

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 317

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 18:13-18

Topic: The Failings Of The Flesh

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John's latest prayer letter: http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/prayer_ltr_08_04.pdf

John 18:13-18 MKJV And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. (14) And Caiaphas was he who gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. (15) And Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. That disciple was known to the high priest, and he went in with Jesus into the court of the high priest. (16) But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple went out, the one who was known to the high priest, and spoke to her who kept the door and brought Peter in. (17) Then the girl who kept the door said to Peter, Are you not also *one* of this man's disciples? He said, I am not. (18) And the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold. And they warmed *themselves*. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

Yesterday we looked at the three way choice – fight, flight or mastery and how the flesh lead us to either fight or flee, while the Spirit leads us to mastery. In yesterday's verses Peter was fighting, in today's verses Peter is fleeing. Both are the responses of a threatened man - who is adrift from the Spirit of God.

Fear and threat were Peter's weak points. When Jesus talked about being crucified that threatened Peter and he started rebuking Jesus. When Peter was walking on the water and he saw the wind – he became afraid and sank. In the Garden Peter drew his sword and in the court of the high priest Peter denies Christ.

Fear is not easy to deal with, especially when the threat is very real; and even more so if, like Peter, you are a big man who can bluster through most things. Fear can place an icy grip on our heart and totally take over our thought processes. Fear is so powerful that it is Satan's main weapon and his demons have an incredible ability to inject fear into the human spirit.

That is why the Bible says, some 366 times, "Fear not" or "do not be afraid" or similar sentiments. God is totally committed to driving fear out of our lives. In fact His love casts out all fear.

1 John 4:18 MKJV There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love.

Peter was not confident in high company. He stood outside the door when John ("the other disciple") went in to the court with Jesus. John seems to be an upper class Jew, well known to the high priest and to people such as Nicodemus. But Peter was a fisherman in a hierarchical society and was socially intimidated. Even though John got Peter an invitation inside he still preferred to sit with the soldiers and servant girls.

Next Peter gave in to his physical desire for comfort and pampered his flesh at the wrong moment. He warmed himself by the fire instead of standing by Jesus during His trial. Yes, it was cold. Yes it was not a sin in itself – but it was a weakness that led to a disaster. Earlier the disciples had slept instead of praying, now Peter was warming himself instead of going in with Jesus. The flesh was winning the war.

Strong faith has a certain rigorousness to it. The strong Christian can switch off the TV during the Olympics and go and pray. The strong Christian can fast. The strong Christian can take the discipline of study, or the conditions on the mission field. Too much pampering just strengthens the flesh and weakens the Spirit.

Earlier that same evening Jesus had given His disciples this advice: “Matthew 26:41 MKJV Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.” The spirit is indeed willing to obey God, but the flesh loves the warmth of the fire on a cold night.

Now while Spirit-filled Christians are disciplined, they are not ascetics, and the bed of nails and self-torture have no place in the faith (see Colossians 2:20-23). We simply follow the leading of the Spirit – wherever that takes us, and at times that may mean some discomfort. But it is not the discomfort that is spiritual – but rather the following of the Holy Spirit.

But Peter was not following the Holy Spirit, rather he was following his fears, his social timidity, and his own desire for comfort. This is a potent combination that has sidelined countless Christians with missionary calls on their life. Fear, the social lowliness of the missionary life, and the desire “for a little comfort” has kept many Christians from an adventurous life following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Peter seems to have collapsed in on himself. He may even have been in mild shock. The adrenalin that was flowing twenty minutes before in the Garden has had nowhere to go, his blood sugar is being burned up and he is withdrawing from others and feeling cold. The blood has moved away from the brain and Peter is not thinking straight. At this point the Devil attacks and sends the slave girl along to test Peter – and he says “I am not.” Fear, in a tired mind and a weary body has won the day.

There are times when our body is not our friend. Fear, lust and rage all emanate from physical responses. We need to master the body. And the way to master the flesh is via the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV I say, then, Walk in *the* Spirit and you shall not fulfill *the* lusts of *the* flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by *the* Spirit, you are not under law.

We need to walk in the Spirit. To do this first pray a brief prayer and ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Then listen to the voice in your conscience that is the voice of God. Obey that voice and obey the word of God. As you listen and obey the voice of the Spirit will become ever more distinct. Gradually

the nudges from God will become second nature and you will be following Jesus through the day. This moment by moment communion with God is what is known as walking in the Spirit or “keeping in step with the Spirit”. (Galatians 5:25) In the process you will keep on choosing God’s will over other alternatives and so the good choices will become easier and easier and stronger and stronger. This denying of evil and choosing good is called “crucifying the flesh” – and is a consequence of the Spirit-filled life.

Gal 5:24,25 But those belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh with *its* passions and lusts. If we live in *the* Spirit, let us also walk in *the* Spirit.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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