

# That Which Is of the Flesh

by J. Henry Brown

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*The sermon explores the distinction between the flesh and the spirit, emphasizing the necessity of being born again through Christ for true reconciliation with God.*

**Duration:** 35:47

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 3:2-3, John 3:5, John 3:16, Romans 8:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17

**Topics:** "Salvation", "Spiritual Rebirth"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the urgency of preparing for death. He shares a story of a young man who asks a professor how long he should give himself to prepare for death, and the professor responds with 'five minutes.' The preacher explains that people end up in a lost eternity because they refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, not necessarily by explicitly rejecting Him, but by saying 'not just now' or 'not tonight.' He emphasizes that it is our responsibility to cooperate with the conviction of the Holy Spirit and avail ourselves of God's provision for salvation. The preacher also references the importance of being born again, using the analogy of the wind blowing where it pleases to explain the spiritual rebirth.

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## Transcript

I'm very pleased to have this opportunity of being with you for this meeting this morning, and I want to draw your attention to a portion of Scripture which, in some ways, is rather difficult, and then I'm going to draw your attention to a portion of Scripture which is very, very well known. So, if you have a Bible, will you turn with me to the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, and we'll read in chapter five. Second of Corinthians, chapter five, reading from verse 14.

For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, 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. 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.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. All things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new, and all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech by us, we pray in Christ's head. Be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, he whom you know sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." That is our reading, and now I want to remind you of another portion of Scripture very well known, and that is the third chapter of the Gospel according to John. Some years ago in England, I visited one of these RAF hospitals where they were trying to patch up men who had been badly injured in plane smashing, and I went and sat down by the bedside of a man there who had been having a very very rough time, and as I sat down I saw that he was staring at me very hard, and I said to him, well how are you getting on? Well he said, uh I think I'm now beginning to make a little progress, but I'm at a very very bad time.

I said, I can see that, but he said, you know I know you, I've seen you before. I said, have you? He said, yes. He said, you know, he said, about a year ago you pressed a little book in my hand, and you said, read this and God bless you.

He said, there was no time for anything else because we were going up the gangway onto a troop ship. He said, I've got the little book in my locker, and he reached out to the locker, and he took out his wallet, and from the wallet he produced this little book. It was very dirty and dogged, and it had been sewn together with some cotton.

He said, this is it, you gave it to me, and you said, read it and God bless you. He said, you see I've read it, I've read it over and over again, and it's been a great blessing to me. It was the Gospel of John.

I said, well you've read it over and over again? He said, yes, I can quote chapters of it. Well, I said, that's something. I said, what about chapter three? Oh yes, I know that.

He said, that's all about being born again, isn't it? I said, that's right. Oh, he said, I can quote that chapter, would you like me to? I said, yes, you go ahead, and he began to quote the chapter, and he went through very nicely, made three or four mistakes, but he did very well. I said, that's fine.

Well now then, you can quote it. Now, I wonder if you could tell me what you think about it? Oh, he said, no, he said, I can't make this out. You know, he said, this being born again, oh no, he said, don't expect me to explain that, it's beyond me.

But he said, I'll tell you this, I think that Jesus was very abrupt. He said, I don't think he gave that chap a chance. You know, that man Nicodemus, he said, I think he wanted to ask him questions.

He didn't give him a chance. You know, he sort of nailed him down and said, you must be born again. Oh, I said, you feel like that about it? Well, yeah, yeah.

He said, when I read it, that's how it appeals to me. Well, I said, I don't think it was quite like that. Well, he said, can you explain it? Well, I said, I'm sure that this man Nicodemus was interested in the kingdom of God, and that's why he came to Jesus.

And when he came into his presence, he admitted a fact. He said, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God, for no man could do the miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. I said, the Lord as much as said, well now, we needn't waste any time.

I am the teacher sent from God. You are the pupil, and the subject is the kingdom of God, and the first thing I want to teach you is this, that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. And

when the man looks at him and said, but how can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? The teacher as much as said, well now, let me make it a little clearer.

Now he said, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. And when the man goes on to say, well I still can't follow, I can't quite understand, well he said, now listen, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Now if you can understand that in some measure, then you will not marvel when I say unto you, you must be born again.

And let me explain it a little more. The wind blows where it lifts us. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor would it look, so is born of the Spirit.

And this man was just lying there in bed, listening to me, and little by little we went through the chapter, until at last when we got to the end, he said, well I never knew that. But he said, I followed you, and now I understand. He said, just being born again.

And when I came away, there was a man born again by the operation of the Spirit of God. Well now, this morning, I want to center your thought in this particular verse, where the Lord said to this man, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Now what did the Lord Jesus have in his mind when he said, that which is born of the flesh is flesh? Did he just mean that that which was born of the body is body? Oh no, oh no, it goes much deeper than that.

I've seen a translation of the scriptures where it says, that which is born of the body is body. But I think we're better with this, that that which is born of the flesh is flesh. But just what we mean by flesh, or what was behind the word as we find it in scripture, well that needs quite a little explanation.

And I want to try and help you this morning, that you might understand a little better what it meant by the flesh. You'll notice that there is finality in the Lord's statement. He said, that which is born of the flesh is flesh.

As much as to say, no matter what you do with it, you'll never make it other than what it is. That's what it is, that's what it always will be, no matter what you do to it. You can take it if you like, and you can educate it, but when you finish, it is only educated flesh.

You can take it if you like, and you can make it religious, and when you finish, it is only religious flesh. You can take it if you like, and you can glorify it, and put it on a pedestal, and when you finish doing that, it is still only glorified flesh. That's what it is, that's what it always will be, and you will never make it any different.

Now, the apostle Paul takes it the same course, and he says, the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Now, that's final. Says the Lord Jesus, they that are, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, can't change it, says the apostle Paul, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God, an impossibility. So, this flesh is a tremendous thing.

There was a man who lived many years ago, his name was John Parnell. He became Lord Congolese, and as a young man, I think he was able to enjoy himself to the full. But, there came a time when I think he

realized the truth of what was said by the preacher, when he said, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes.

Eat, drink, merit, have a real good time while you can, but remember that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.' So, he decided that he'd better turn over a new leaf, and all that he could think of was the ten commandments. So, he wrote them out on a piece of paper, pinned them up on the wall of his room, and he went there and stood there from his time each day learning these commandments. A friend visited him one day, a man who was a fine Christian, and when he saw the paper, he looked at it and said, "John, what's this?' Well,' he said, "I'm reminding myself of those ten commandments, and I'm trying to keep them.' He said, "If I were you, John, I would read the eighth verse of the eighth chapter of Paul's epistles to the Romans." Eighth verse, eighth chapter.

After his friend had gone, he got a bible, and he began to read from verse one, and he read until he came down to these words. So then, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' And he said, "Well, even if I succeeded in some measure in keeping those commandments, I am still in the flesh, cannot please God." So, this is a tremendous thing. We have to face up to the fact that the flesh is something that we cannot alter.

We cannot make it other than what it is, and another thing is that in that condition called we cannot please God, no matter what we do. Now, what do we mean by flesh? Now, to understand it, there isn't time to go into all this, but just briefly, if we want to know really what the meaning of the flesh is, then we have to go back to the beginning of the bible. I know lots of people are not very willing to go back to that today.

They think we've got away from it. We've become so learned and so intelligent, we've got so much knowledge that, well, the stories that we have in the beginning of the bible, well, better leave them alone. But, we have to go back.

We believe them. The Lord himself put his testimony to the fact that this was true. So, we go back and we find a very simple story.

It's a story of a garden. God planted a garden. There were trees in the garden, fruit trees, and God brought a man, and he brought a woman, and he put them in the garden, and he said they might freely eat of the trees of that garden.

But, one tree was forbidden. It was the tree of the knowledge of goods and evil. Now, this is very, very simple.

This is primacy. If you can only keep it in mind, this is the beginning. God begins with a garden.

It begins with a man and a woman in that garden eating of the fruit of the trees of the garden, and one tree in the garden was forbidden. Now, that's simple enough, but remember it's primitive. You begin, you open your bible, and there it is, a garden, and a man, and a woman, and trees.

You get to the end of your bible, and there it is again. What? A garden with a tree, and there are people there, you see. But, there's something else in that garden.

There's a city. Oh, so God begins with a garden, which is all primitive, but ends with a garden, and in the garden, a city is the city of God, you see. So, from the beginning to the end, there's going to be progress

and development until God at last has got his city, the holy city.

Usually, he's going to have it, you see. So, remember, this story of the beginning of the garden, the man, the woman, is very, very simple. It's primitive.

Only a beginning. So, there they were, and of necessity, in these primitive circumstances, God brought them into this position where they were faced with the fact that they could take of a certain tree. They were told not to, but they could.

Now, remember, this man, this woman, did not know good and evil. How then could they live? How could they go on from day to day? Well, intuitively, they knew the mind and will of God. They didn't have to think, they didn't have to put two and two together, they didn't have to study or deduce, they knew intuitively God's thought, God's desires, and God's will, and all they had to do was to go on in this way in absolute dependence upon God.

Then there was that fellowship with God. That's simple. They were perfect after their deed, not perfected, but they had to go on from day to day.

So, now, we look at the man's constitution, and we see that this man was spirit, and soul, and body. He was a personality centered in soul, capable of thinking, capable of desiring, capable of willing. There he was, he himself, in soul, thinking, desiring, willing.

He found he had a body that enabled him to touch, taste, handle that which was material. He found he had a spirit that enabled him to communicate that fellowship and communion with God. There it is.

Oh, what a happy, what a happy position! What a happy condition to be just there in that fellowship with God, knowing God's thoughts, God's desires, God's will, and just going on from day to day in absolute dependence upon God. But, you see, because God had made him as he had made him, it was necessary for him to be brought into a position where he is going to exercise that will. Otherwise he's not a man in the full sense of the term.

So, a tree, forbidden, was quite sufficient in these primitive circumstances. There's the tree. That is forbidden.

You are not to take of that. That's enough, you see. Now, the man is there, and he can, if he will, he can take of it.

He can say no, he can say yes. Now, we know, of course, from the story that the woman took of the tree, she gave to her husband, and then something happened. Something happened.

Oh yes, you see, they became sinners. In what sense did they become sinners? Well, they had done what was forbidden. Because they did that which was sinful, they became sinners.

Do you think that's all there is to it? Oh no, you've got to go much deeper than that. It was not that they simply became sinners because they had done a sinful thing. Like you would talk about a man if you found him standing on a ladder with a paintbrush and a pot of paint, and you say he's a painter.

How do you know? Well, he paints. This man is a sinner. How do you know? Because he sins.

Is man just a sinner? Because he sins. Or does he sin? Because he's a sinner. And we've got to go deeper.

Is it not the big question what a man is? Not simply what he does. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That's what it is.

The man's constitution, spirit, soul, body, and a happy fellowship and communion with God, and he sins, and something happens in him. He became spiritually dead. His spirit didn't die.

He wasn't dead. His spirit wasn't dead, but he was in a condition of being spiritually dead. So, what does that mean? It means now that instead of going on in absolute dependence upon God, he has taken of the tree, he knows good and evil, and now he is independent.

Instead of going on in absolute dependence upon God, thinking God's thought, desiring God's desire, and willing God's will, he is now thinking his own thought, desiring his own desire, and willing his own will. The man has become self-thinking, self-desiring, self-willing, self-centered, selfish, sensual, and all the rest of it that has to do with the man's soul. That's the flesh.

That's what the man is. That's what we are. That's our condition.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. They that are in the flesh cannot be God, as we are constituted sinners by the disobedience of the world. The many were made, a very strong word, constituted sinners, a corruption of constitution.

We are flesh. We are soulish. We are independent.

It's one's own way. What's God going to do about it? What can we do about it? Is it possible for us in any way to change the flesh? No. Can we in any way make the flesh better? No.

Can God do anything with it? Does God intend to make it better? Does God intend in some way to improve it? Does God intend in some way to patch it up, to mend it? No. And that's great. Now, we've got the wrong idea.

We've got the idea that, yes, that's what he's going to do. That's what he's trying to do. No, no, no.

We're mistaken. That's why I read to you what we find in that second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, chapter five. You see it? The apostle Paul, in writing to these Corinthians, he has taken God's viewpoint of the cross.

He is looking at that cross, and he says, we thus judge. As we view that cross, we thus judge that if one died for all, then we're all dead. Now, some people will translate this and say, if one man died for all, then we're all dead in separatism and in sin.

I don't believe for one moment that that was in the mind of the apostle when he wrote those words. The revised reading says, we thus judge that if one died for all, then all die. That gives rather a different idea, doesn't it? One died for all, therefore all die.

Now, he's looking at the cross. He's taking God's viewpoint of the cross, and when God looked at that cross, what did he see? He saw there his beloved son made sin, as we read, made sin, made to bear sin, made to be a sin offering, and God dealt with him accordingly. He suffered, and he died, and he died for

all, and God looked at the death of Christ, and he saw him dying for all.

The apostle Paul takes the same view, and he sees Christ dying for all, and he says, therefore all died. As far as God is concerned, as he looked at the death of Christ, all died. Paul took the same view, and we got the same view.

There in the cross of Christ, we see the natural man. We see the man in the flesh. We see the sinner.

We see Christ representing the old man, the old creation, the man in the flesh, sin in the flesh. He is there representing all that, and he suffers, and he dies. He endures the wrath of the Holy God on account of what he is representing.

He dies for all, and God said, that's the end of it. This is the flesh. We want to patch it up.

We want to make it different. God says, no, I don't want to do that. I want to make it suffer.

I want to make it die. I want to take it down from the cross and bury it in the tomb. I want to put an end to it.

We thus judge. If one died for all, then all died, and he died for all, that they which live, who are they? Those who have come out from the all, who are reckoned in some sense to be dead. They have come out, and they have been made alive, that they which live should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.

Now, follow? Henceforth, then, know we no man after the flesh. How can we? Because there in the cross is the end of the man in the flesh. Henceforth, though we know man after the flesh, yea, though we knew Christ after the flesh, there on the cross representing it, we henceforth know him no more.

You see what God has done? He has taken all that pertains to the flesh, nailed it to the cross, made it suffer, made it die, made it endure his wrath to the full, took it down, buried it in the tomb, and he says that's the end of it. Have you got that viewpoint? Is that how you look at things today? Or are you still trying to improve the flesh, to produce something in the flesh, to make that acceptable to God? Is that what you're trying to do? No, you're mistaken. You've got to come to the cross and realize that that was the end of all that pertains to the flesh and to the all creation.

It was the end of you in the flesh. You got there. So, we haven't got there yet.

This is a tremendous truth. This is the very heart of Christianity. I'm crucified with Christ, isn't it? Nevertheless, I live.

Yet not I, because I went to that cross in Christ. I suffered, I died. Nevertheless, I live.

Not I. That was the end of me, but it was the beginning of, it was the beginning of Christ in me. You see, so says the apostle, henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yet we've known Christ after the flesh, henceforth knoweth him no more. But, if any man is in Christ Jesus, he's a new creature.

All things have passed away. All things have become new, and all things are of God. Oh, now we're beginning to get God's gift on top of it, you see.

We got to the cross. We've seen it. We've realized it.

Well then, that was the end of the man in the flesh. That was the end of me, but it was the beginning of Christ. Oh yes, it's all gone.

He suffered, he died, he was buried, and that's the end. Oh, you say, just a minute, didn't he rise again from among the dead? Yes, of course he did. But listen, when he rose from among the dead, he didn't rise with what he took to that cross.

Oh no, what he took to the cross, it was finished there, and when he was buried in the tomb, that put it away. He arose again from among the dead as the head of a new creation, whereas the old one's gone, judged, put away. What's the new one? Christ is the head of that new creation.

If any man is in Christ, he's a new creature. You see what that is, don't you? And we are missing this. Oh, we are coming to know Christ as dead yet.

We may be born again, but we haven't yet got this clear. We need to get to that cross and realize there, in some sense, was the judgment of this world. There, in some sense, God finished it all and began something new, and we've got to get there and identify ourselves with that that God has done, and with that which God has in his mind now.

The cross of Christ was the judgment of this world. You remember he said, as he was looking forward and he could see that cross, he said, "Now is my sole trouble, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause came I into this hour. Father, glorify thy name." That's it.

And then he went on to say, "Now is the judgment of this world." So, the cross of Christ was the judgment of this world. It's a judgment pronounced, it's not yet carried out. As far as God is concerned, that's right.

But, remember, it's not yet carried out. Now notice, between that sentence there in the cross and the actual carrying out of that sentence, God comes in in a wonderful way, and he makes it clear to us that we can accept the free carbon, you see, which will mean that we become alive. And we take that viewpoint of the cross, the viewpoint of God, and the viewpoint of the Apostle Paul.

In between the passing of the sentence, the carrying out of the sentence, God comes in, and he says, "Now I've made it gloriously possible for you to go to that cross, to identify yourself with Christ in that suffering and death, and then to be identified with him as a new creature, and the one who was risen from among the dead. Many years ago, when I was over here, they took me to a place away outside the ... I don't know what it was now, somewhere up in the north, a big house there, and they said, you know, at one time the president of America lived here. He was Andrew Jackson.

So, we were around the place, and we came away, and I thought, Andrew Jackson, yes. I remember that in the time of Andrew Jackson, a man boarded the mail train, murdered the man in charge of the mail, robbed the mail, and he got away. But, eventually, they tracked the man down, he was arrested, and he was brought up on a charge of murder.

The man was found guilty, and he was sentenced to death. His name was George Wilson. George Wilson was there in prison, the sentence of death had been passed upon him, and he was awaiting the day of his execution.

You got it? George Wilson, sentenced to death, there in the condemned cell, waiting the day of his execution. And then, for some reason, Andrew Jackson, the president of America, exercised his

prerogative, and a free pardon was sent to George Wilson. And when they went down into the cell, they said, George Wilson, we've got good news for you.

There is here a pardon signed by Andrew Jackson, the president of America. George Wilson, your prison cell door is open, the prison door is open, the prison gates are open, and you're a pardon man. You can go free.

He said, I refuse. George Wilson, do you understand this? You are under the sentence of death, you're awaiting your execution. Here's a free pardon from the president of America, Andrew Jackson.

Yes, I understand. Well, then, will you not take it? No, I refuse. But, but you know what this means.

Yes, he said, I know what it means, but I refuse that. Why do you refuse? Because I'm guilty. But here is a free pardon.

I refuse it. So, they went away, and they didn't know what to do. So, they gathered together, and said, what do we do with this man? Here is a free pardon signed by the president of America.

Here's this man, and he refuses a free pardon. What do we do? So, some said, well, you execute him. But, but there's a pardon here.

Yeah, that's right. Well, make him take it, oh well. So, they gathered together, you know, all the astrologers, the soothsayers, the wise men, and what have you, and they opened all the books, you know, to see, well, what does the book say? And, he didn't say anything.

It never took into consideration the possibility that a man sentenced to death would refuse a free pardon. So, after discussing it, the attorney general took to his feet and said, men and brethren, listen, a free pardon is a piece of paper the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. If that free pardon is refused, it is no pardon, and George Wilson must be hung.

And hung he was. They didn't execute them, they didn't elect to execute them in those days. They hung them, and he was hung.

Now, you might say, oh, the man must have been a fool. Listen, between the passing of the sentence and the actual carrying out of the sentence, they came to him with a free pardon, and he refused it, and the sentence was carried out. Now, you reckon the man was a fool, right? There in the cross of Christ is the judgment of this world.

It's a judgment pronounced, it's not yet carried out. Between the passing of that, pronouncing of that sentence, and the actual carrying out of the sentence, God comes to us with a free pardon. Are we willing to accept it? If we refuse it, what then? If we refuse it, that sentence pronounced, it's certain to be carried out.

The judgment of a holy God will be carried out on you, if you refuse to avail yourself of what he's provided for you in that cross. We've got to face up to this, each one of us. We've got to realize this is our responsibility.

God will not save us against our will. He will not force the issue. He will make it perfectly clear to each one of us, and it is our responsibility to cooperate with the Spirit of God when he convicts us of sin, and righteousness, and judgment, and to avail ourselves of what God has provided for us, or we suffer the

consequences.

Now, let us remember things happen very suddenly. A young man went in to a professor, who was a Christian, and he said, Sir, could I ask you a question? He said, Yes, my boy. I would like to ask you, Sir, how long should I give myself to prepare to die? The professor said, uh, five minutes.

Oh, is that all, Sir? Yes, he said, five minutes. What, five minutes just to prepare myself to die? Yes. Oh, I thought I would need more time than that.

No, five minutes. Oh, thank you, Sir. And when he reached the door, the professor said, uh, my boy, Sir, have you any idea when the five minutes begin? They may have already begun.

Oh yes, things happen very suddenly. Men and women in the lost eternity tonight are never meant to be there. Last Sunday.

Oh, you say, yes, I know. I know why they're in the lost eternity. Why? Because they refused to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. Because they said no. No, they didn't.

They didn't reject it. They didn't say no. You know what they said? They said, not just now.

They said, not tonight. That's all. Oh, they didn't refuse.

They didn't say no. They only said, not just now. And then something happened.

It happened very suddenly, and they're ushered into a lost eternity. Would God we would face up to these facts and realize that this has to do with eternity, not just with time, not with a few years that remain, but with eternity. What we decide now.

Shall we pray? Oh God, our Father, in the worthy and precious name of our Lord Jesus, we give our thanks to Thee that we are free to look into Thy word, we are free to contemplate what we find therein, and we find therein so much revealed of Thy mind, and Thy will, Thy thought, and much has come before us this morning. We would ask of Thee, our God, that Thou would be pleased to bless this word to each one of us. Whether we be saint or sinner, we ask for Thy blessing upon it.

We ask, our God, that if there's anyone here this morning who has yet has not availed himself, herself, of that free pardon being offered to them through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might this very morning decide to accept it. That it may not be too late, they may not procrastinate, but avail themselves gladly of what Thou hast provided for them right now. And if we ask of Thee, as we give our thanks for Thy help, in the worthy and precious name of Thy beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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