

Flesh & Spirit – Part V: How is Your Heart?

1. Overview

- a. This week is the last sermon in our series of the “flesh and the spirit.”
- b. I hope that you learned more than head knowledge but also learned and are practicing some of the tools for walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh.
 - i. Even when we are walking in the Spirit one day and the next day we get up and for one reason or another don't put on Christ like we should, or we don't get our minds on heavenly things, or we pay attention to temptation instead of focusing on Christ...**do not despair!**
 - ii. I believe that the reason Paul talks about this struggle between flesh and spirit so often is not only because it is important, but because we are so prone to fail and give up!
- c. When we learn to walk, we don't always walk really well.
 - i. When a 9 month old child learns to walk, you expect them to trip and fall pretty often.
 - ii. I know of a man who was president who tripped and fell just about every time a camera was watching. (President Gerald Ford – who incidentally is over 90 years old and still going strong)
 1. His falls didn't kill him. Your falls won't kill you.
 2. They will hurt, but the key to walking is getting back up.
 3. Walking is a continuous, present tense action that we do in the Spirit.
 - 4. The key to a successful walk is to not stop, not give up, not give in and not to quit!**
- d. Your “flesh” will complain, especially when you are getting weary or tired.
 - i. The temptation is to give into your body and to stop.
 - ii. What ultimately rules then? The flesh or your spirit?
 - iii. **(SPEAK SLOWLY)** What kind of heart-drive do you have? Is your heart drive such that you ignore the cries and protests of your flesh and keep on pursuing your goal?

2. This morning, we are going to look at a passage from Hebrews that talks about finishing the walk.

- a. Hebrews 12:1-4 *“1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin...”*

3. Illustration:

- a. Two gas company service men, a senior training Supervisor and a young trainee were out checking meters and parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked their way to the other end. At the last house a woman looking out her kitchen window watched the two men as they checked her gas meter. As they finished the meter check the older supervisor challenged his younger co-worker to a foot race down the alley back to the truck.

As they came running up to the truck, they realized that the lady from the last house was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped and asked her what was wrong. Gasping for breath she said, "When I see two gas men running full speed away from my house, I figured I had better run too." Contributed by: Stan Martin to sermoncentral.com

 - i. That lady was running, wasn't she? Now, she wasn't exactly sure why she was running, but she seemed to think that her life depended on it.
 - ii. Wouldn't it be truly awesome if every person who claims the name of Christ, every individual who is called a Christian, would run the race of faith as if their lives depended on it?

- iii. Unfortunately, many Christians aren't really even **in** this race of faith.
 - 1. Oh, they may have been saved ... they have come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord ... but that's it.
 - 2. They're not growing, they're not serving, and they're not sharing their faith.
 - 3. It's like they jumped across the starting line ... and then they laid down to rest. They have taken themselves out of the race before it even really started.

Lets look at this passage verse by verse to understand how we can not only stay in the race, but finish it as well!

- 4. V-1 *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*
 - a. **STORYTELL:** The scene begins in a sports stadium where a long distance marathon is being run. The runners are the readers of this letter and they include you and I who are running a grueling race. Encircling the track is a stadium filled with a great number of people who are watching, some of whom were named in the preceding chapter as ones who completed the same race before us successfully.
 - b. **Every Believer Must Run...no laying down, no quitting, no halfhearted effort!**
 - i. From the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we are enrolled in this race.
 - ii. Our new birth gets us to the starting line, but it does not get us to the finish line.
 - iii. Unfortunately, many Christians are merely "jogging", some are walking slowly, and some are sitting or even lying down.
 - iv. Yet the biblical standard for holy living is a race, not a morning stroll.
 - v. The word for "Race" is the Greek word "agon", from which we get **agony**. It is used in 2nd Timothy to describe a fight.
 - 1. *"I have fought (agonizomai) the good fight (agon), I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
 - 2. This word = fight, fought, a hard fight for our destiny!
 - vi. This is because a race is not an enjoyable stroll, but is demanding, grueling and oftentimes agonizing, and it requires all we have to give in self-discipline, determination, and perseverance.
 - c. **Principle #1: Others have finished the race before us!**
 - i. As I mentioned earlier, chapter 11 lists some of the great heroes of the faith and lists some of the hardships that they faced as well as some of the obstacles that they had to overcome to finish their life of faith.
 - 1. The word used for witnesses is a word that implies that they have completed the race already and are cheering on those who are still running:
 - 2. They shout to us: **"Others have done it, and so can you!"**
 - ii. One of the best ways to develop endurance and encouragement is to get to know the godly men and women of the Old Testament who ran the race and won.
 - iii. In Hebrews 6 we are told:
 - 1. *"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."* (Hebrews 6:11-12)
 - 2. And so if you think you're experiencing problems with your family, read about Joseph's problems in (Genesis 37ff)! If you think your job is too big for you, study the life of Moses (Exodus 3:11ff). If you are tempted to retaliate, see how David handled the problem the continual curses from Shimei of the house of Saul (2 Samuel 16:5ff).
 - iv. **We are told to run this race with a special character. That term is "endurance".**

- v. The word for Endurance is “Hupomone” which describes an attitude which bears things not with resignation, but with blazing hope.
 - 1. **It is not with a fatalistic resignation that we bear our trials, but with hope and expectancy of our Savior’s return and reward.**

- d. **Principle #2: Set aside all of the distractions. “Lay aside every encumbrance...”**
 - i. We are told to set aside every thing that is a weight or burden that could slow us down or keep us from finishing.
 - ii. Encumbrance - *Apotithemi* - literally was used to describe the laying aside of clothes or taking off one’s clothes, as did the runners who participated in the Olympic Games.
 - 1. In fact the ancient Grecian runners ran in the stadium nearly naked. They had nothing slowing them down!
 - iii. Even good things can be distractions. Lay aside anything that slows you down.
 - 1. Can you imagine someone trying to run a 26 mile marathon wearing a 20 pound backpack with an ipod, dvd player, an xbox360, a cell phone, and a blackberry in it. When you run a race your goal is to finish the race, to win it, not to carry a bunch of stuff that won’t help you get there.
 - 2. Your music, your movies, your tv programs, your habits: What's wrong with them?
 - 3. Ask this question: **Does it help me RUN the race!?! Does it help me RUN (live to my fullest)- for Jesus?**
 - iv. Lay down “Even the sin that EASILY snares us”
 - 1. Recall last week we read that we were to throw aside our “old rags (clothes) which were anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech? (Colossians 3:4-12)
 - 2. This picture of “laying down our sin” is not of a weight that is weighing down an athlete, but rather the problems that beset him during the race—the snares of temptation that await to trip him and snag him.
 - v. There is a story about a man who went out to play golf early one Saturday morning. His wife became concerned when he had not returned home by dinner time. It wasn’t until about midnight when he came through the front door, exhausted.
 - 1. “Where have you been?” she demanded
 - 2. “I’ve been playing golf” came the reply.
 - 3. “But that was 18 hours ago. What happened?”
 - 4. “I was having the best game of my life. I was two under par when on the seventh tee Harry had a heart attack and died.” His wife still didn’t understand.
 - 5. “After that it was hit the ball, drag Harry - hit the ball drag Harry . . .”
 - 6. What is it that is slowing you down, keeping you from giving the Christian life your all?
 - 7. Are you trying to run with extra weight? Are you dragging something behind you? **(LOUD) Get rid of it! Run Freely**

Bea Baker showed me a certificate last week that she got for walking in a race! Yes, she finished I think it was in 7th place! And you know what? She got her certificate because she FINISHED! She didn’t quit, she didn’t give up, I don’t know if she ever tripped or got tired...but I do know that she finished. I am willing to bet that if any of us would have been spectators, we would have been cheering her more and more as the finish line approached! This brings us to principle #3:

- e. **Principle #3: Plan to finish** (run with endurance)
 - i. In the 1986 New York City Marathon, almost 20,000 runners entered the race. What is memorable is not who won, but who finished last. His name was Bob Wieland. He finished 19,413th—dead last. Bob completed the New York marathon in 4 days, 2 hours,

47 minutes, and 17 seconds. It was unquestionably the slowest marathon in history—ever. So, what is it that made Bob Wieland’s marathon so special? Bob ran with his arms. 17 years earlier while in Vietnam, Bob’s legs were blown off in battle. He sits on a 15 pound saddle and covers his fists with pads. He uses his arms to catapult himself forward one arm-length at a time. That is real endurance in the face of adversity. Contributed by: Ed Wood

1. We can learn a lot from that incredible example in that man’s life. He didn’t plan on quitting. He was going to finish no matter how long it took. **He would bear all things, endure all things, he was going to finish!**
 2. That is what God expects from us... **to plan on finishing!**
 - ii. Marathon runners have a saying called "Hitting the wall." It happens around ½ way in the race. You’ve come to the end of your physical strength & you’re not sure you can put one foot in front of the other anymore. The only thing that carries the runner past the “wall” is a heart-felt determination that exceeds all the power of the flesh!
 1. I’ve seen it in the Christian life. You’ve been around for a while & you’ve fought the battles, but you’re not sure there is enough energy left to make it to the end, & the temptation is to quit.
 2. Maybe you are there today. Maybe you wonder what use is it to go on.
 3. Maybe your marriage is struggling and you think it is time to give up.
 4. Maybe God hasn’t answered your prayers the way you want...
 - iii. Keep on keeping on! “He who began the good work in you will complete it!”
5. *V2: 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- a. **Principle #4: Focus on Jesus and what He has accomplished.**
 - i. By calling Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, the author is calling Jesus the best example of all.
 - ii. We hear the encouragement of the crowd in the stands, but we see Jesus waiting for us at the finish line. CAN YOU SEE HIM THERE?
 - iii. The word “fixing our eyes” comes from a Greek word (aphorao) that has the idea of concentrating your gaze.
 1. It means to look away from other things so that you can focus all your attention on one SINGLE object.
 2. It has the connotation that you cannot give your undivided attention to two things at once.
 - iv. Stuart Briscoe tells a story about when he was in the marines, the training for commandos included cliff assaults. The theory was that a commando raid should be a surprise, done as quickly and as silently as possible on the area with the lightest defenses. The lightest defense is at the point where attack is least expected. More often than not, it was the cliffs. They would come close to the cliff in small boats and fire one rocket up through the darkness. Attached to the rocket was a grapnel. Attached to the grapnel was a light rope. When the rocket landed on top of the cliff, the grapnel would lie on the grass. They would then pull it back gently until it caught on something. They hoped it caught on something secure. They had expert climbers. Those guys are like spiders. They would get out of the little boat onto the seaweed-strewn rocks, and scale those cliffs in the dark hanging onto this thin, little rope that was on the end of a grapnel they hoped was hanging onto something secure. A bigger rope trailed behind them. Below, they held onto the rope. When the climber got on the top, he would secure the rope he’d taken up and then give two little tugs on it. The minute the two little tugs came, they jumped out of our boats, cold and wet on the waves and rocks. They would scale the cliffs. It was a hairy

experience, except they had utter confidence in the one who'd gone before them. They had utter confidence in the security of the rope he had fastened for them.

- v. Jesus is called "the one who has gone before," or in the Greek, the "prodromos."
 1. The prodromos was a person who headed a patrol in military maneuvers. He was the one who went ahead and made sure the way was open. Citation: Stuart Briscoe, "Handling Your Insecurities," Preaching Today, Tape No. 119.
 - vi. Jesus went before us. He set the course. He set the line. He calls to us and says, follow me!
 - vii. Run the race with our attention on Him. Not on the distractions...
 - viii. To walk in the Spirit means to have our attention fixed on Jesus. Not on distractions.
 1. What are some distractions: My failures? My successes? Entertainment? Possessions?
 2. What are you PAYING ATTENTION to?
 3. When you fail, stop paying attention to your failure. Pay attention to Jesus! He paid your price. It is His righteousness that saves you not your own or lack of it.
 4. **Pay attention to Him!**
 5. **Will you fix your UNDIVIDED attention on Him? He has gone before you. He has done the hard part. You only need to follow!**
6. V3: *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*
- a. **Principle #5: Consider Jesus and what he endured for you**
 - b. "I've got my eye on you", is a saying that we all have heard at one time or other. Maybe it was when you received a warning from a person of authority, a police officer who gave you a break but tells you that if they catch you speeding again you will get more than a warning. I remember the days in the principles office or the stern warning from a parent, "I've got my eye on you". A fellow got a gift one year from a friend...he came up to me and placed a plastic eyeball in his hand and told him "I'm keeping an eye on you."
 - c. We are not supposed to be watching each other, but Jesus. We are to "consider" what he went through. We are to consider what He endured for us. Each Easter we do that. But what about the rest of the year? Here is something that the Catholics have right...they mediate upon the sufferings of Jesus...they "consider" Jesus and what he endured for them.
 - i. Whatever hostility we face and whatever shame comes from it, it is nothing in comparison to what Jesus endured.
 - ii. He reminds them of the trial Jesus faced, accused falsely, scourged with whips, and wore a crown of thorns. Jesus endured it all for the joy of the salvation of mankind and the pleasure of His Father.
 - iii. Sometimes in our day-to-day living, we lose our focus on Jesus, don't we?
 1. We focus on ourselves and are tempted to say, "Woe is me."
 2. We are tempted to say, "What next, Lord?"
 3. We are tempted to say, "Will it ever rain again?" We are tempted to say, "We are not blessed enough."
 4. We know that list goes on and on, whether it is material things and blessings; or sometimes we might even complain to God about spiritual things.
 5. When this happens, we are focused on ourselves rather than fixing our eyes on Jesus. The Lord says to us today to fix our ATTENTION on Jesus, because He is the Author of our faith.
 - iv. I encourage you this week to ask, "**Where is my focus right now?**"
 - v. We have to remind ourselves to fix our eyes on Jesus, not just on Sunday morning.
 - d. **Why consider Him? *So that you will not GROW WEARY AND LOSE HEART.***

i. **How can you lose heart? By growing weary!**

1. The Greek word for weary also is translated “sick”
 - a. When you are sick, run down, run over and run out...you don’t feel much like running much less walking. You feel like lying down and giving up.
 - b. It is at this point you must ask “What is in my heart?”
 - c. Is what resides in your heart stronger than your strength?
 - d. Yes! Because Jesus resides there. His power is sufficient!

7. V4: *You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin...*

- a. When you do...let me know.
- b. Coach Tom Landry of the Dallas Cowboys is reputed to have said, "The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, in order to be what they've always wanted to be!"
This is what God does for you!

8. Show Video (ftg_wholehearted)

- a. Application of Video,
 - i. Hebrews 12:1-4 “1 *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin...*”
 - ii. The witnesses of Hebrews 12:1 are the saints who have run the race before us, and have gathered along the marathon route to say, "By faith I finished, you can too!..."
 - iii. This is the way all the witnesses of Hebrews 11 are helping us. They have gathered along the sidelines of our race and they hold out their wounds and their joys and give us the best high-fives we ever got:
 - iv. "Jesus is saying, ‘when you signed up, you said you’d give it your all. Did you mean that? Don’t stop now!
 - v. **Go for it! You can do it. By faith you can finish. You can lay the weights down and the sins. By faith, by the assurance of better things hoped for, you can do it. I did it. And I know it can be done. Run. RUN!"...**
 - vi. There are thousands and thousands of those who have gone before and who have finished the race by faith and surround us like a great cloud who say: "**You can do it, don’t give up, its all heart from here on in, I know it hurts, don’t give up on me, keep on going..**"
 - vii. And Jesus stands over the goal line and say, Don’t give up! Don’t give in! You can do it. Don’t give up on me! I won’t give up on you!
- b. Invitation