

In the Flesh

Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk **in the flesh**, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. (2Corinthians 10:1-4)



Have you ever heard or used the idiomatic expression, “in the flesh”? It is an expression used to indicate a very real presence physically. It indicates something immediately at hand—not artificial, illusory, or ephemeral. In writing to the Christians in Corinth, Paul uses the phrase, “in the flesh,” to contrast something spiritual. He does not mean that things spiritual are not real, but that things fleshly are at hand—subject to recognition through physical senses. He, through both of his letters to Corinth, has to remind these Christians of that distinction. This causes some to deny Paul’s service and apostleship.

Some in Corinth had not corrected the things which were amiss and were still after the “scalp” of the apostle. Especially in Second Corinthians, he informs them that he is ready. The fight is on. However, he would not be fighting with physical weapons. His enemies assumed that he would walk and fight according to the flesh (**2Corinthians 10:2**). They understood these tactics—they used them. He informs them that he is not motivated by fleshly feelings and would not walk in that manner. Does this mean that Paul is not a real, flesh and blood human?

Paul, In the Flesh

Paul was in the flesh—very much so (**2Corinthians 10:3**). He even suffered a thorn in the flesh (**2Corinthians 12:7-9**). He suffered in the flesh (**2Corinthians 11:24-28**). “**In**” the flesh, as used here, refers to being in the body, alive.

Although Paul was in the flesh, he did not walk according to the flesh (**2Corinthians 10:2**). He did not war according to the flesh (**2Corinthians 10:3**). Walking “**according**” to the flesh refers to being motivated by fleshly desires. It is doing what one feels like doing.

Jesus, In the Flesh

Deity came in the flesh—Immanuel, God with us, who is called “Jesus” (**Matthew 1:21-23**). “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (**John 1:14**). “*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the*

likeness of men” (**Philippians 2:5-7**). However, just because Jesus was “in” the flesh, did He walk “according to the flesh?”

Jesus did not walk according to the flesh. “*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (**Philippians 2:8**). “*Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously*” (**1Peter 2:21-23**). He did not do the will of the flesh: “*As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*” (**John 5:30**).

Apostles, In the Flesh

Other men sent by the Lord, were apostles “in” the flesh. Jesus made reference to this in a prayer: “*I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are*” (**John 17:16**). They were “in the world”—they were human beings. They did not walk according to the flesh. Jesus also referenced this in His prayer: “*I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*” (**John 17:14-16**). They were chosen by the Lord “*out of the world*” (**John 15:19**).

Christians, In the Flesh

Christians are “in” the flesh, that is the way all men, created by God, are found (**Genesis 2:7**). As long as man lives, he is in the flesh—the spiritual portion of man is different (**Ecclesiastes 12:7**).

Although Christians are in the flesh and have that physical component, they are not to walk according to the flesh, based on those desires (**Romans 8:1-2; Romans 8:5-13; 2Peter 2:10; Romans 7:18**). Christians are not to even make provision for the flesh (**Romans 13:14**).

In the Flesh—Not According to the Flesh

The concept is easy to illustrate: there is a pretty woman and my flesh tells me that I should take her and commit adultery. “That is good,” says my flesh. No matter that the Spirit says: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” To commit adultery is walking according to the flesh. There is the desired object. My flesh says, “I like it. Get it. Steal it. Take it.” It matters not that the Spirit says that thou shalt not covet and thou shalt not steal. That is walking according to the flesh. Here is a religion that really appeals to me. My flesh likes it. It excites me. It sounds good. It feels good. Take it! It makes no difference what God’s word says. That is walking according to the flesh.

Since we are “in” the flesh and constantly feel its tugging, let us be careful to walk not “according” to the flesh. The flesh is selfish and does not tell us that which is best.