

The Fifth Column **(The Flesh - Our Enemy Working From Within)**

Part 1

Introduction

Many of our readers are too young to remember the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930's. During this war supporters of the rebel forces formed a clandestine subversive organization which worked within Madrid, then enemy territory, to help their own political and military causes. One rebel general named the subversive group The Fifth Column. Today, this term remains a picturesque addition to our vocabulary, meaning an enemy working secretly from within.

Would you be surprised to learn that we, too, have a fifth column within our own walls, a fifth column that is more than willing to cooperate with Satan? We have heard it described by several names -- our inner being, our core or center, the essence of who we are. In Scripture it is frequently referred to as the flesh.

Our Study

The Flesh - Our Enemy Working From Within

The Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."

1. What does Paul tell us about our salvation? _____

2. What is it not? _____
3. Why did God make it entirely a gift? _____

The Scripture: Romans 7:18

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature."

4. What does Paul tell us about our sinful nature, the flesh? _____

When Paul tells us that nothing good lives in our flesh, that is exactly what he means. That is God's judgment of the flesh. As humans we like to believe that we really aren't so bad. Maybe we get off the track now and then, but human nature is basically good -- basically worth redeeming -- worth saving.

The Bible, however, teaches just the opposite. In fact, in Romans 5:10 Paul says that before salvation, man is God's enemy and needs to be reconciled to God through Christ. God did not save us because we deserved to be saved but because of His great love for us.

The Scripture: Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”

5. What does this passage tell us about our “heart”? _____

The heart is just another name for our inner man. When Jesus began His teaching ministry on earth, He echoed the words of the prophet.

The Scripture: Matthew 15:19-20

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony slander. These are what make a man unclean.”

6. What does Jesus say comes out of the heart? _____

7. What do these things do to us? _____

If we are not born unclean as a result of the Fall, we would ultimately become unclean by our own thoughts, processes, and deeds. In the book of Romans Paul amplifies this same thought.

The Scripture: Romans 1:20-21

“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities -- His eternal power and divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse....Their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts became darkened.”

8. Why does Paul say anyone who does not believe in God has no excuse? _____

9. What has lack of honoring God done? _____

Paul does not imply that this happens in exactly the same way to each individual who does not honor God; but we can safely say this is an accurate picture of what happens to societies as a whole that do not honor God; and eventually, it happens to all the individuals in that society.

Personal Questions:

What has happened in our own country since we as a nation have stopped honoring God? _____

What happens to people when God enters their life and they are saved? _____

At War With the Spirit

At salvation God gives us His Holy Spirit. We might think that with God's Spirit in man, all hostility to God would end. However, that is not the case.

The Scripture: Galatians 5:17

“The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

10. What does this verse tell us about the relationship between the flesh and the Spirit? _____

Kenneth Wuest in Wuest's Word Studies gives this picturesque explanation.

“The fallen nature has a strong desire to suppress the Holy Spirit. The Spirit and the flesh reciprocate the antagonism each has for the other. There is a permanent attitude of opposition toward each other on the part of both. The picture in the Greek word is that of two opposing armies, each digging a system of trenches for the purpose of holding the land they have and conducting a trench warfare. They have dug themselves in for a long drawn-out contest.”

More Hostilities

The Scripture: James 1:14-15

“Each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

11. How are we tempted? _____

Although the meaning of the word desire has changed, the Greek word from which it is translated simply means a desire which can be good or bad; and the form of the word used here has a prefix that intensifies its meaning. In this case, it is not only a desire but a craving.

Perhaps you have been taught that temptation was entirely the work of the devil. True, he is the tempter, but in this verse, James explains that it is our own lusts -- our own evil desires for things that cause us to respond to the temptation.

Personal Question:

Are there temptations in your life that you have been blaming Satan for? If so, you need to be willing to concede that they are products of your own desire. _____

12. What happens to our desires when we don't deal with them? _____

Unsaved man stands in a completely hopeless situation, as far as his own nature, his own abilities and his own worth. But even saved man quickly becomes aware that he cannot be “good” by his own efforts. The war is not over. Even though we have the Holy Spirit residing within us, there is still something in us that makes us want to oppose Him and continue to desire things that are not eternal.

Like Paul, we want to cry out, to be saved from this certainty of sin, corruption, and death. It is part of the Good News that God has provided a way out.

In the second part of this study, we will look forward to a time when saved man’s heart would desire to follow after God.

The Answers

1. It is a gift—we've been saved by grace.
2. Not by works
3. So we couldn't boast
4. That nothing good lives in us
5. It is deceitful above all things--beyond cure
6. Evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual, immorality, theft, false testimony, slander
7. Make us unclean
8. God's invisible qualities have been clearly understood from what has been made since the creation of the world.
9. Made our thinking futile and our hearts darkened
10. They are at war with one another.
11. By our own evil desires
12. They give birth to sin and eventually death.

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