

The Flesh Is Weak

When temptation comes, our spirit is willing to do right, but our flesh is not.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He gathered the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane and made just one request: "All of you must keep awake (give strict attention, be cautious and active) and watch and pray, that you may not come into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41, The Amplified Bible). It seemed like such a simple thing—all the disciples had to do was stay awake and pray.

Jesus told the disciples to pray with Him because He wanted to prepare them for the trial that was coming. But they kept falling asleep.

Jesus, on the other hand, did pray, and as He did, an angel strengthened Him in spirit, enabling Him to endure the cross. The disciples didn't pray—they slept—and proved that the flesh truly is weak.

This is why prayer is so important. As Christians, many of us have the idea that everything in our lives will be perfect simply because we are Christians. But Jesus clearly warned us, "In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you]" (John 16:33).

That's not to say we should be negative. But we need to be realistic and understand that very few things in life are

perfect. Jesus said we would have to deal with temptation, tribulation, trials, distress and frustration. These things are part of life on this earth—for the believer as well as the unbeliever.

When temptation comes, our spirit is willing to do what is right, but our flesh will not help us. Our flesh will pull us under if we don't pray and ask God to strengthen us in spirit and to circumcise our hearts to resist temptation.

Crucifying the flesh is never a particularly enjoyable experience, but as followers of Christ, we are called to suffer as He suffered. First Peter 4:1 tells us, "So, since Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God]."

It is important to understand the difference between suffering in the flesh and suffering demonic affliction. Giving up the selfish appetites of our flesh does not mean we are to suffer from sickness, disease and poverty. Jesus died to deliver us from the curse of sin. But unless we are willing to suffer in the flesh, we will never walk in the will of God.

The apostle Paul wrote, "But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit]" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Paul is speaking here about self-discipline. Self-discipline is keeping ourselves going in the right direction without being pressured by someone else.

The problem is that somehow we have gotten the wrong idea that everything in life is supposed to be easy. We need to be people who are self-motivated and self-disciplined. We must do what is right because it is right, not because someone is forcing us to comply.

When we get up in the morning, we should set our thoughts on walking in God's will all day long. We might even say to ourselves, "Even if I need to suffer in order to do God's will today, I purpose in my mind and heart to be obedient."

Remember—even in the face of our suffering, there is hope, for Christ has overcome the world! Paul wrote, "Rejoice and exult in hope; be steadfast and patient in suffering and tribulation; be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). Decide ahead of time that you will face each day with the determination to please God, whether your flesh is willing or not.

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