

(Today, we ponder about the benefit of trusting and obeying.)

8:6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

8:7 For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot,

8:8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

8:9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

8:10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

8:11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

What is the difference between the flesh and the body in Paul's argument? Paul talks about the flesh in verses 6 through 9, then suddenly he speaks of the body in verses 10 and 11. Are they the same thing, used interchangeably?

No. It is clear that Paul uses the flesh and the body to mean two

different things. The flesh is the metaphor of all the human traits that seek selfish gratification, while the body is the literal designation of the vessel of a person's soul. The flesh refers to the lust, greed, ambition, or any motivation that propels a person to premeditate and act upon the inner desires.

There is this list of sins, known as Seven Deadly Sins, that answers to the metaphor of the flesh: Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, and Pride. There are far more vices that fit the metaphor of the flesh, but you get the idea: the flesh refers to all the human stains, all the self-oriented motivation, premeditation, attitude, speech, and action.

In direct contrast, Paul shows the examples of the spiritual traits that oppose this fleshly traits in his letter to the Galatians:

¹⁷ For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other,

to prevent you from doing what you want.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (Gal. 5:17-25).

What the Spirit desires is the common good, as Paul said:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7)

The gifts of the Holy Spirit have been given with the intention of

sharing the benefit from the fruit of the spiritual gifts. The flesh desires to satiate only the self, and the only thing that matters to the flesh is self. This trait is known to us as egocentrism. Another way to call it is solipsism, meaning that nothing else matters except one's own self.

Besides wanting only to satiate oneself, and oneself only, the flesh does not care whether one's action harms others or not. The flesh will serve only one's own self, and hurt one's self and others in the course of securing what the flesh wants.

We can see it in the minds of people through tidbits of news that we hear nowadays: college students crowding the Florida beaches in droves when shelter-in-place order is in effect; Californians packing their beaches, parks, hiking trails; Kentucky teenagers attending COVID-19 party (and one of them tested positive), etc.

No matter how one cuts it, this kind of action not only shows off

their stupidity, but also flaunt their defiance and their delusion of invincibility: it endangers everyone with whom they come in contact. It is the flagrant disregard of the welfare of others that will harm untold number of people. It is a wonton disregard of others for one's pleasure, who might actually get sick and die.

When the darkness descends, the rats scurry around. The ones with light walk into the darkness and shine their light into the darkness. In the darkness, the bad become emboldened, but the darkness also defines them; and the light highlights both the good and the bad.

If a crisis brings out the true colors of people, it also brings out the good in people. People bring out the good in their hearts, while others bring out the bad. In small things they can do, the good people might share the toilet paper rolls with neighbors, distribute food to help those who

are pinched hard in hard times caused by Coronavirus, call the vulnerable friends for their welfare, deliver the groceries to those who are shut-in, and make sure their church community is safe and sound. They take the risk, in order to practice compassion towards the vulnerable. While some people let their flesh dictate their behaviors in crisis, these people live by the Spirit through the crisis.

My brother sent me a joke, so I will share the shortened version:

1. Where were Noah and his family when the Flood hit them? --At home.
2. Where was Abraham, when the three angels visited him? --At home.
3. Where was Lot, when the two angels came to Sodom and Gomorrah? --At home.
4. Where were the Israelites, when the angel of death smote the first born in Egypt? --At home.

5. Where were the disciples when they received the Holy Spirit? --At home.
6. Where are we, due to the Coronavirus? --At home!

The original punchline was not really punchy, but the gist was this: be obedient and stay home, or shelter in place, and you are safe!

There is a plenty of reasons to be fearful and be worried in these days. Some people are doing well, with the plenty of supplies and safety; but others are confronted with the threat to their physical and financial well-being. Some have been laid off; some have no choice but continue to work, being exposed to many people daily; others have been stuck abroad and in lock-down, with no way to catch a flight home, while their fund, medicine, and patience are wearing thin in a foreign land.

We need to keep our fortitude especially in a time like this, and care for one another, and be perceptive to one another's needs.

We need to exercise the common sense, and not be swayed by the rhetoric, disinformation, and rumor and propaganda that float around.

The best wisdom that is available comes from your own commonsense: wash hands often, keep away from other people at least 6 feet, give up on unnecessary outings. This will minimize the chance of being infected or infecting others.

So, the question is: will our bodies obey the flesh, or the Spirit?

Let us not give in to the demands of the flesh, but live by the Spirit—that is, be obedient to the direction of the Holy Spirit—and we will be guided by the Spirit, and will overcome this tribulation together.