

What Is Flesh?

By Norman Grubb

If our whole desire is to be a holy (whole) person, in the fullness of a life well-pleasing to God—what Paul called being “complete in Christ,” (Col. 1:28), then one of our major problems is this: what actually is my flesh, and how do I have my flesh in its right position? The answer is that I am “in the flesh, but not of it.” I, as Paul said, “walk in the flesh but do not war after the flesh” (2Cor. 10:3).

Flesh must be something essentially okay, because Jesus was “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). But it also says in Romans 8:3 that He was in the likeness of sinful flesh. In other words, flesh in itself is okay, but there is a virus operating it, which Paul calls “sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3) or “sinful flesh.”

Plainly, then, flesh in its basic being is okay, but can be misused. Therefore Paul says, “Don’t walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1-8). So the real problem comes down to this: not the flesh in itself, but what it means that I either walk “after” or don’t walk “after” it. That clears things.

First of all, it means that “flesh” is the name of my human make-up. I must have that to be human. It is called flesh rather than body, as shown by the difference in Greek between “sarx” and “soma.” Therefore it is meant to include both my body and soul human make up.

My body is obvious with its right and normal drives which make me a vigorous, active person. Those are my sex, my physical hungers my desires for material comfort and physical health. Paul speaks of these as “the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13) or “members upon earth” (Col. 3:5).

There is also my soul, or emotional human make-up. In that Colossians 3 passage, Paul goes on to include that, having

already spoken of those body members upon earth deserving to be mortified. Then he names the soul expressions as hate, fear, filthy talk, defiance against God (blasphemy). Also in Galatians 5, under the term “works of the flesh,” not only are those physical ones, but also “wraths, seditions, heresies, envying, etc” (verses 20-21). These are all those negative reactions which constantly assault us on our emotional, or, in modern terms, psychological level.

The writer to the Hebrews made the distinct differentiation between those soul-reactions as a living human. So now we see that, in Bible terms, we have a God-created humanity that is evidently right and not wrong, with both its body drives and soul-expressions, by which we operate as humans.

What Is Spirit? (An Inner “I-hood”)

But secondly, I penetrate to my real reality, which is spirit. That is my real “me,” and that is where the Bible says we humans are made in God’s image. Jesus said “God is Spirit;” Paul and the Hebrews writer said God fathered our spirits (Heb. 12:9); and if redeemed, we are “spirits of justified men” when we leave our bodies (Heb. 12:23). Paul says our human spirit is our “knower” (I Cor. 2:11-14). So here we reach the vital spot. We are spirit-humans. Spirit means that we have an inner “I-hood” like God’s which consists in knowing, loving and willing (John 7:17 & Phil. 2:12-13).

Now we come to the nitty-gritty of our humanity. Our “I” is our human spirit—knowing, loving, willing, just like God. Our means of self-expression is our “flesh,” consisting of body appetites and our soul-reactions. They are agents of our spirit-selves. But then the whole key to our being is that we (our human spirits) are created, never to be independent self-acting selves, but to be to be containers of the Deity Spirit. Thus we are called vessels, branches, slaves, wives, temples, and only exist to express, in our human flesh actions, what the Deity Spirit joined to our human spirits expresses by us as His Nature.

We know that because of the Fall of man, that deity spirit—called by John “the spirit of error” (Jn. 4:6) and by Paul “the spirit of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), or the devil, or Satan—took possession of us through Adam and Eve. So then our human flesh—soul/body—became the agency for Satan’s self-for-self nature (Eph. 2:3).

Satan as Lucifer, by his free choice as a person, was the first “transgressor of the law”: (1 Jn. 3:4), which is John’s definition of sin. This means willfully refusing to conform to God’s law, which we know to be the principle of self-giving love. So, Lucifer’s sin was giving himself over to express the contrary “law” of self-getting love—that “consuming fire” nature. In the Father this was transmuted into “light” by the begetting of His Son and expressed as blessing, not consuming.

The false deity spirit—called the “god of this world,” (2 Cor. 4:4)—became the false vine to us as human branches (Rom. 6:20), the false liquid in the vessels (Rom. 9:22), the false slave owner (Rom. 6:16), the false god in our temples (1 Cor. 8:10), and the false husband of us humans as wives (Rom. 7:1-7). So our flesh became “sinful flesh”—not the flesh, in itself, with its soul/body appetites and faculties being evil, but operated by that spirit of self-for-self, which is named “Sin.”

Flesh is Not Evil

Although we regard our flesh, or right humanity, as sin-indwelt and sin-controlled, it is obvious that the flesh is not essentially evil in its potentials. If Satan-spirit-sin operator uses it—by stimulation in all kinds of “deeds of the body,” or soul—and gives the impression that the flesh itself is something evil. No! The flesh is merely the human agent of the operating spirit; and my human spirit always only operates by the drive and nature of the deity spirit indwelling my spirit.

Through the revelation given Paul, I learn that Jesus—as our last Adam replacing that first—so identified Himself on the Cross with us that, in God’s sight, he was what we are, and thus was said

to be “made sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). His shed blood—His outer human death—removed the penalties of sins in God’s wrath; and by faith in that precious blood, we are “dead to sins” (1 Peter 2:24). Then by His body death—represented our Sin-Satan indwelt bodies, out went that false deity spirit-sin and in came His own Spirit. So, in Him we are now “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:2).

Paul says that Sin, as Satan’s self-for-self nature, no longer is the indwelling principle in us. It is now Christ indwelling us (Rom. 8:1). Sin is a condemning criminal in death row, as it were, awaiting final destruction (Rom. 8:3). In his self-for-self drawings he can shout at us through the bars or entice us (James 1:14), and does that by stirring up our desires or emotional reactions to fear, hate, etc. Those are our flesh drawings which we shall always have in this world geared to flesh responses. That does not mean that the fact of there being such responses is evil. Jesus was “tempted in all points like as we are” (Heb. 4:15).

Our flesh-body is only an agent by which we express ourselves. But the “self” is my “me”: my human spirit. And Paul now says it now depends on who we “walk after”—if we walk “not after the flesh but after the spirit.” So, it is the “I” (human spirit) is indwelt and controlled by the Deity Spirit in us. And now, in Christ’s body death and resurrection, it is His Spirit indwelling and joined to our spirits (1 Cor. 6:17): “Christ/I.”

The verdict remains with us, whether we walk after flesh or Spirit. By flesh is meant those drawings of body or soul by enticing conditions which surround us. The crisis moment is not the condition of the flesh in its drawings by its “list,” nor the Spirit by His drawing. It is the “me.” What is my response? Which do I walk “after” (Gal. 5:18)?

But now I no longer have to struggle in a helpless bondage, for Satan is no longer the “spirit of error dwelling in” or controlling me. He has been replaced by the “Spirit of Truth.” So, as my “flesh” feels these flesh drawings to respond—either in physical responses or in emotions reactions, then I just say, “You don’t own or control me, False Spirit. These pulls of sin in the flesh are from behind bars, condemned, and have no right to me. I have died to

them in Christ's body death (Rom. 8:1-4). Now I am Christ-indwelt, Spirit-operated by the "Spirit of Truth."

As I respond that way to these flesh pulls of soul or body, they have no further power, because the Spirit is expressing Himself by me, and producing. His fruit by my soul/body (Gal. 5:22). I am a total Christ-expresser, not Satan-expresser—a branch of the True Vine (Rom. 6:22).

Recognizing Those Pulls

So do I now have it clear? Flesh itself is merely our God-created humanity of body-desires and soul responses. All are perfect in their place and necessary for me to function in my full humanity, even as Jesus Himself did. But the manager and operator of my soul-body flesh is Christ. My human is made in the likeness of God, and created only capable of manifesting the Deity Spirit in His nature.

But at the Fall, my human "I" spirit was taken captive by this false Satanic deity spirit through my free choice. Thus, my soul-bound flesh became the normal enslaved fulfiller of the drives of sin, which is the self-for-self nature of Sin-Deity. There is no escape. I am slave, branch, temple, vessel, wife of the false husband.

Now, through my Last Adam's intercessory death "made sin," and resurrection as me (made alive and filled with the Spirit of God), so am I. So I remain fully in my soul-body flesh externals with their normal, necessary physical-emotional responses and drawings. But that sin-drive no longer owns and manages me.

Satan still exists, but as in a condemned cell. He can reach me and stimulate me flesh pulls. The whole outer world "in the wicked one" does that all the time in what William Law calls "pride, covetousness, envy and wrath." But my human spirit now has changed its owner and operator: no longer Satan, but Christ.

Therefore, while I, as a right human, shall continue to have every kind of flesh-pull and their many enticements (Aames 1:14), I now know how to recognize those prevalent pulls. I am now able to say—not with condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but with that recognition of the reality of those pulls, “I’m no longer under the dominion, Satan, nor of your sin-pulls on me. I am now Christ indwelt and dead to you. As I affirm Christ, His Spirit-nature of other love puts your pulls to death and replaces them with good fruits.”

I express Christ, not Satan; holiness (wholeness), not sin. I therefore don’t downgrade my humanity, though under the Bible term “flesh” it is most often used to express the false uses of my humanity. But now I accept that what can be called flesh as my body-members yielded to God, and my soul-affections (through the Cross, as in Gal. 5:24), manifesting Jesus’ Sermon-on-the-Mount quality of living. Christ is magnified by my body whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20). I am a whole person.

The basis of victory is not the flesh soul-body outer human agency, but “ME” whom they express—formerly a Satan-spirit of error as me, but now through Calvary, a Christ Spirit of truth as me. I’m free and whole, though still privileged to live under testing earth conditions. With Paul, in all these things “I am more than conqueror through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37).