

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scriptures: John 6:52-60; Galatians 5:16-25;
Ex. 17:8-16; Malachi 1:1-4

"The Flesh Profits Nothing"

ONE MORE REASON TO BELIEVE

There are many reasons why I believe the Bible to be the Word of God and why I believe Jesus Christ is Lord of heaven and earth. Today, we find a perfect example. In our Gospel lesson from John, Jesus says, ***"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing."*** That is not only a profound statement but it is an everyday truth. ***"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing."***

To understand this profound truth, one needs to look at its context. Recall Jesus says that He gives His life for the world and anyone who eats His flesh and drinks His blood will have life. He goes further on to say that unless you eat His flesh and drink His blood you cannot have life within you. The most common interpretation of this passage views it as the theological affirmation of the Holy Eucharist – holy communion – We read from Acts that the early church was devoted to four things – the apostle's teaching, the prayers, fellowship, and the breaking of the bread. Jesus on the night before He died redefined the Jewish Passover – rather than simply celebrating the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt and God passing over the first born, it now represents the new life we have in Christ through His death. He is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

And whenever we gather and break the bread and drink the cup, we are proclaiming that spiritual reality to the world. Of course, some of the folks who listened to Jesus had a hard time with what He was saying. Does He mean that we need to literally eat Him? – We read earlier in **John 6:52**, ***"Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?'"*** that is cannibalism. Of course, the answer is no. It is why Jesus said, ***"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life."*** They were focusing on the outward appearance of things rather than the reality of what the outward was truly manifesting. Everything Jesus said and did was to point us to Himself. It is why all the miracles described in John's Gospel are called "signs" – they point to something greater than the sign itself. Recall after He fed the 5000 families earlier in this chapter, He told them that they follow Him not because of Who He says He is, but because He fed their bellies.

Holy Communion is important, but it is only meant to point us to Jesus. And yet for those who say that since it is the spiritual reality that is only important and we don't need to do it, they are not only missing the message of Christ as it pertains to why we celebrate Holy Communion, but they are being disobedient. The truth is that the outward demonstration conveys true spiritual realities; and therein lies the key to understanding life, for Jesus has just presented us with a profound principle which is intrinsic to everything in our everyday life – ***"It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing."*** So what does that mean?

WHAT IS THE FLESH?

The flesh (*sarx*) in the New Testament refers to two things – the body – which ultimately can also represent the world that has been made – everything that has been created; and human nature – our desires and

tendencies apart from God. In short, our sinful fallen human nature which trusts in the flesh – the creation rather than the Creator. Now there is nothing wrong with what God has made. We are told in Genesis that it is good; in fact when God was done creating, He said, ***"It was very good."*** But though everything God has made is very good, the creation itself cannot sustain life indefinitely. Everything is breaking down; everything is subject to decay; the human body is no different; and eventually every living creature on the planet will die. This is a result of the curse which in turn is the result of man's rebellion. So even though everything is very good in and of itself because God made it, it won't profit us one bit when it comes to sustaining us indefinitely. Everything in creation only provides us with a temporary fix or solution. Likewise, when our human nature trusts in anything or anyone but God – and that ultimately begins with a trust in self – that also will lead us to a dead end! It won't sustain us indefinitely; and worse, it distorts the meaning and purpose of life itself – which is love of God and our neighbor which cannot happen if we are focused on anyone other than God.

TWO FUNDAMENTAL REALITIES IN LIFE

Simply put, there are two realities in life – the physical – that which we can perceive with our natural senses – that which we can taste, touch, see, hear, and smell - and the spiritual - those things that cannot be perceived through natural means unless they manifest in a natural way. The thoughts of our minds are an invisible spiritual reality that can only be made physical if we communicate them physically. And life teaches us that everything that happens in life first happens in the mind of someone. Nothing can happen unless you or someone else first thinks it. You are here in this church in the flesh because you first decided to come here in the spirit. Which is more important? The physical or the spiritual? The world would have us believe it would be the physical – trust in your beauty, your strength, your personality, your money. The spiritual teaches us that what is most important is what is in the heart, what is in your soul, in your spirit. Show me the man, and I will ask, show me the spirit of the man. For it is the spirit of a man that determines a man's destiny. Our present earth today would not look the way it does, would not be developed the way it has, unless man fleshed out his desires and dreams. God gave us the earth, and then He said go and explore it, cultivate it, and oversee it.

And this reality points us to the greater reality of the Spirit of God who gives life to all men, by which the world was made. This Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and it is Christ ***through whom all things were made (Jn.1:3)***. It is why **Acts 17:28** says, ***"In Him we live, move, and have our being."*** and **Col. 1:17**, ***"In Him all things hold together."*** But it is not only the Spirit who gives life to all men, it is the Spirit who gives us eternal life. So apart from the Spirit I can't live, and apart from the Spirit of God I can't live forever. So in whom or what should I trust – the flesh? That which has been made? Or the Spirit of God – that One who not only gives me life, but who can direct me, and who can enable me to live forever.

THE CONFLICT IS REAL

Jesus said, ***"It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing."*** This is our great challenge each and every day. In fact, it is a battle. The Apostle Paul highlights this conflict when he writes in **Galatians 5:16-25**: ***"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,***

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."

Every choice we make is one between trusting in the flesh or trusting in the Spirit. And this battle is highlighted throughout the Holy Scriptures – from the Garden in Genesis to the end of this present age in Revelation.

THE EXAMPLE OF AMALEK

And there is one particular example in the Bible that God uses as a type for all human time, and that is the example of Amalek. You ask who is Amalek? He is the grandson of Esau. Do you remember who Esau was? He was the twin brother of Jacob, son of Isaac. He sold his birthright as first born for a bowl of stew, for a cup of soup!

Exodus 17:8-16: *"Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus, his hands were steady until the sun set. 13So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." 14Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." 15Moses built an altar and named it *The LORD is My Banner*; 16and he said, "*The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.*"*

God says this is so important, I don't want anybody to forget what happened here. He says, ***"Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it!"*** There's a tremendous lesson, here. In other words, let's put it in a book so the folks that live in Western New York, live in the US, that live in the world can learn about this.

And what will God do? ***I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.*** So Moses built an altar and called the name of it, Jehovah-Nissi. – The Lord is my banner. For the Lord has sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'

Now, let's put this into perspective. The children of Israel represent the Christian. When they were in the land of bondage, the land of Egypt, they represented the man who was yet to be saved. He is under the bondage of Pharaoh who represents the devil. He took that land of slavery and darkness and idolatry as a picture of the unsaved man in captivity of the devil. When they came out of Egypt, they came out under the blood of the Passover lamb through the Red Sea. That's the picture of our salvation, our deliverance. But they went out of Egypt and into the wilderness. If Egypt is a picture of the lost man, then the wilderness is a picture of the carnal man; but they were headed right on into Canaan which is not so much a picture of heaven, but rather of the spirit-filled life.

But there was an enemy that came to stop them, to keep them from going into Canaan; and **the name of that enemy was Amalek.** If Egypt represents the world and Pharaoh represents the devil, what or whom does

Amalek represent? The flesh. The same flesh that I read to you about over in **Galatians 5**. The same flesh that Jesus spoke of in **John 6**. How do we know that Esau and, in turn, Amalek, represent the flesh?

Please turn with me to the last book of the Old Testament, to **Malachi 1:1-5** *"The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. 2***"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; 3but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."** *4***Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever."** Notice verse 4. *"the people toward whom the Lord hath is indignant forever."* Who is that? Esau - Esau's descendants - the Edomites. The Bible says that God has indignation against them forever. **"Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated."**

Again, who was Esau? The man who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew! The man who served the god of his belly rather than the God of the universe! He was a man completely given over to the flesh. The Bible speaks of him as a profane person. He had no appetite for spiritual things. He was carnal, he was fleshly. The flesh as represented in Esau was interested in the present, not the future; in the material and not the spiritual. He wanted that bowl full of red stew rather than having the birthright and the spiritual blessings of God. He was interested in the things of the flesh, not the things of the spirit. For God said, **"Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated."** Jacob and Esau were brothers, twin brothers, but God loved Jacob because Jacob had a desire for spiritual things. Esau God hated because he was a man of the flesh.

And as a result, the bible says that God had a perpetual warfare with Esau and his kinfolk. Again going back to **Exodus 17:16**: **"The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."** That is, God says I, I'm not forgetting this thing. Here is the grandson of Esau. He represents the flesh. He represents that which God hates. So it shouldn't surprise us that the Hebrews, God's people, came out of the land of Egypt, under the blood of the Passover Lamb, to then meet face to face, the flesh, in the man, Amalek, grandson of Esau, against whom God has eternal, perpetual indignation and warfare.

For the Bible says the flesh is what? Warfare with God. **Romans 8:7**: **"...the mind set on the flesh is enmity with God - hostility toward God; And further Paul says there that "the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace."** There is a perpetual war between the things of the spirit and the things of the flesh, and that's the reason the apostle Paul says the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, Jacob against Esau, Esau against Jacob. Amalek against Israel. There is that war.

A perpetual war with Amalek - the flesh - that tries to keep us out of Canaan which is the land of blessing. It is a picture not of heaven but of the spirit-lived life. God delivers us from Egypt (our slavery to sin) and brings us through the wilderness (the spirit of the world) and moves us to a life of fullness and blessing! But the only way is to crucify the desires of the flesh. And that means turning to Christ and allowing His Spirit to rule our hearts.

For the only way to have victory over the flesh is to live by the Spirit, and the only way to live by the Spirit is to walk by the Spirit. And the only way to walk by the Spirit is the same way we walk in life – Remember the sermon we heard on Father's Day? How to walk by the Spirit – focus on Christ and His Word, movement – step by step, balance – remember your priorities, have a goal – the Kingdom, and keep doing it!