

What is Living According to the Flesh?

Use with the full teaching and a Bible. Watch or read first, complete the questions, then discuss and apply. For family or homeschool use, an adult may choose a shorter section and accept spoken answers.

The summary is a reading aid. Test the teaching's explanations against the cited passages. Keep the answer key and facilitator notes separate when distributing learner pages.

[Open the teaching](#)

Teaching summary

This teaching examines what Scripture means by living "according to the flesh" and contrasts it with being led by the Spirit. It begins with passages such as Romans 8:8, Romans 8:13-14, Galatians 6:8, and John 6:63, which connect the flesh with death and corruption and the Spirit with life. The teaching first considers whether "flesh" simply means the physical body and "spirit" means what is non-physical. Scripture can use those words that way, as seen in Isaiah 31:3 and Luke 24:39. However, that physical meaning does not explain Paul's moral contrast. If living according to the flesh merely meant satisfying bodily desires, then depriving the body of food, comfort, or intimate relations might seem like a way to strengthen the spirit. The teaching identifies this approach as asceticism and points to Colossians 2:20-23, where Paul says that severity to the body is of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

The teaching follows a biblical connection between life, death, and obedience. Deuteronomy 30:15-18 connects life and blessing in the land with loving YHWH, walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, while turning away brings destruction. In Luke 10:25-28, Yeshua directs the lawyer's question about eternal life to the Law's commands to love YHWH and one's neighbor. The teaching then connects Eden's warning about disobedience and death with Revelation 22:14-15, where those who wash their robes have access to the tree of life and those who practice evil are outside. These passages form the teaching's argument that obedience belongs to the way of life and sin leads to death. They do not make obedience a way to earn forgiveness or eternal life.

Romans 7 and 8 explain Paul's contrast more directly. Romans 7:14 calls the law spiritual, while Paul describes himself as of the flesh and sold under sin. Romans 7:25 contrasts serving YHWH's law with the mind and the law of sin with the flesh. In these passages, the teaching understands flesh as the inclination to sin and life according to the Spirit as a Spirit-enabled desire to obey YHWH. Romans 8 contrasts a mind set on the flesh with a mind set on the Spirit. The fleshly mind is hostile to YHWH and does not submit to his law. This is an explanation of the contrast in context; it does not reduce the Holy Spirit to a human desire or define every biblical use of flesh and spirit in the same way.

The teaching asks how the Spirit leads a person into obedience. Ezekiel 36:26-27 describes YHWH giving his people a new heart, putting his Spirit within them, and causing them to walk in his statutes and obey his rules. Acts 5:30-32 joins Yeshua's resurrection and exaltation with repentance, forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The teaching says YHWH's Spirit overcomes the inclination to sin and produces righteous fruit. Galatians 5:16-24 contrasts the works of the

flesh with the fruit of the Spirit and says those who belong to Messiah Yeshua have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The teaching concludes that avoiding life according to the flesh does not require rejecting the physical body or every physical pleasure. What must be rejected is the desire to disobey YHWH. Believers repent and receive forgiveness through Messiah Yeshua, then depend on YHWH's Spirit to overcome sin and produce obedient lives. Salvation is received by grace through faith; obedience is its fruit, not its price. Romans 6:22 describes people already freed from sin and belonging to YHWH, whose fruit leads to sanctification and eternal life. This is continuing growth, not a demand for instant perfection.

Summary points

- Scripture contrasts living according to the flesh with walking by the Spirit, connecting the flesh with death and the Spirit with life.
- Although "flesh" can refer to the physical body, that physical meaning does not fully explain Paul's moral contrast between flesh and Spirit.
- Paul's rejection of asceticism shows that merely depriving the body of physical pleasures does not stop the indulgence of the flesh.
- Deuteronomy 30, Luke 10, Genesis 2, and Revelation 22 connect obedience to God with life and disobedience with death.
- Romans 7 presents the law as spiritual and contrasts the law of God with the law of sin operating through the flesh.
- In these passages, the teaching contrasts the desire to sin with a Spirit-enabled desire to obey YHWH.
- Romans 8 says that the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law.
- Ezekiel 36:26-27 teaches that YHWH puts his Spirit within his people and causes them to walk in his statutes and obey his rules.
- Galatians 5 contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit and describes those who belong to Messiah Yeshua as having crucified the flesh.
- Forgiveness through Messiah Yeshua and the Spirit's transforming work lead believers away from sin and toward obedience, sanctification, and eternal life.

Fill in the blank

Use the teaching and the cited Bible passages. Equivalent wording is welcome when it expresses the same meaning.

Basic

1. The Scriptures repeatedly teach that following the flesh leads to _____, while following the Spirit leads to life.
2. The teaching explains that, in Paul's moral contrast, the flesh represents the desire to _____.
3. The teaching explains that walking according to the Spirit includes the desire to _____ YHWH.
4. Deuteronomy 30 connects keeping YHWH's commandments with _____.
5. Romans 8:7 says the mind set on the flesh does not submit to God's _____.
6. Ezekiel 36:26-27 says YHWH puts his Spirit within his people and causes them to walk in his _____.

Challenging

1. The practice of depriving the body of pleasures in an attempt to weaken the flesh is called _____.
2. Colossians 2:20-23 says severity to the body is of no value in stopping the indulgence of the _____.
3. Romans 7:14 says that the law is _____.
4. Romans 7:25 says, "with my flesh I serve the law of _____."
5. Acts 5:30-32 says YHWH has given the Holy Spirit to those who _____ him.
6. Galatians 5 says those who belong to Messiah Yeshua have _____ the flesh with its passions and desires.

Group discussion

Discuss with respect, support answers from the passages, and allow time to think. Use the lines for brief notes or a notebook for longer responses.

1. Why does the teaching conclude that Paul's contrast between flesh and Spirit cannot simply mean physical things versus non-physical things? How does Colossians 2:20-23 help make that distinction?

2. How do Deuteronomy 30, Luke 10, Genesis 2, and Revelation 22 build the teaching's connection between obedience and life, and between disobedience and death?

3. What do Romans 7 and 8 show about the relationship among the flesh, sin, God's law, and the mind that is set on the Spirit?

4. According to Ezekiel 36:26-27, what role does God's Spirit have in obedience, and why is that important to the teaching's definition of walking by the Spirit?

5. How does Galatians 5 contrast the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit, and what does the teaching mean by "crucifying the flesh"?

6. Why does the teaching distinguish rejecting the physical body from rejecting the desire to disobey God? How does that distinction shape the way a Spirit-led life is understood?

Answer key

For the leader or parent. Answers follow the teaching; references help you check the wording and context. Accept equivalent wording where appropriate.

Basic

1. death

Romans 8:8,13–14; Galatians 6:8

2. sin

Romans 7:14,25; 8:6–7

3. obey

Romans 8:4–7; Ezekiel 36:26–27

4. life

Deuteronomy 30:15–18

5. law

Romans 8:7

6. statutes

Ezekiel 36:26–27

Challenging

1. asceticism

Colossians 2:20–23

2. flesh

Colossians 2:23

3. spiritual

Romans 7:14

4. sin

Romans 7:25

5. obey

Acts 5:30–32

6. crucified

Galatians 5:24

Facilitator notes

These are suggested directions for discussion, not a required script or a test of identical wording. Invite participants to explain the passage and consider a faithful practical response.

1. Scripture sometimes uses flesh for the physical body, but Colossians 2 says bodily severity cannot stop fleshly indulgence. The teaching therefore reads Paul's moral contrast as sinful inclination versus the Spirit's work, rather than physical existence versus nonphysical existence.

Isaiah 31:3; Luke 24:39; Colossians 2:20–23

2. These passages connect obedience with life and sin with death in different settings: covenant blessing, love, Eden, and final access to the tree of life. The teaching brings them together as a pattern, while forgiveness and eternal life remain gifts through Yeshua.

Deuteronomy 30:15–18; Luke 10:25–28; Genesis 2:9,16–17; Revelation 22:14–15

3. Romans 7 calls the law spiritual and distinguishes it from sin. Romans 8 describes the fleshly mind as hostile to YHWH and refusing his law. The teaching therefore connects Spirit-led life and peace with obedience, not rejection of Torah.

Romans 7:5,14,25; 8:2–8

4. YHWH gives a new heart and places his Spirit within his people, causing them to walk in his statutes. Obedience depends on his transforming help, not merely willpower or bodily deprivation. The teaching therefore describes a Spirit-enabled desire to obey.

Ezekiel 36:26–27

5. Fleshly works include relational evils such as jealousy, anger, strife, and division. The Spirit's fruit includes love, patience, gentleness, and self-control. Crucifying the flesh means rejecting sinful desires as someone belonging to Yeshua, not physically harming the body.

Galatians 5:16–24

6. The body itself is not the enemy in Paul's moral contrast, and deprivation cannot make someone righteous. Believers receive forgiveness through Yeshua and rely on the Spirit to turn from disobedience. Appropriate physical enjoyment need not be treated as sin.

Colossians 2:20–23; Romans 6:22

Put it into practice

Choose one response to the passages you studied. What will you do, and when will you revisit it? Share only what you are comfortable sharing.
