

INTRODUCTION: TURN TO GENESIS 21

- Today I want to look at the faith of Abraham
- But first I want to explain the concept of the flesh versus the Spirit
- Those are terms that are often used and quite often used wrongly
- So I've prepared a visual to help us see what it means to be in the flesh and what it means to be in the Spirit

The term "flesh" can refer to 2 things

- It can refer to the physical body which is made out of flesh and blood
- When Adam named Woman he said this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh referring to her body
- It also refers to man's sin nature which is earthly, of this world
- Paul said to the Galatians... the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17)
- To the Romans he said... I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh (Romans 7:18)
- The flesh is always characterized as against the Spirit, enmity towards God and deceitful
- In the Hebrew Scriptures, the flesh is referred to as man's iniquity
- Iniquity means "to bend, to twist, to deviate from the way" and it speaks of man's bentness away from God

Genesis 6:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

- This is the condition of natural man... man is bent towards evil
- The word evil is translated iniquity, speaking of man's sin nature
- Thus the flesh is describing the natural man who is not born again

[SLIDE 1] The Natural Man is condemned under the law

Romans 3:19–20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

- No matter how hard man tries to be righteous by the good works he does, it's never good enough because the law demands perfect obedience
- Thus the natural man is under condemnation and judgment
- The natural mind is carnal, against God, evil continually
- The natural heart is under the law
- That's what it means to have a heart of stone
- And thus man attempts to please God by obeying the law
- That is what every religion is about... if you obey our rules you will go to heaven, go to Nirvana, get your own planet
- But man fails because man is weak, man's effort runs out and there is no forgiveness of sins, no fellowship with God because man's very nature is against God
- ***THERE IS NOTHING THE NATURAL MAN CAN DO TO MAKE HIM ACCEPTABLE TO GOD***

[SLIDE 2] The only solution is for man to be born again

John 3:3, 6 (NKJV)

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Ephesians 2:4–8 (NKJV)

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,

- When Jesus died on the cross, He became the innocent life that was sacrificed for our sin according to the requirement of the law
- Thus everyone who believes in the LORD like Abraham in Genesis 15:6 will be saved, declared righteous, brought out of darkness and into the light, the old is gone, behold all things are made new
- Now this is a legal transaction on the part of Jesus
- That means there is a change of ownership
- Now longer do I belong to this world system that is under judgment

- I have been bought with a price, therefore I am going to glorify God in my physical body
- I'm no longer a slave of the world, I belong to God

[SLIDE 3] Because I belong to God, I am now in the Spirit

Romans 8:9–11 (NKJV)

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- Now I am forgiven of all my sins
- Now I am accepted in the beloved
- I have the mind of Christ which is at peace with God
- The very Presence of God lives in me... I am the Holy Place, the place where the Shekinah of God rests
- My heart that condemned me under the law has been replaced with a heart that is easily led by the Spirit, a heart of flesh
- I am no longer under condemnation by the law because I am no longer under the law
- There is nothing that can separate me from the love of God
- I am a new creation in Christ with a new heart and a new spirit
- ***THERE IS NOTHING THE SPIRITUAL MAN CAN DO TO SEPARATE HIMSELF FROM THE LOVE OF GOD***

[SLIDE 4] You can see the comparison

- Life in the Flesh versus Life in the Spirit
- A Christian cannot be in the flesh
- The natural man cannot be in the Spirit
- A Christian is in the Spirit always because the Spirit of God lives in you
- But the natural man cannot receive the things of God because they are spiritually discerned

Now why is this so important to know?

- Because when we look at the life of Abraham

- We see a man who has tremendous faith in God which led to tremendous successes with God
- By faith he left UR to find a city whose builder and maker was God (Hebrews 11:10)
- By faith he rescued Lot and defeated the 4 most powerful Kings in the world in Genesis 14
- By faith he believed in the LORD and the LORD counted it to him as righteousness in Genesis 15
- But he also had tremendous failures
- He brought Lot with him when God said leave your family behind
- Because of unbelief he went into Hagar when God told him he would have a son with his wife Sarah
- Out of fear he lied about his wife and said she was his sister and as a result two kings took her for their wives
- God had to intervene because of Abraham's failure to trust God's power to protect Him
- So Abraham had these powerful moments of faith intermingled with these tragic failures
- Abraham's faith was far from perfect

Yet Paul declared Abraham to be the father of all who believe

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

- When you read Paul's account of Abraham in Romans 4
- When you read the famous Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
- God doesn't seem to remember any of Abraham's failures
- In fact, all He seems to notice is Abraham's faith
- This gives me an extremely important principle for my life
- God does see me the way I see myself
- God doesn't focus on my failures
- I do, others do, my boss does, people in church do... but God doesn't

In fact, the Bible says...

Psalm 103:8–14 (NKJV)

8 The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive *with us*, Nor will He keep *His anger* forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 As a father pities *his* children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. 14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we *are* dust.

- God knows that I am weak... God knows that I will fail
- That doesn't seem to bother God
- Because HE is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy
- The word abounding literally means "10,000 fold"
- God has more mercy than you'll ever use... that's the idea
- You can't exhaust God's mercy
- When it comes to my sin... He doesn't hold me accountable for my sin
- He doesn't punish me because of my sin nature
- WHAT? Did you just say God doesn't hold me accountable?
- YES I did... but I didn't say that your sin wasn't accounted for
- All I said was YOU were not held accountable for it... JESUS was
- And the same way a Father shows compassion on his kids, God shows the same compassion on those who fear Him, meaning those who are Born Again... who belong to Him

In Genesis 21 we see Abraham's greatest mistake

- He fathered Ishmael because he didn't believe God
- What makes this so hard is it involves another life, a child, an innocent
- When God gives Abraham Isaac, the son he promised, Abraham's disobedience becomes a major problem in his family

Genesis 21:8–11 (NKJV)

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. 9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac." 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

I don't know if you can relate?

- Maybe you haven't done anything as bad as Abraham
- You didn't father a child with someone who wasn't your wife
- Maybe you've just made some bad decisions and you're dealing with the consequences of your choices
- Whatever the case... the matter is very displeasing to you because you know people are hurting because of it.

I want you to see how God handles the situation

First of all... God gives direction to Abraham

Genesis 21:12 (NKJV)

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called.

- The word "displeasing" in this context suggests that Abraham is finally coming to terms with what he's done
- He was hoping life could go on as normal and we could just overlook this momentary lapse of judgment, but now there's an ultimatum
- Get that bondwoman and her child out of here
- Now Abraham is beating himself up... how could I have made such an incredible mess of things
- I thought we were doing the right thing?
- But listen to what God says... "do not let it be displeasing in your sight"
- Abraham, stop beating yourself up because you've caused two innocent people a great deal of pain
- Listen to your wife because she's right on this one

Then God gives assurance to Abraham

Genesis 21:13 (NKJV)

13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is your seed.*"

- Abraham, I'm going to take care of the people you brought into this mess... you've done the best you can... I'll take it from here
- I will bless Ishmael because he is your seed

- Just as I promised, I will make a great nation out of him
- Abraham, don't worry about your son's future
- He's in My hands now....

Finally God took care of the innocent one...

Genesis 21:20 (NKJV)

20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

- Often we feel responsible to fix our mistakes
- We can't control how people react, how they feel, the choices they will make because of our actions
- Even if we make things right, we can't guarantee there will be no consequences down the road
- The only thing I can do is entrust people in our lives to God
- What Abraham couldn't do... God did...
- God heard the voice of the lad (vs. 17)
- God provided for the lad (vs. 19)
- God was with the lad (vs. 20)
- Maybe you have a friend, an ex-husband or wife, maybe a son or daughter... you've been holding onto guilt, beating yourself up
- It's time to trust God with them... because what you can't do... God can

This is what I love about Abraham

- Abraham was far from perfect
- Abraham has an imperfect faith
- But rather than judge Abraham for the faith Abraham didn't have, God delighted in the faith Abraham had
- Stop beating yourself up for not having a perfect faith
- God isn't looking at your lack... God is looking at what you have
- You might say... I don't have much faith
- It doesn't take much faith... the Bible says if you have faith the size of a grain of mustard seed you can move mountains
- It's not the size of the faith you have... it's the size of the God you place your faith in and what a mighty God we serve!