

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SIN'

PART 27

KEY TERMS: FLESH, SATAN

FLESH

This word has a wide range of use and meaning. In a general sense, it can refer to the whole animal creation, man or beast, and it can refer to the flesh of their bodies as opposed to bones and organs. It can refer to meat used for food. It is used as a distinguishing marker between the physical body and the human spirit. It is used to mean natural or physical origin. It can mean “mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God; accordingly it includes in the soul whatever is weak, low, debased, [and] tending to ungodliness and vice” [Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, s. v. “flesh”]. In the Old Testament, the word is used only sparingly to figuratively refer to spiritual issues. In the New Testament, it is used much more often as a figurative representation of the state of sinful man. “A physical body is denominated *flesh* whether dead or alive, whereas the term *flesh* in its ethical meaning includes not only the body but also that which makes it a living thing—the unseen reality which expresses and manifests itself through the body” [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 6:183].

In Hebrew, the word used the majority of the time is בָּשָׂר. This word is formally used for flesh and can refer to living things. It means any biological life, human or animal, with a focus on the substance of that life. It has a more specific biological meaning when it refers to all the soft-tissue component parts of the body of any creature that make up the total corporeal mass including but not limited to skin, ligament, muscle, etc. It can also mean the whole of the human body including bones as an extension of the soft tissue corporeal mass. It can simply mean the meat or flesh which refers to the muscle and soft tissue of an animal used for food or sacrificial offering.

Leviticus 17:14 ¹⁴“For as for the life of all flesh [בָּשָׂר], its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh [בָּשָׂר], for the life of all flesh [בָּשָׂר] is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”

In Genesis 2:23, “flesh” is used in a more figurative sense in that man and woman become one flesh meaning a married couple existing in complete unity as though one person. Unger said it this way, “‘She is my very own self, my counterpart,’ not merely in physical feelings (flesh), but in the higher realm of the intellectual and spiritual (bones)”

[Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 14]. Bones, עֲצָמוֹת, can mean self and that is what Unger is referring to here.

Genesis 2:23 ²³The man said, “This is now bone [עֲצָמוֹת] of my bones [עֲצָמוֹת], And flesh of my flesh [בְּשָׂר]...”

In Ezekiel, “heart of flesh” is contrasted with “heart of stone” with what are clearly figurative meanings assigned to the word. The heart of stone is a disobedient, rebellious heart but the heart of flesh is an obedient heart that believes and responds to God in loyalty and in faithfulness.

Ezekiel 11:19 ¹⁹“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh [בְּשָׂר] and give them a heart of flesh [בְּשָׂר].”

There is only one other Hebrew word for “flesh,” שָׂרָף, and it is used much less often in the Old Testament. It means flesh, food, meat, body, self, blood relative, or blood kindred. It is generally synonymous with בְּשָׂר. It can refer to the human's seat of physical strength and vitality.

Psalms 73:26 ²⁶My flesh [שָׂרָף] and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The Greek word for flesh is σάρξ and it means flesh, the corporeal mass of human and animal; the physical body, or the human nature. The Louw-Nida lexicon has a definition that is more applicable to the soteriological aspects of the word. The psychological aspect of human nature which contrasts with the spiritual nature; in other words, that aspect of human nature which is characterized by or reflects typical human reasoning and desires in contrast with those aspects of human thought and behavior which relate to God and the spiritual life. “Flesh” is often used in the New Testament as a figurative description of man's sinful proclivities and of his opposition to God. When “flesh” is used in the New Testament to refer to the unseen reality of a person it is usually referring to the sin nature and what flows from that nature in a person. I can't think of any Scripture that uses “flesh” to refer to godly issues involving a person. The flesh is called weak (Mt. 26:41), flesh begets flesh (John 3:6), the flesh profits nothing (John 6:63), the flesh serves the law of sin (Rom. 7:25), the flesh and the spirit are opposed to one another (Gal. 5:17), and so on. “Flesh” is used 133 times in the New Testament and whenever it is used figuratively it is used to refer to issues of the sin nature. It is used with a negative connotation.

The word is used to identify normal human biological concepts. When Paul said that Jesus was born according to the flesh, he meant that Jesus was born a human being. In

this verse (Rom. 1:3), Paul was emphasizing the fact that Jesus was fully human and in the next verse he emphasized the fact that He was God as well.

Romans 1:3³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh [σάρξ],

As I mentioned, “flesh” is often portrayed in a figurative sense as being opposed to spiritual matters and representative of the sin nature. To live according to the flesh, is to live according to the old sin nature. The problem is those who are in Christ should be walking according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. “Walking according to the flesh” is referring to a Christian who is living a carnal life. This is a life that is being lived according to the dictates of the sin nature and according to the values of the world system. That is not a life the Christian is supposed to live.

Romans 8:4⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh [σάρξ] but according to the Spirit.

“...σάρξ can function almost as shorthand for the present evil world and for human existence apart from God, both of which have a drive that is opposed to God. The flesh not only serves as an occasion for sin but also becomes entangled in it. Accordingly, Paul can draw up a catalogue of vices that he characterizes as τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ‘the works of the flesh’ (Gal 5:19-21), i.e., sinful attitudes and actions motivated by ἐπιθυμία σαρκός, ‘the desire/lust of the flesh’ (5:16; cf. Rom 13:14). Above all, in Gal. 5:17 he is able to say, ‘For the flesh desires [ἐπιθυμεῖ] what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.’ It is worth noting that in Eph 2:3, which describes immoral conduct as living ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῆς σαρκός (‘the passions/lusts of the flesh’), the terms σάρξ and διάνοια (‘mind, thought’) are then coordinated: ποιῶντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκός καὶ τῶν δανοιῶν, lit., ‘doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts.’...An understanding of this theological conception of σάρξ helps to explain the impotence of the Mosaic law. The law ‘was weakened by the flesh’ (Rom 8:3a) because the flesh uses it as a means of self-assertion against God. But because God ‘condemned sin in the flesh’ (8:3c; cf. Eph 2:14; Col 1:22) by sending Christ ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom 8:3b), believers are set free from sin by the Spirit (8:2) and are able to fulfill the law as they walk according to the Spirit (8:4). Their minds are set not on the things of the flesh (cf. Col 2:18) but on the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:5), yielding life and peace instead of death (8:6). In this sense believers are no longer ἐν σαρκί, ‘in the flesh’....Rather, the Spirit dwells in them and thus they are ἐν πνεύματι, ‘in the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:9b). Thus they must not be σάρκινοι (1 Cor 3:1, defined as ‘infants in Christ’) or σαρκικοί (3:3, defined as ‘walking according to man’; NIV, ‘acting like mere humans’)” [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, s. v. “σάρξ”].

As always, we must examine the context in order to determine the particular meaning of σάρξ. In general, there are four categories of meaning assigned to the word.

1. It refers to the weaknesses and frailties of human beings who are fallible and vulnerable. In no way should we place any confidence in human beings and their capabilities to do what is right in God's sight. No person has anything intrinsic to their being that would allow them to be in the presence of God apart from Christ. Christians also remain fallible even after their new birth.
2. The word can simply refer to the physical body without any evaluation of the human nature. This is important, however, because Jesus was also a true human being with a physical body.
3. When people think according to the flesh, they are making decisions based on human thought and emotion apart from any spiritual considerations. The only way we can understand spiritual matters is through the Scriptures and the One who guides us into all truth through them.
4. The word is used to characterize all that it is about people that is hostile to God. It is self-oriented and fancies itself to be independent of God. Even though this is no longer true of those who are in Christ, they can still sin and act in a fleshly manner. Christians can walk as mere men and as such they are fleshly even though regenerate.

The concept of “flesh” encompasses not only the nature of man but his whole being that is in the flesh. This negates any doctrine that claims a Christian can become sinless. Positionally, we are in Christ but experientially we are still in the world, possess the sin nature, and continue to be able to operate in the flesh after salvation. “It has been said that, though the *flesh* is never eradicated, the carnal nature is. But Scripture never speaks of ‘the carnal nature.’ According to Scripture, the believer has the *sarx* as long as he has the natural body, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit he may walk free of its dominion. The error lies in assuming either that regeneration changes the nature, or that the indwelling Spirit has delivered the believer from all possibility of walking in the flesh. The New Testament certainly speaks of some believers as carnal, and to make a distinction between ‘flesh’ and ‘carnal’ is mere forgetfulness of the Greek. ‘Flesh’ is *sarx*—flesh; ‘carnal’ is *sarkikos*—fleshly” [C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Bible Correspondence Course*, p. 5:1208]. Justification does not eliminate or change our sin nature into a righteous nature; justification is a declaration of righteousness and not the infusion of a righteous nature. The possibility of walking in the flesh according to the sin nature is not removed from the believer until the reception of a resurrected, glorified body.

The point is Christians must understand they still have a sin nature. You can only misunderstand this issue by ignoring the Word of God and by ignoring human experience.

“A very complex situation is thus confronted wherein the living factors of human existence—spirit, soul, Adamic nature, heart, kidneys, mind, sensibility, will, and conscience—are all integral parts....as a feature of the immaterial part of man is included a nature which is prone to sin. It is in reality the original human nature which has been injured, and as such has been reproduced throughout all succeeding generations. By his first sin the first man became at once a different order of being than that which he was made by creation, and the law of procreation obtained, which is to the effect that the species reproduces after its kind....Failure to recognize this nature as an unalterable and universal feature in all human existence does not change the fact, and it is the part of wisdom to acknowledge it and should be the plan of one's life to be adjusted to it. Four more or less common errors should be identified and avoided: (1) that man is not evil by nature, (2) that children are born into the world unfallen, (3) that the Adamic nature may be eradicated, and (4) that the Adamic nature may be controlled by the power of the human determination and will. Being an integral part of a human being, this evil nature cannot and will not be dismissed until the body itself in which it functions is redeemed, or until the separation between the body and immaterial elements of soul and spirit is achieved by death. The Adamic nature is the dominating factor in all that enters into the flesh. That nature remains undiminished and unimpaired in each believer after he is saved and becomes one of the three great foes of the spiritual life [the world, the flesh, and the devil]”...[Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 6:183-184].

“The Scriptures are exceedingly clear in teaching that the flesh with its sin nature is still a living, vital part of every believer and that he will continue in possession of the flesh and its fallen nature until the body is redeemed at the coming of Christ or until he leaves this earthly frame behind in death. Notions are entertained that the sin nature which is in the flesh can be eradicated now by some supposed divine achievement. But the truth obviously remains that the world, the flesh, and the devil are never removed; they are overcome by the superior power of the Holy Spirit in response to an attitude of faith. Thus it may be seen that even were the sin nature eradicated the believer's three major conflicts abide, and it is not only revelation but reason that the divine method of overcoming them must be that which alone succeeds when dealing with the sin nature—which nature happens to be only an integral part of the flesh anyway: hence this nature is always to be governed by the power of God rather than eradicated” [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 7:155-156].

“The nearest that we can go toward finding a ‘general’ meaning for this partic. category is to say that fleshly life is lived in pursuit of one's own ends, in independence of God or of the law of God, in contrast to living in accordance with the direction of the

Holy Spirit" [New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, s. v. "σὰρξ"].

Σαρκικός is the adjective form of σὰρξ; it means fleshly, carnal, or pertaining to the flesh or body. It is sometimes, but rarely, translated "carnal" in the KJV and the NKJV. There is another adjective, σάρκινος, which means fleshly, material, and made or consisting of flesh and this word is also translated "carnal" in the KJV and the NKJV. The NASB does not use the word "carnal" at all. Rather, it uses the words "flesh" and "fleshly" which are more literal translations of the Greek words being translated. Collectively, these words are translated "carnal" only eight times in the KJV. As Scofield pointed out, to create a meaningful distinction between the words "flesh" and "carnal" is not warranted. It is particularly an error to create a distinction between them in order to create a doctrine that claims sin can be eradicated in the Christian's life. Some Christian theological systems do, in fact, claim that sinless living is possible. On the reverse side of that issue, they claim that a true believer can never engage in carnal living. Paul clearly contradicts this theology. Christians can live carnal lives.

1 Corinthians 3:1–4 [NASB] ¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh [σάρκινος], as to infants in Christ. ²I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³for you are still fleshly [σαρκικός]. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly [σαρκικός], and are you not walking like mere men? ⁴For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:1–4 [KJV] ¹And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal [σάρκινος], even as unto babes in Christ. ²I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. ³For ye are yet carnal [σαρκικός]: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal [σαρκικός], and walk as men? ⁴For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

Walking as men walk rather than walking as spiritual men in Christ should walk is a sanctification problem. "Carnal" is probably an acceptable term to use to describe the Christian who is walking as those men walk who are not only in the world but of the world. I do have a problem with the KJV translation in verse 4 at the end of the verse where it is translated "are ye not carnal"? The problem is the word translated "carnal" here is not σὰρξ or a cognate of σὰρξ; it is ἄνθρωπος, "man." It is interesting to note that the KJV does translate the same word in verse 3 as men but in verse 4 they use carnal. The NASB is better but they insert a word that isn't in the text and that word is "mere." That's their way of making the meaning more clear but it seems to me to be unnecessary in this case. The ASV is the best translation of this verse because it is the

most literal translation. I'm pointing this out just to highlight the hermeneutical/translation problem I see here. Even though "carnal" may present an accurate sense of what the verse is saying, it is not an accurate translation of the word that appears in the text, ἄνθρωπος. I'm suggesting that is not how we should do the work of translating the original languages.

1 Corinthians 3:4 [NASB] ⁴For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men [ἄνθρωπος]?

1 Corinthians 3:4 [KJV] ⁴For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal [ἄνθρωπος]?

1 Corinthians 3:4 [ASV] ⁴For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men [ἄνθρωπος]?

The assault on mankind from the world is an attack from outside the person but the flesh operates within the inner being of man and attacks from that vantage point. The carnal person "is not rightly related to the Holy Spirit, nor yielded, or filled with the Spirit, or walking in the Spirit. Also, he continues to be immature in his spiritual growth" [Kurt Witzig, "Sanctification by God's Free Grace" in *Freely by His Grace*, p. 378]. The concept of the carnal Christian is presented in Scripture as fact and it is most often connected with the Greek word σὰρξ which is properly translated "flesh." There is no question that truly born again believers can not only fail to walk in the Spirit but can regress and walk in the flesh.

It is important to understand that the sin nature was judged at the cross and we no longer have to live under it. How do we do that? Chafer addressed that issue in connection with Romans 6:11-13. "The judgment of the flesh with its lusts was achieved perfectly by Christ in His death unto the sin nature....Paul does not imply that the flesh and its lusts were rendered inactive or destroyed...A judgment rather is gained against the flesh and its lusts by Christ and so the 'old man's' power may by the Spirit be disannulled for such time as victory is claimed by means of the Spirit. The objective is that sin (the nature) should not be served. This particular judgment makes it righteously possible for the indwelling Spirit to hold the sin nature in check. Were it not for this judgment of the cross, the Spirit could not thus deal with the nature, and it is equally evident that He could not dwell where an unjudged sin nature reigns. Deliverance from the flesh and its lusts, is assured on the fulfillment of three conditions hinging on its many verbs: (1) 'reckon,' which means to count on the plan and provisions of God to be sufficient therefore (Rom. 6:11), (2) 'let not,' which command points to a conflict and implies that the power of the flesh will be disannulled if this foe is fought in the way and with the resources that God has provided (Rom. 6:12), and (3) 'yield,' which word

directs the human will how to walk in the path of God's holy ways (Rom. 6:13). Were the theory of eradication of the sin nature found to be true, all this Scripture with its extended analysis of the life under the enabling power of the Spirit would be rendered both aimless and useless" [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, p. 7:156-157].

Romans 6:11–13 ¹¹Even so consider ["reckon"] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let ["let not"] sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³and do not go on presenting ["yield"] the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

In the Greek, these are imperatives meaning they are commands; we are supposed to do these things. If God considers us to be righteous by faith as Paul has clearly established earlier in Romans, then we should consider ourselves alive to God. Life is our fundamental status. Conversely, we are dead to sin. Our behavior should reflect that truth. Sin no longer reigns and we no longer have to live under its power. We are to live under a conscious commitment to God doing His will. God has snatched us from the jaws of death and we are now to present ourselves to Him to live for and to serve Him. We have to have the attitude that faith has not only saved us from the penalty of sin but it saves us to the end from the reigning power of sin. We have no power to control our old nature but the indwelling Holy Spirit does have that power when we rely on Him in faith to do so. When we submit to these commands, we are walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

SATAN

The world and the flesh are two of the three modes of attack that are constantly assaulting believers in this age. The third leg is the leader of the other two legs, Satan. Who is this being? Where did he come from? What are his intentions? Does he even really exist? Those who do not believe the Bible to be literal truth have often made the claim that Satan is simply a figurative expression representing the concept of evil. This is a byproduct of evolution. Man is thought to be intrinsically good and through the evolutionary process over a long period of time man will become better and better and evil will be discarded as an unnecessary element of human life. The problem with that line of thought is the Bible clearly identifies Satan as a real being and evil as a real byproduct of man's rebellion against God by submitting to Satan. If Satan is not real, then the foundation of Christianity that identifies man as a rebellious sinner held in the grip of Satan and in need of a Savior is not true and there is no need for Christ and Christianity. For any Christian to doubt the existence of Satan is to doubt the veracity of Christ Jesus because He spoke of this evil being a great deal in the gospels.

Matthew 4:10 ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.' "

Satan, Σατανᾶς, means an adversary in general. It is also specifically applied as a proper name for the devil. Hebrew also has the word Satan, שָׂטָן, and it also means adversary. It refers to one who opposes another either as a verbal antagonist and so a slanderer or accuser or one giving physical opposition. Interestingly, apparently the word wasn't in the Greek until shortly before the New Testament was written because the Septuagint used ὁ διάβολος instead which refers to a person who is a slanderer and it is where the name "devil" comes from. It is "from a verb meaning 'to throw.' It is clear from this that the devil hurls accusations; he slanders; tears down, or defames God to man and man to God" [Robert Lightner, *Angels, Satan, and Demons*, p. 73]. When it is used with the article, it is specifically referring to the devil. In John 6:70, Jesus called Judas a devil, διάβολος, because he would eventually be Christ's accuser and the Lord called Peter Σατανᾶς in Matthew 16:23 because he was acting as an adversary to the Lord's stated purpose of suffering, dying, and being resurrected in Jerusalem.