

Series: 1 Cor

Title: Knowing After Flesh, Knowing After Spirit

Text: 2 Cor 5: 16

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Our subject is “Knowing After Flesh, Knowing After Spirit.”

*After the flesh*, I am what the majority in this country hates most: a southern, rural, Christian, white, heterosexual, male. When the majority despises a certain *fleshly difference in someone*, it makes people feel safe to despise them. Most of you can relate since New Jerseyans are the punchline of a lot of jokes in this country.

Most of you know, I get a little impatient when *fleshly distinctions* are used to exalt one person or group, at the expense of another person or group. The reason is

**2 Corinthians 5: 16: Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.**

**Proposition:** Those regenerated by God are to use spiritual discernment and no longer use *external fleshly distinctions* to put a difference between ourselves and brethren or any others.

When spiritually dead in sins, we were like those who “*glory in appearance but not in heart.*” (2 Cor 5: 12) Now, born of the Spirit of God, we know men after the spirit. We use spiritual discernment. We no longer know Christ after the flesh but we know him in spirit and in truth.

## **WE KNOW NO MAN AFTER THE FLESH**

First, what does it mean to “*know no man after the flesh?*”

Paul spoke of spiritually dead sinners as “*them which glory in appearance, and not in heart*” (2 Cor 5:12) Then he described believers born of the Spirit of God, saying, “*For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, [God has given us spiritual discernment to know] that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*” (2 Cor 5: 15-16)

Having been born of the Holy Spirit, we are given spiritual discernment to know and believe that all for whom Christ died, died when Christ died.

One, it means our old man of sin died when Christ died—“*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*” (Rom 6:6)

Two, it means we died to the law when Christ died—“*Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ.*” (Rom 7:4)

Three, it means the law died to us when Christ died—“*But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*” (Rom 7:6)

The Holy Spirit has taught us in the new spirit given to us by God that “*they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh...*”

God used *fleshly circumcision* and *the letter* of the law to separate a *fleshly* people that God called Israel. He did it to show that it is God alone who makes a difference between his elect, spiritual Israel and all others. And God makes that difference, not by what he does in our *flesh*, but by what God does in us in *spirit*.

Ephesians 2: 11: Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

*Judging men after the flesh*, all outside the nation Israel were Gentiles and all inside the nation Israel were Jews. *Judging men after the flesh*, Israel were the Circumcision. But they were the *circumcision in the flesh made by hands*. So the Jews hated the Gentiles calling us the uncircumcision. The Jews exalted themselves over Gentiles because of the *fleshly* difference of circumcision made by their own hands and hated the Gentiles because of the *fleshly* difference that the Gentiles were uncircumcised.

But God separated the Jews *by fleshly circumcision* and by *the letter* of the law to show that it is God alone in Christ who makes *the true, spiritual circumcision, thus making the true, spiritual Jew, the true, spiritual Israel of God*. That is what Paul declares next:

Ephesians 2: 13: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14: For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; 15: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; 16: And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Christ circumcised the elect of God from our filthy flesh by fulfilling the law for us on the cross. Then through the Holy Spirit, he circumcised us from our filthy flesh in regeneration.

Ephesians 2: 17: And [our Resurrected Head] came and preached peace to you [elect Gentiles] which were afar off, and to [those elect Jews] that were nigh. 18: For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19: Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

Again, we see the same thing declared in Colossians 2. The true circumcision, the true Jews, the true elect Israel of God—are made by the circumcision not made with our hands but by God in Christ. Christ circumcised us from our filthy flesh by fulfilling the law for us, crucifying our old man, making our old man die when he died on the cross. When Christ was baptized (immersed) in the justice of God on the cross, our old man was buried with him in that baptism, crucified in him.

Colossians 2: 11: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Then Christ circumcises us from our filthy flesh in regeneration through the Holy Spirit.

Colossians 2: 13: And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14: Blotting out the handwriting of

ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

Romans 2: 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

By regeneration, by God's irresistible grace, we:

Colossians 3: 10:...have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all.

As Paul said in our text, "*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.*" So let's understand how this applies to us who are born of God right here where we live.

We recognize there are fleshly differences between men. But none of those differences puts any sinner in favor with God. We are all sinners in need of Christ saving us! So to make a distinction based on fleshly differences such as face, place, race or grace (our denomination) *is knowing a man after the flesh*. It is our proud, self-righteous, sinful flesh boasting that I am better by some fleshly difference in me. God hates it!

Proverbs 6: 16: These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17: A proud look,...

Nor do we make distinctions based on one who appears to have kept the law outwardly and another person who appears to have broken it. That too is *knowing men after the flesh* because we do not know the heart as God does. In the heart, no sinner has kept the law perfectly. The fleshly Jews exalted themselves over Gentiles claiming they kept the law of God *in the flesh* and the Gentiles did not. Paul said none of us has kept the law because *in the flesh* "*there is none righteous no not one.*" (Rom 3: 10)

Romans 2: 1: Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

Galatians 5:6: For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Galatians 6:15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

So by the Holy Spirit of God, believers discern who are true brethren and who are not by who glories in Christ alone and who yet glories in their own flesh. That is what Paul is telling us to do in Philippians 3:

Philippians 3: 2: Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

These evil workers are those who preach law, who teach men to cut out this thing and that thing in the flesh in order to make themselves righteous and holy. They are legalists who cut men out of their fellowship and receive others based only on an outward appearance of who has kept the law and who has broken the law. They know men after fleshly differences their own hands have made.

Philippians 3: 3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Those circumcised in the heart by the Spirit of God are the true spiritual circumcision. As a result, we worship God inwardly in the new spirit God has given. We rejoice in Christ Jesus. And we have no confidence in anything we nor any other has done in the flesh.

The concision attempt to be made holy by cutting away the filth of their flesh by their own hands; the circumcision (true believers) are those made holy by the Holy Spirit giving us a new spirit in the new birth. The concision's worship is all outward in the flesh; the circumcision worship God inwardly in that new spirit given by God. The concision rejoice in themselves; the circumcision rejoice in Christ Jesus. The concision have confidence in their flesh; the circumcision have no confidence in the flesh.

We know no man after the flesh when it comes to who our true family and brethren are. When they told Christ his mother and brethren were outside desiring him,

Matthew 12:48: he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? 49: And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! 50: For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

We know no man after the flesh in that we do not show partiality based on the flesh.

1 Timothy 5:21: I charge *thee* before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

James 2:1: My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. 2: For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; 3: And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: 4: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

## **WE HAVE, YET NO MORE**

What does it mean when it says “yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.” (2 Cor 5: 16)

The apostles and some early believers had seen Christ in the flesh and once knew him when he walked this earth in the flesh. Others boasted Christ was of the Jewish nation so that they were related to him *after the flesh* and they thought that put them in favor with God. Many then and now boast in knowing historical and doctrinal facts about Christ that they taught themselves—apart from the preaching of the gospel—*which is to know Christ after the flesh*.

I know many true historical facts about George Washington. But he has never personally introduced himself and made me know him. So I only know him *after the flesh*.

Yet, those born of God can say, “*Yet now henceforth know we him no more*” after the flesh but now we know Christ after the Spirit. It is because the Spirit of God has given us a new spirit and spiritual discernment to know Christ himself in spirit and in truth! By divine revelation, God has given us a spiritual understanding of Christ. We know Christ himself and believe on him. By Christ abiding in us in the new spirit, we enjoy his spiritual presence and have his love shed abroad in our hearts. By this we know spiritually:

1 John 5: 19: *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 20: And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

“*Christ in you*” is “*the hope of glory.*” (Col 1: 27) That means in order for a sinner to have a true living hope which assures us of eternal glory it is only by having Christ our Hope formed in us. It is only by being made to know him, in spirit and in truth, by the Holy Spirit, by the words Christ speaks into the new heart through the preaching of the gospel.

We have “*an unction from the Holy One and we know all things*” (1 John 2: 20) We know, believe and confess publicly that Christ is God in human flesh. We know, believe and confess publicly that Christ made us the righteousness of God in him by his one offering on the cross. We know, believe and confess publicly that Christ, the risen Head over his church, filleth all in all!

Christ filled our presence with the preaching of the gospel. Christ filled us with new life. Christ filled our inward man with spiritual understanding. Christ filled us by being our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and our Redemption. Christ keeps us and shall lose none. Christ is coming again and soon he shall make us be like him and reign with him forever. We know, believe and confess publicly that Christ is our All and in all!

## **THE QUESTION**

The question we all need to ask ourselves is “How do I know myself? Do I yet know myself after the flesh? Do I yet exalt myself over others based on fleshly distinctions? By my fleshly understanding? Have I made myself superior so that I differ from another? Or do I know that there is no difference between me and any other sinner? Do I know in spirit and in truth that I am a fallen depraved helpless worm in need of being saved entirely by the Lord? Do I know in spirit and in truth that I am what I am by the grace of God alone and not by the works of my flesh?”

The question we all need to ask ourselves is “How do I know Christ? Do I know Christ after the flesh? As a historical figure? Or do I know Christ in spirit and in truth according to divine revelation, according to his own word? Do I know Christ as God, as my Prophet, Priest and King, as My Lord to whom I bow in all things, as my Savior who alone gets all the glory for my salvation? Do I know Christ as my Living Redeemer, my All? Do I know Christ in spirit and in truth so that I am not ashamed to confess him before men?”

By being born and taught of the Spirit of God, every true believer says, “the love of Christ constraineth [me;] because [I] thus judge, that if [Christ] died for [me], then [I am] dead: And *that* he died for [me], that [I] which live [by his regenerating me] should not henceforth live unto [myself], but unto him which died for [me], and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know [I] no man after the flesh: yea, though [I] have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know [I] *him* no more [after the flesh but now I know him in spirit and in truth by his grace alone through faith alone!] (2 Cor 5: 14-16)

**Amen!**