the baby under one bush and goes as far away as she can get to get the sound of the crying out of her ears, but she can still see. And there she is.

And the father of the faithful was a part of that miserable scene. And then you'll remember God came and said, Hagar, I will take care of you and take care of your son. Now, you know, I've often wondered why that story was included.

Wouldn't Genesis be nicer if you didn't have that? So I got to thinking about why it was there. I read this thing in Galatians, and I decided it may be one of the most significant, one of the most valuable chapters in the book of Genesis. One of the things that's astounding to me is that the passages I used to like to skip over, now I find extremely interesting.

So if you've got any passages in the Bible that bore you, just wait a while. Sooner or later, they'll come alive, and you'll know why they're there. This is one that just recently, for the first time, came alive for me.

Now, let me tell you why I think it's there. It suddenly dawned on me not too long ago that everything that God promised Abraham, he got through Hagar except a Savior. I never thought of that.

Through Hagar, the slave girl, he got a son named Ishmael. And you know what Ishmael means? Ishmael means the Lord God has heard. Ishma, Ishma, is he heard? And the L part is the name of God, the word for God.

God is heard. So he was named as if he were an answer to prayer. So he got a son.

That son had 12 sons. We don't know how many daughters, but the family lines were predominantly through the sons, so he had 12 sons. So he got a family through that son.

He got nations through that son, among whom there were kings. And you know who owns most of the real estate in the Middle East today? It isn't the sons of Isaac. Do you know Abraham got everything that God promised him through Hagar except for Jesus? And God said, this is not the one.

It is in the next chapter that God comes to Abraham and says, Sarah is the one that's going to have the child through whom the blessing and the salvation is going to come. Now let me see if I can make plain what has become very impressive to me. I think there, probably better than anywhere else in the Scripture, you have a clear illustration of the difference between the flesh and the spirit.

Do you know how oftentimes in the New Testament you have a contrast between the flesh and the spirit? Read the book of Romans. You'll find it through, but especially in chapter 8. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now the older translations say, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.

Now you'll find that line is not in the more modern translations. But it doesn't matter whether it's in the more modern translations or not. You read the rest of that chapter and the next 10 verses, the next 12, 14 verses, you know what they are? A contrast between the flesh and the spirit.

So whoever put that there was giving you a summation of what the most of chapter 8 of the book of Romans is about. There are two ways you can live. One, you can live in the flesh, and the other one is you can live in the spirit.

Now you get that passage in chapter 4 of Galatians that I read about Hagar and Sarah. But if you turn to the 5th chapter and start with verse 16, you will find that Paul is saying in the Galatian letter, there are two ways you can live. One is you can live in the flesh, and the other is that you can live in the spirit.

And if you live in the flesh, you'll die. And if you live in the spirit, you'll live. And you get that horrible list of everything from adultery to all sorts of evils down to dissension and strife and jealousy and envy and drunkenness and orgies and all that list.

They are the fruit, they are the works of the flesh. And then you get the fruit of the spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, all of that. And you get the two contrasted.

Now, I think the Hagar story is there at the beginning of the Bible to get laid down the principle that is developed very fully later in the scripture, there are two ways I can live. One is I can live in the flesh, and the other is that I can live in the spirit. The one is what I can do, and the other is what God can do, and only God can do.

Now, you may not have noticed it. I wouldn't have noticed it if I hadn't been looking at it a good bit. But in the Galatian passage, when he talks about the two women, Hagar and Sarah, and the two covenants,

Sinai and the current Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem, and Sinai and Calvary, when he talks about the two covenants, he says that Ishmael is the son according to the ordinary way.

And the ordinary way, that's the way every child comes. But Isaac is called the child of promise. So you get a contrast between the ordinary way and the child of promise.

And do you know, I now think I know why Abraham had to wait 25 years to get him. I think God was just letting him know, you can't do it. You know, if the promise had come when he was 75 and when he was 76, he delivered, Abraham would have said, no problem.

One of the things I found in the Old Testament is that one of the most common themes in the Old Testament is that we're supposed to wait. And that's the thing I hate to do the most. You know, I want God to tell me today and have it done before night.

But the Old Testament, one of the greatest themes is wait. I've wondered what the value is. Do you know what I think it is? It's to let me know very clearly what I can do and what I can't do.

What he can do and what no way you and I can do it. You see, one of the themes of the Old Testament is, and you will never appreciate the richness of the New Testament if you do not see it clearly in the Old Testament, there is no salvation except in God. There is nothing any human being ever does that has any saving significance.

If there is anything that ever occurs that has saving significance, it's when he comes on the scene. You see, it's the child of promise. You and I can't do it.

So we have to wait for him. And then when he does it, we say, this is what we've been looking for. But when you and I say, we better help him out.

And always beware the person in Christian circles who says, we've got to do something. Watch it. Because when we begin to do it, you can count on it.

It will be sterile as sin. So I think the story is given there to give us the contrast between the flesh and the spirit, to let us know there are certain things we can do. We can produce the Ishmael, but only God can produce the line that has a saving power within it.

And so Sarah was sterile, barren, and it's interesting that Rebecca was. And it's interesting that Mary was a virgin. And those things go together.

The Savior comes by divine activity and not by human activity. Now he needs humans to accomplish it, which brings us to this. What's wrong with the flesh? You read the New Testament and it says the flesh is the way of death and it gives you all of these horrible things that are the works of the flesh.

But do you know that biblically the concept of the flesh is that it's good? Because who made it? God made it. God made Hagar. God made her reproductive system.

God gave them Ishmael. Do you know that the flesh is good because God made it? But what's being said is that something good, when it is separated from God, something good, when it is separated from God and from his control, becomes a substitute for the real thing. And if it's a substitute, it is a wrong way, it is a dead end street, it is a way to destruction instead of a way to life.

Now the place where it began to come home to me is, do you know the expression that we use? And you know I even hesitate to use it because I sort of cringe when I use it. Do you know what we talk about when we say one person has a carnal knowledge of another? It's a very distasteful concept, isn't it? Because instantly you think of something wrong, you think of something that is a violation of something sacred, and it is a violation of somebody's personhood, carnal knowledge. That word carnal speaks of something degraded and something that we recoil from.

But do you know the same C-A-R-N that you've got in carnal, which is a Latin word for flesh, is the word that is in the term that we use when we speak about Christ, the incarnate Son of God. The C-A-R-N in the incarnate Son of God or in the incarnation is the same Latin word as you've got in the C-A-R-N of carnal knowledge. One is degraded and the other is our salvation.

Now, it's interesting that God couldn't save from heaven. If he could, you wouldn't have needed Bethlehem. And it's interesting that God couldn't save in God.

God had to get into the flesh to save us because the Savior's got marks in his body and when we need him, he'll have a body. So you've got to recognize that when God made the flesh, he made it good. But you see, when it gets separated from God, do you know what the potential is? There is nothing in hell itself that isn't potentially in you or me when we're separated from God.

There is nothing in hell that is not potentially in me if you let me get separated from God and live away from him long enough. Now, I think that's the kind of thing that God is trying to get pointed out, the foundations laid for in the 16th chapter of the book of Genesis, which is the 5th chapter in the story of Abraham. You know, it begins in 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, or wait a minute, that's the 12, 13, 14, 15, yeah, it's the 5th chapter in the Abraham story.

Bang, he's trying to get it clear that when we are without God, when we get separated, you get Adam and Eve out of the garden and the next thing you get is Cain and Abel. Okay, so there it is to let us see the flesh cannot give us what we need. If we're saved, it's going to have to come from him.

Now, let me mention four characteristics of the flesh. The first one is, we've already mentioned it, it's sterile. It's the ordinary way.

It's not the way of promise and it cannot produce salvation. Now, you know, that's hard for us to learn because we keep trying to think we can do it. You read the life of Martin Luther and until that moment of illumination came when he saw that we were to be justified by faith, he was as religious as anybody in the world.

He was doing everything the church told him to do, but there was no new life in him. And one day he realized the just are to live by faith, not by human works. And he looked up and said, if I'm ever saved, you're going to have to do it.

And a transformation took place. Now, Methodists, you Presbyterians will forgive me for a minute, but Methodists especially ought to understand that. But we don't.

We don't. You read the life of Wesley and you'll remember that he was 35 years of age. He'd grown up in one of the most devout homes that England ever had.

His mother was one of the godliest women that ever lived. He had the training in the church and he had the best education at Oxford you could get. He was ordained in the Anglican clergy and he had been a missionary.

And he was 35 years of age and he had come to the end of himself. And so one night he went to, of all things for an Anglican established church, he went to a disestablished, you know, he went to one of these groups that the Anglicans looked down their nose at. And it's interesting, God usually has to do that kind of thing with us.

And so he went to this Moravian meeting, you know, and somebody was reading Luther's preface to the book of Romans. And he said, Suddenly I felt my heart strangely warmed and felt that God for Christ's sake had forgiven me my sins, not because of anything I had done, but because of what Christ did for me. You see, the ordinary way is what we can do.

The way of promise is what he can do. I felt that God for Christ's sake, not because of what I had done, had forgiven me of my sins, even mine. And I had been set free from the law of sin and of death.

And the interesting thing is, he not only tells you what year it was, 1738, he not only tells you what month it was, it was in May, and he not only tells you what day it was, it was the 24th. The funny thing is, he tells you what time of day. It was about a quarter before nine.

It was about 25 minutes from now. At about a quarter before nine. You know, I expect when Sarah was 90 years of age and when she got pregnant, she knew it.

Now, you know, we can't produce it. Only he can produce it. I grew up in a Methodist church.

My mother and father were devout. I don't ever remember a day that I didn't see my father reading the Bible. He was a lawyer.

When I was in high school, I'd come in earlier than I would have otherwise because he'd get up in the middle of the night, and what'd he do? Read the Bible. And if I came in too late, he was sitting there reading the Bible. That was enough to make me uncomfortable.

So I'd come in earlier before he got up. Last night of his life, last time my mother heard his voice, he was quoting Scripture to himself. I grew up in that kind of home.

I remember when I was 12, my mother and father, who wanted me to find Christ, took me to a Baptist church, to a Baptist revival, and I went forward. I can remember going home that night, looking out the back window of a Model A Ford, feeling glad that I'd done that. But do you know two weeks later, I wasn't a bit different than I'd been two weeks before? And then six months later, I found myself in a Bible class in a camp, and a lady looked at me and said to me, they called her Mother Clark.

Dennis, do you know Christ? I said, oh, no. If it had been my mother, I'd have lied to her. If it had been my Sunday school teacher or my pastor, I'd have lied to them.

But I was away from home. Goodness of God. She was a stranger, but I'd heard her teach three days, and something inside me said she's real and said you can trust her.

I said, oh, no. She said, wouldn't you like to be? I said, well, of course. You know, I don't remember a thing she said in her prayer.

I don't remember a thing I prayed. But, you know, when we got up off our knees, I was regenerated. And the significant thing was not something I did.

It was something he did. I tried it all. I was baptized, took communion, did it all, you know.

But he did. The flesh, there is a sterility in it. Now, don't kick it because it just can't do it.

The salvation is in God. It's not in us. Now, the second thing is that the flesh, if you do not have it touched by the Spirit, becomes enslaving because it won't let you break out.

Let me give you a story, an illustration I've never forgotten. We, Elsie and I, had a pastor for 22 years named David Seamans. David Seamans, one of the greatest preachers I ever heard.

I don't ever remember really being bored in a Sunday service in 22 years. And I'm not the kind that you entertain easily. My mind can wander.

You know, I'm the kind that can count every board in the ceiling and every light and all the rest of that stuff. I do not ever remember a boring Sunday with David Seamans. But in 1970, the revival broke out at Asbury.

David and I had been in college together with Deet, Snyder, and Mark when we were at Asbury. And the Spirit came on Tuesday morning. His auditorium was full of people for the next eight days.

On Saturday night, I'd gone home for a few minutes and had come back to Hughes, and the place was jammed. And I looked for a seat, and the only place I could find a seat was down on the second row from the front on the left. And when I got there, I saw the empty seats, and when I got down there, there was David on about the third seat, and the first two seats were empty.

So I walked in, and we sat down. I sat next to David. I don't know how long we'd been sitting there.

Hour, hour and a half. When suddenly David reached over and grabbed my right arm and began to squeeze it, and I turned and looked at him, and his face was red as a beet, and his eyes were full. And he said, Dennis, I've got to tell somebody.

And so we had a little conference right there while everything was going on. He said it was at supper tonight. I was sitting at one end of the table, and Helen was sitting at the other.

And my son was sitting on one side, Steve, and my daughter on the other. He said we were about halfway through the meal when Helen looked up and said, I have something I need to say. She said, you know, when we had to come home from India, there were missionaries in India, Methodist missionaries.

When we had to come home from India, we came home in the spring. They had a son who had a club foot, and it was going to have to be a whole succession of surgeries. And so they came home in late April or May, and they came to June.

And so they had to have some way to support them, so they agreed to take a Methodist pastorate, and they were assigned to Wilmore. Now, I don't know what you think about Wilmore, but Helen Siemens grew up in Wilmore. Her father was pastor of Wilmore Methodist Church.

And right next door to the parsonage was one of the crankiest old crones you ever met. And there were some other people in town that were not always there. And Helen Siemens grew up with a deep animosity toward Wilmore.

And so now she's a grown woman, returned missionary, and their assignment is Wilmore. So the revival breaks, and she's sitting at her dinner table with her son and daughter and her husband. And she looks over at her husband and says, Now, David, you know that when we came home from India and when we were assigned to Wilmore, I hated every thought of it.

I hated everything about this town. I hated the town. I hated the church.

I hated the college. I hated the seminary. I hated everything here.

And she said, Here we were assigned. And she said, We've got here. And it didn't get any better.

She said, I knew it was wrong to have that kind of attitude. And she said, I tried to change my attitude. But she said, it didn't work.

She said, I went forward in a service to pray about it. That didn't work. She said, I found a sign that said, Expect a miracle.

And I put it on my desk at the theological seminary where she was the secretary to the dean. And she said, I kept looking at that. Expect a miracle.

And she said, You know, it never came. And she said Thursday, I was in Hughes Auditorium, and a girl came up to me and she said, Mrs. Seamans, I've looked everywhere for your husband. I cannot find him.

I need somebody who will counsel me and pray with me. Will you pray with me? And she said, I didn't want to pray with her. I wasn't in condition to pray with anybody.

And she said, I looked desperately around. I couldn't find you. But she said, I was trapped.

And I found myself listening to this girl as she poured out her pain and her guilt and her agony when she said, Suddenly I saw you, David. And she said, I said to the girl, Hold it just a minute. And I went running and I got you and brought you.

And she said, You sat down and you started dealing with the girl. And then you began to pray. And you got her into the kingdom.

And she said, David, while you were getting her in, I got in. And I want you to know that for the first time, I'm on your team. He shook all over.

He said, Dennis, I had to tell somebody. And do you know there was radical change in her and him and some of the rest of us in that kind of circumstance, you know. But what fascinated me was she was a preacher's daughter, graduate of Asbury College.

She was a Methodist missionary in India. She was a pastor's wife. She didn't want to be that way.

But there was no way out until God did something she couldn't do. And you say, Why did God let her live in that thing so long? Do you know, I think, why he let her live? Until she could learn that she couldn't do it. Because if there's any notion inside me that I can do it, there's no chance of it ever occurring.

I've got to come to the place where I know that what I need, I cannot produce. So, there's a bondage in it. And you get trapped in that bondage.

Now, there's also a hostility. You remember in the Hagar story, Ishmael story, how Ishmael and Isaac were in conflict with each other? And do you know the flesh lusts against the spirit and the two are contrary to each other? And they will fight, fight, fight. And you will find it in the church.

I remember the president of Asbury College, Dr. Morrison, telling a story when I was young, I never forgot. He was pastor of the First Methodist Church in the capital city of Kentucky in Frankfurt. And it was a society church.

He was a very prominent young rising preacher, gifted orator, brilliant speaker. And one day, but he had a great love for the gospel and he preached a very direct, straightforward gospel sermon. And he said, I noticed the face of the most influential man in the church.

He said, by the look on his face, I knew I'd have a visitor the next morning. And so he said, at eight o'clock I was in my study and at eight o'clock there was a rap on the door. And I said, come in.

And he said, my man came in. Just like I expected. And he said, he sat down and said, now, Brother Morrison, we're so glad to have you as a pastor in Frankfurt.

And you're such a gifted speaker. And we're so grateful to have a person of your gifts and so forth. And he bragged on him a little.

But he said, now, about that sermon yesterday. And he said, you could feel the animosity inside him because the flesh had been touched. And the flesh lost against the Spirit.

That's the reason the only way out is through repentance and death to the flesh. Crucifixion. Because it will fight, fight, fight.

Who was it that crucified Jesus? It wasn't the Roman government. It was the chosen people. It was the elect nation.

It was the predestined people. The elect nation that did it. It was the temple itself that did it.

It was the high priest who had the final word. Now, there's the hostility there. You'll remember the Roman governor said, let me give you Barabbas.

And the church, the fleshly church said, we want Jesus and we want to crucify him. There is no compromise between the two. And there is no way the two ultimately can live together.

Okay. Now, the fourth thing I want to say is that the problem in it is that they're so much alike. Did you know the flesh can simulate almost everything the Spirit can do? No outsider could have told the difference between what Ishmael looked like and what Isaac looked like.

But the hope of the world was in one and it wasn't in the other. And in that day, the best people in the world, you know, they looked at the temple and that was a symbol for God. And the two can look alike.

Hagar gave Abraham everything that Sarah gave him. But through Sarah, God gave something he didn't give through Hagar. And we need a sensitivity to whether God is in it or whether or not.

Now, how much are they alike? You remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that in that day, the day, final day, there will be people who will say, Lord, didn't we say, we said, called you Lord? Lord. Speak the right language. Haven't we prophesied in your name? Prophecy is a great thing, isn't it? Do you know you can prophesy and it will be all flesh? Haven't we cast out devils in your name? You read the New Testament carefully enough and you'll find it says that unbelievers, people who were not regenerate, had the power to cast out devils.

Do you remember the guy that cast him out? Then the devil wandered and then came back? The fellow was seven times worse off than he was before him. They said, haven't we cast out devils in your name? Why, we've done miracles in your name, Lord. And the Lord said, I never knew you.

But do you remember 1 Corinthians 13? You can have tongues of men and of angels. You can preach like an angel. You can have the gift of prophecy.

You can understand all mysteries. You can have all sorts of theological knowledge. You can have faith to produce miracles.

You can do works of mercy and take care of the poor and the needy. You can be a martyr. Isn't that interesting? I think Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 was trying to underscore the 16th chapter of Genesis.

You can have it all. But if you don't have the Spirit and His work inside you, then it counts for nothing. Do you know that Thomas Aquinas, the greatest brain in the history of the Christian church, who wrote those incredible psumas, when he came to the end of his days, quit writing.

And he'd sit still and not pick up his pen and would not say a word. In those last months he was so silent they called him a dumb ox. But the man, his secretary, who wrote for him and worked with him, pled with him and said, You must, Father, you must write, write.

The world is waiting, the church is waiting to hear what you say. And one day he turned to his secretary and said, Everything I've done up to now is dust and ashes. He took a trip to Rome.

His secretary was so pleased. He thought he'd get the inspiration to write this brilliant stuff. But on the way he stopped at a monastery and they asked him if he'd speak to the monks.

And so for the first time in a long time he began speaking. You know what he spoke on? The psalm of Psalms. And the personal relationship that a person needs between himself and Christ.

The love relationship. And before he finished he was dead. But he counted everything he'd ever done.

Do you remember what it says in 1 Corinthians 3? He says, there's only one foundation, that's Christ. You know, for years I thought that said, Now there are many foundations, but Jesus is the best. That's exactly what he didn't say.

I don't know how old I was. I was president of Asbury College before I thought that what he said was, didn't say. There are many foundations and he's the best.

What he says is, he's the only one. And anything you do that isn't built on him will count for nothing. It'll be down the drain.

He said, but do you know what he said? Even for those who build on him, there are some who build with wood, hay, and stubble. And when the fire comes, it'll burn it all up. And wouldn't it be tragic to come to the end of your days and find you've given your life to stuff that had no significance? I think that's why that horrible story is stuck in there, to help me understand that.

Dramatically presented so I can't miss it. The flesh, the process, nothing. It's the spirit that gives life.

I've done a lot of work at Brandeis University in ancient Near Eastern literature. And one of the things we've studied was Hamiropis Code, which is the oldest legal code in the world. It's from Abraham's time in Babylon.

And do you know what you have in Hamiropis Code? You have a section that says, if a woman cannot give her husband a son, then what she should do is she should give him a slave girl. So every man deserves a progeny, and every woman deserves a progeny. So if she can't produce it, then she provides a slave girl for her husband so that he can have a child, and the family name can go on, and the family estate can be kept together.

So the law says that Sarah did exactly what a good citizen would do. But do you know something else? Hamiropis Code says that if this takes place, and the slave girl, when she gets pregnant, begins to get uptity about it, and look down her nose at her mistress, the mistress and the master should boot her out. So do you know that what Sarah did, according to the law and the customs of the time, it was legal, it was ethical, it was right? She owed it according to her culture to Abraham.

She wasn't doing something according to our standards, it was according to their standards. But it was wrong. Do you know you can do perfectly right and it be wrong? Because it isn't what God wants you to do? And if you do it, it'll create problems, and it won't give you what you need, what the world needs, but if God's in it, even if the world's opposed to it, it'll give us what we need.

Now I tried to think of, you've been patient, thank you for the way you listen, but I tried to think of an illustration to drive that home for us, for us to think about. Of course, what I'm getting at is, and I'm talking to me as well as to you, see, I'm getting toward the end. I'd hate to come to the end and find that I invested my life in flesh, and you can do it in religious flesh.

If there's any generation in human history that ought to understand that, this generation ought to understand that. Tell me about Jim Baker and his empire. Do you know how many millions of dollars went through that man's hands? Paul said to the Philippians, I know I'm in prison, and there's some of you, some who've taken advantage of my imprisonment, and they're preaching Christ out of contention and strife and personal self-interest.

You look at what we've seen in our day. But you know, I've seen, now that could hit the newspapers, but I've been in a lot of churches, that when it's all over with, there's not going to be much fruit from it. Of eternal significance.

And do you know you can be a sincere gospel preacher and there not be much from it? I have a friend who is, I'm on a board that meets twice a year. Usually meets in Chicago. We come in on a Tuesday afternoon and eat dinner together Tuesday night, Tuesday evening, and then we have a meeting on Tuesday night, and then we spend Wednesday together until about three in the afternoon, and then we all head for the airport.

So it's less than 24 hours that we're together twice a year. But I've been doing that for probably about 12 years with this bunch, maybe 14. And I've gotten to know the guys that sit around that table.

And there's one fellow, if I can, I always try to sit next to him. We have never met or had a minute's conversation outside of those four days. But the conversation we have had in those has been very precious.

I always know when we talk. Spirit meets spirit. So it was about two years ago we finished the board meeting, and at three o'clock we headed for O'Hare.

And we were both flying Delta. He's in the Southwest. He's a Baptist in Southern Baptist Church Convention.

He's got a convention job in the Southwest. He was headed out on Delta and I was too, and our gates were right next to each other. So we found ourselves standing together waiting for our plane.

And suddenly he looked at me and he said, Dennis, can I tell you a story? And I knew something good was coming. So I said, yeah. So he said, you know, I found Christ when I was 17.

He said, God called me to preach. And he said, I went away to the university to get prepared. I had trouble getting through because my family were sharecroppers.

But he said, due time, I made it. Then I went to seminary, Southwestern Seminary, and graduated. I was called to a Baptist congregation.

I began my pastoral ministry. He said, I began moving up. My reputation began to build.

When I was about 32, he said, I had a multiple staff. I had a church that was growing and my reputation was beginning to build. He said, I had felt pretty good about myself.

But he said, when I got to about 32, he said, I began to sense there was something empty in it all. And I thought, this is all there is to it. There's not what it was cracked up to be, I thought.

He said, slowly, God began to deal with me. And he said, as he dealt with me, I became hungrier and hungrier. He said, I wanted my life to count.

So he said, one night, I went in my study, locked the door behind me, shut the light off, and he said, I fell flat on my face on the floor. And he said, God, it's nothing more. It isn't worth it.

I can't make it. And he said, Dennis, I don't know whether you'll understand this or not. But he said, as I lay there and cried out my soul to God, he said, it was just as if I were a briefcase.

And God came along and picked me up and turned me upside down and began to shake me. And he said, as he shook me, he said it was appalling what shook out. The self-interest, the pride, the self-will.

He said all sorts of nasty stuff that I tried to think wasn't there. But he said he just shook and kept on shaking. And he said, what a mess.

But he said, you know, after he'd shaken a long time, and all I could say was, have I been that unclean within? He said it was as if he'd turned me right side up. And then he filled me with himself. And he said he cleaned me out inside.

And where there had been an awful lot of me, he took total possession. Isn't that interesting? He came to the end of the me. And he said he took total possession of me.

And he said, you know, Ken Law, I don't know whether it really happened or not, but I would have sworn that it got brightly lit in that room with no light on. And he said, you know, I knew that I was different. He said, I thought, what should I do with this now? So he said, as I thought about it, I decided I wouldn't tell anybody.

So he said, I didn't tell a soul. He said it wasn't too many weeks when one day we were in a staff meeting. He said, we finished our agenda.

And he said, I noticed nobody made a move to leave. And he said, I looked over, and everybody was looking at one person. And he said, he looked sort of antsy.

And he said, I knew something was coming. And he said, the guy began hesitantly to speak and said, Pastor, we've been talking, and we've got a question. It's very personal.

And we don't know whether you want to answer it or not. But if you would, we'd appreciate it. Well, he said, what's the question? They said, Preacher, we think something has happened to you.

You are different. Would you be willing to tell us what it is? So he said, I told them. And they said, well, we knew something had happened.

Then he said, but now don't you tell anybody. He said, it wasn't too many weeks after that. We were in a Board of Deacons meeting.

And he said, we finished our agenda. And when we got to the end of our agenda, he said, it got real still, and nobody moved. And he said, I noticed everybody was staring at the chairman.

And he said, he looked over at me and hesitantly said, Pastor, we've got a question. It's a very personal question, and you may not want to answer it. But if you would, we'd appreciate it.

He said, well, what is your question? He said, the board chairman said, we think something's happened to you. You're different. And we'd love it if you'd tell us what happened, if it's true.

And he said, I looked at him and said, yeah, something's happened. He said, I explained to him how I'd come to the end of me and the beginning of his growing. And they said, well, we like to change.

And then he said to me, he said, Dennis, I wouldn't go back to what my life was like before that for anything in the world. He said, living in spirit is a different world, life, from living in the flesh, even partially living in the flesh. And he said, the fruitfulness in my ministry really began there.

He's a joyous, free human being. And, you know, I thought, I'm glad that Hager story is in there. Because, you see, that's exactly what Bill Hogue was doing.

He was trying to produce the kind of ministry that only the Holy Ghost can produce. Now, that applies, I think, to you and me in two ways. One, I need to come to the end of me where the flesh is not hindering the spirit, is subordinated to the spirit.

And the spirit of Christ is in total control. Because if not, the flesh will fight the spirit and will die. You can't live that way forever.

You're going to go one way or the other. But I not only need it so that I can be filled with the spirit and possessed by him so that my life is fruitful in eternal things. But you know, I ought to be careful that I invest my time and my energy and my resources in something that is not fleshly.

You know how easy it is to put your tithe just to religious cause, do you put it that way? You know, I've come to the place where I'd like everything about that I've got to be under the control of the spirit so it'll be fruitful eternally. Now, that's the reason I think we have retreats like this. So we can have time to stop and think and say, Lord, is there some of me left in my way or does the spirit possess and control me? Am I wholly yours, Lord? And am I giving what I've got of my time and my heart, my energies, my possessions, these things, am I giving it all into something that the spirit is in and that will bear eternal fruit? Or am I building on the foundation something of wood, hay, and stubble that when the fire comes it'll all be ashes? That's where I wanted to begin tonight.

You've been patient. You've traveled a day. But I hope as we go that you'll be saying, Lord, am I living in the spirit? There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

And say, if there's any of the flesh left, Lord, I want you to get rid of Hagar and her son, the flame. I want to belong wholly to you. Let's bow our heads together for prayer.

Prayer heads bowed, our eyes closed. Before I pray, I wonder if there's anybody in the crowd who would say, I want you to pray for me about that. I want to evaluate my life.

I know that I know Christ and I love him. And I want all that I am and have and all that I, the person that I am, I want it all to be under the control of his spirit. I don't want to be a part of something that's going to be swept away in that town.

I want to be one. I want to count for Christ. I want to walk in the spirit, live in the spirit.

Anybody says, I want you to pray with me that God will help me evaluate my life, these hours that we have together. Would you swipe up your hand? Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Father, thank you for the privilege of getting away from home and the ordinary pressures.

Thank you for the quietness of this place. And thank you for the fellowship. We don't understand the mystery of it, but we know that when we meet together with fellow believers, you're there and you're here and you're here to teach us, you're here to instruct us, you're here to lay your hands on our lives and touch us.

So Lord, let this be an altar time for us and don't let one of us go down off this mountain until we're wholly on that altar and we're totally yours. We want to be instruments sanctified and neat for the master's use, possessed through your spirit. We want to be free channels for your spirit to flow through us.

We want the kind of change in us that Bill Hobes, people saw in him. And so speak to us tonight and in the morning as we come together. And as we meet around for prayer and around your word, you show us the

way and then help us to walk in it.

Get us out of the ordinary, get us into the light of the promise, and we'll give you thanks in Christ's name.  
Amen.

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