

The Flesh

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*I*t is extremely sad just how many dear saints battle endlessly simply to survive the “Christian life.” At the center of this conflict is a great misunderstanding of the very nature of our own bodies – the ones that God has given us. It is a deep-rooted body-negative view. Multitudes labor under the bondage of such a perverted view. Simply put, many are miserable with themselves. They often find themselves at their wit’s end. Their hearts and souls desperately ache for real and lasting relief. Just where is the life of joy and victory that they hear so much about?

This all-to-common experience is a direct result of a misunderstanding of our true identity in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a series of basic truths related to this identification that are crucial for the believer to clearly embrace. Without a grasp of these precious truths, the believer is left prey to the dreadful bondage of religion.

One topic of critical understanding is the word “*flesh*.” The Scriptures convey four basic concepts by the usage of this word. These distinct concepts are often confused with each other, to the point of utter frustration and discouragement. Without this being corrected we actually end up struggling against the very core of who God, in His wise and gracious design, has actually made us for His own glory.

For those who have had any religious influence or training, the word “*flesh*” itself brings a very negative, evil connotation. The fact is however, that of the four ways that we shall see the word “*flesh*” used in Scripture; only one of them is negative. The other three are positive.

Let’s briefly look at these four ways that our English word “*flesh*” is used in the Bible.

FLESH: A Reference to the Physical, Human BODY (Godly by Divine Design)

The first passages we will look at are of the word “*flesh*” used as a reference to our physical, human bodies.

“*But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him ... there is one kind of **flesh of men** ...*” (I Corinthians 15:38-39).

*“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and **the life which I now live in the flesh** I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).*

*“But if I **live in the flesh**, this is the fruit of my labour ... To **abide in the flesh** is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:22, 24).*

*“And the Word was **made flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).*

In each of these verses, the word “*flesh*” is used as a reference to our bodies. They are godly by God’s design. God made them – “*God giveth a body as it hath pleased Him.*”

God’s life was manifested in the human body of the Lord Jesus Christ – “*the Word was made **flesh**;*” and this is the same place where Divine life is also manifested in us –

*“... That the life also of Jesus might be made **manifest in our body**” (II Corinthians 4:10).*

*“... That the life also of Jesus might be made **manifest in our mortal flesh**” (II Corinthians 4:11).*

*“... Great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh** ...” (I Timothy 3:16).*

In all the verses that we have seen here, the word “*flesh*” is used as a reference to the human body that God has given us. There is nothing evil here at all. They are a part of God’s design. This should be obvious, since “*the Word was made **flesh**.*”

So, here we have seen Scriptural references to “*flesh*” being positive and good.

FLESH: A Reference to MEAT (Godly by Divine Design)

The passages we will now look at are of the word “*flesh*” as it refers to meat designed to be eaten.

*“... the LORD shall give you in the evening **flesh to eat** ...” (Exodus 16:8).*

*“... to **eat flesh** ...” (Romans 14:21).*

The Scriptures speak of the eating of meat, as the eating of “*flesh*.” Even though under the Mosaic Law certain meats were ceremonially excluded as unclean from the diet of Israel, all restrictions have been removed. They are all now godly by God’s design.

“... meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (I Timothy 4:3).

Eating meat is a part of God’s plan; after all, “... Jesus sat at meat ...” (Matthew 9:10).

Again we see Scriptural references to “flesh” that are positive and good.

FLESH: A Reference to KINSHIP

(Godly by Divine Design)

Now we will look at passages where the word “flesh” is used as a reference to the family relationship.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be **one flesh**” (Genesis 2:24).

“... He is our brother and **our flesh**...” (Genesis 37:27).

“Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to **the flesh**” (Romans 1:3).

“... My kinsmen according to **the flesh** ... of whom as concerning **the flesh** Christ came” (Romans 9:3, 5).

In these references, the word “flesh” is used as a reference to ancestral geologies, or family trees. There is nothing evil here. Relatives are God’s idea; an integral part of His design. This should be obvious, for “as concerning **the flesh** Christ came.”

Once again these are Scriptural references to “flesh” that are positive and good.

So, we have seen three aspects in which the word “flesh” has a positive godly usage. We shall now see the one way in which “flesh” is used in a negative way.

FLESH: A Reference to the OLD MAN

(Ungodly by the Adamic Fall)

“For **when we were in the flesh**, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death ... For I know that in me (that is, **in my flesh**,) dwelleth no good thing” (Romans 7:5, 18).

“So then they that are **in the flesh** cannot please God. **But ye are not in the flesh**, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Romans 8:8, 9).

“And they that are Christ’s **have crucified the flesh** ... ” (Galatians 5:24).

Now we have finally located examples of the negative use of the word “*flesh*.” It’s usage in each of these last passages is a reference – not to the human body – but to what the Scripture also refers to as “*the old man*” (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9).¹ The “*flesh*” and the “*old man*” (“old” as in *former*) are doctrinal terms referring to our *former* birth-identity with fallen Adam. This identity was anchored in an *Adamic* perception of “*good and evil*:” his predisposition to give-way to the “*evil*,” or his prideful, legalistic efforts to perform the “*good*.”

The believer has been delivered from this “*flesh*,” or former identity in Adam. It has been replaced by our new identity with the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul’s words are exceeding clear and plain:

“... **Ye are not in the flesh**, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:9).

We have been removed from the “*flesh*” identity of Adam, as we are now “*in Christ Jesus ... a new creature*” (Galatians 6:15). Therefore,

“... *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” (II Corinthians 5:17).

Anyone in Christ “**IS** a new creature.” “*Old things are passed away*” – these “*old things*” include the “*old man*.” As a result of being in Christ, “**all things are become new.**” Therefore, the believer, instead of being an “*old man*” in Adam, is a “*new man*” in Christ.

“... *Ye have put off the **old man** ... and have put on the **new man***” (Colossians 3:9-10).

WHAT WE HAVE SEEN

We have seen four uses of the word “*flesh*” used in Scripture. Three of these were clearly godly by Divine design. Only one of the four was ungodly, and the good news is that the believer has been delivered from this type of “*flesh*.”

A destructive teaching arises from our failure to “*rightly divide the Word of Truth*” (II Timothy 2:15) – to make distinctions based upon the context of each passage where the word “*flesh*” is used. Many misunderstand the word “*flesh*,” used as a reference to our former identity in Adam, and thus apply it indiscriminately to all references to “*flesh*.” This is one of the evil propensities of religion.

1. “*Knowing this, that our **old man** is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin*” (Romans 6:6).

“*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the **old man**, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*” (Ephesians 4:22).

“*Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the **old man** with his deeds*” (Colossians 3:9).

The Gnostics of early Christianity mastered this concept, as they taught that all that was related to “*the flesh*” was “*evil*.” They went on to interpret “*the flesh*” as *anything* related to our *physical* body and the *physical* world around us. This led to horrendous religious bondage and abuse which has been present ever since Paul’s day. He said that believers willingly allowed religious leaders to enslave, devastate, and entangle them; to rip them off, bully them, and beat them up spiritually,

“For ye suffer [allow], if a man bring you unto **bondage**, if a man **devour** you, if a man **take** of you, if a man **exalt** himself, if a man **smite** you on the face” (II Corinthians 11:20).

Far from the enslaving teaching of the Gnostics, the Scriptures actually teach the freedom of God’s beautiful design of the human body and the physical world.

The Godliness of the Physical Creation

To see the goodly design of the physical creation, all we need to do is read the very first chapter of Genesis.

- Day 1: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:4)
- Day 2: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:10)
- Day 3: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:12)
- Day 4: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:18)
- Day 5: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:21)
- Day 6: “*it was good*” (Genesis 1:25)

What was His summation of the physical creation?

“And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good ...” (Genesis 1:31a).

The Wonder of the Physical Creation

“*I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well*” (Psalm 139:14).

God’s marvelous creation is full of wonder. After all it is His own handiwork.

The Enjoyment of the Physical Creation

“... *God, Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy*” (I Timothy 6:17b).

As we walk in harmony with God, He gives us the grand gift of creation appreciation! All of His creation is ours to richly enjoy!

Our Body, God's Temple

*“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? ... What? know ye not that **your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost** which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: **therefore glorify God in your body**, and in your spirit, which are God's” (I Corinthians 6:15, 19-20).*

Forget all that you have been taught to the contrary, hear afresh God's own words.

Your body is God's temple. Your body! The very body that religion would have you loath, despise, and hate – your body is the place where God can be glorified – “*therefore glorify God in **your** body.*”

Imagine if you will for a moment, standing in the old city of Jerusalem, pointing to the Temple of God and saying, “in there *dweleth no good thing.*” How absurd! Why? Because God resided in there! It was His dwelling place among Israel, and yet, we would have the audacity to presume that God's grand dwelling place today – our very own bodies – is evil, and ungodly? What a sad abuse of the truth!

Our Body, God's Holy Acceptable Sacrifice

*“... Present **your bodies** a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 21:1).*

God says that you can present your body as a living sacrifice to God. He describes your presentation as “*holy*” and “*acceptable*” to Him.

Do you think of your body as “*holy*” to God? Why not? After all your body is the temple of God's *Holy Spirit*.

Do you think of your body as “*acceptable*” to God? Why not? Not only did He make you in the womb, but you are His new creation in Christ as well.

The Godliness of Self-Love

Religion will teach men to hate and despise their God-given bodies. Love of ones own self will be cynically called into question and even condemned. Such is not the case with the Scriptures. Loving ones self is a given in the Scriptures. It is taken for granted. It is Divinely natural for us to love ourselves.

Self-love is the divine foundation of neighborly love

*“Thou shalt love...thy neighbor **as thyself**” (Luke 10:27).*

*“... Thou shalt love thy neighbor **as thyself**” (Galatians 5:14).*

God says we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. How can we love our neighbors, if we do not love ourselves?

Self-love is the divine root of marital love

*“So ought men to love their wives **as their own bodies**. He that loveth his wife **loveth himself**. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ephesians 5:28-29).*

God says husbands are to love their wives as their “own bodies.” How can God require this of husbands, and at the same time require that they *not* love themselves?

The bottom line here is unmistakably clear. It is NOT natural to hate your own body!

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it.”

It takes religion to produce such self-hatred. Religion teaches what is against nature! The negative view of self and our physical bodies is the religious act of, what Paul refers to as, “*the neglecting of the body.*”

Listen to him warn us concerning such abuse at the hands of the religious system:

*“Why ... are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, **and neglecting of the body**; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Colossians 2:20-23).*

Religion, with its doctrines of men, is only a “*show of wisdom.*” It just *looks* good. It is very showy. It is a showmanship of “*the old man*” – a *show business* pageant which satisfies man’s natural identity in Adam (“*to the satisfying of the flesh*” i.e., it satisfies the “*the old man*”); but no matter how good it *looks*, it is fiercely against the design of God.

The neglecting your body is the work of religion. Don’t neglect yours. Love it. Nourish it. Cherish it. Appreciate it. Thank God for it. Honor God with it. Enjoy it as God’s creation. Allow it as His vessel of life and love.

It is not evil, wicked, depraved, rotten, awful, “vile,” or “wretched.”² It is God’s handiwork;

2. The last two of the words in the list are used in the *King James Version*. “*Wretched*” and “*vile*” are examples of unclear words that so often used by religion to aid them in their perpetuation the body-negative attitude.

Wretched – “O **wretched** man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). In the hands of religion “*wretched*” has an awful sound! The Greek word for “*wretched*” is *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #5005, *talaiporos*, and is defined as, “enduring trial, i.e., miserable.” Other sources agree: “enduring toil and hardship” (E.W. Bullinger), “enduring toils and troubles; afflicted” (Joseph H. Thayer), and “distressed, miserable” (W.E. Vine). The “*wretched man*” of the KJV, has the idea of an “*afflicted man.*”

Vile - “Who shall change our **vile** body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). Again, to the religious mind-set the word “*vile*” can sound awful! The Greek word for “*vile*” is *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #5013, *tapeinoo*, and is defined as “to depress; figuratively, to humiliate.” Other sources agree: “of humiliation” (E.W. Bullinger), and “humble condition” (Joseph H. Thayer). It is also translated in the KJV as “*low estate*” (Luke

He designed it. It's God's temple; He lives in it.

Your body is His; and it is His holy, acceptable sacrifice of glory, wonderfully made.

1:48), "*humiliation*" (Acts 8:33), "*made low*" (James 1:10). The idea of this verse is that our Lord's resurrected body is "*glorious*" and our current body is a "*lowly*" and "*humble*" one by contrast; and one day ours will be changed to be made like His!

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