

## The Flesh

### **Sarx as non-sinful**

- Greek word *sarx* refers literally to the fleshy or muscular part of a human or animal body
- Sarx as non-sinful, fleshy parts of the body
  - 1 Co 15:39, “All **flesh** is not the same: Men have one kind of **flesh**, animals have another, birds another and fish another.”
  - 1 Co 15:50, “I declare to you, brothers, that **flesh** and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”
  - Rev 19:21, “The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their **flesh**.”
- Sarx as non-sinful, representing people or humanity in general
  - Jn 17:2, “For you granted him authority over all **people** that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.”
  - Gal 1:16, “. . . I did not consult any **man**.”
  - Col 2:1, “I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me **personally**.”
  - Mk 13:20, “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no **one** would survive.”
  - Acts 2:17 (ESV), “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all **flesh**.”
  - Includes Jesus
    - Jn 1:14, “The Word became **flesh** and made his dwelling among us.”
    - 1 Tim 3:16 (ESV), “He was manifested in the **flesh**, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels.”
    - Heb 10:20 (ESV), “Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his **flesh**.”
    - 1 Jn 4:2, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the **flesh** is from God.”

### **Sarx as sinful**

- Scripture also uses *sarx* in a figurative sense
  - Gal 5:19-21 (ESV), “<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the **flesh** are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- Most works of the flesh in this passage are non-physical sins: impurity, idolatry, sorcery/witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy
- A figurative meaning of *sarx* is a **mindset** focused on worldly existence, or attitude and behavior compatible with the world system which is dominated by sin, therefore opposed to God
- *Sarx* as sinful, origin of sin
  - Ro 8:5-8 (ESV), “<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the **flesh** set their minds on the things of the **flesh**, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the **flesh** is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the **flesh** is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the **flesh** cannot please God.”
  - Ro 7:18-19 (ESV), “<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh**. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”
    - “the desire” [to do what is right] (Gk, *thelo*): primarily refers to purpose, willingness
  - Gal 5:17 (ESV), “For the desires of the **flesh** are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the **flesh**, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”
  - Gal 6:8 (ESV), “For the one who sows to his own **flesh** will from the **flesh** reap corruption.”
    - “corruption” (Gk, *phthoran*): (1) destruction; (2) decay; (3) moral corruption
    - Jn 8:44, the devil is a liar and the father of lies
    - Jn 10:10 the thief comes to steal, kill & destroy
    - If you think like the world, you’ll experience and maybe create deception, loss, death and destruction
- Crucifying the *sarx*
  - Gal 5:24 (ESV), “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the **flesh** with its passions and desires.”
  - “Crucifying your flesh” requires an aggressive and unmerciful response to your own worldly thinking

- Source of temptation
  - Jas 1:13-15, “<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”
    - What’s the source of our “own evil desire”?
- How has this perspective of “the flesh” affected your thinking?

## **Spiritual Disciplines (Self-denial)**

- Fasting
  - Abstaining from or significantly reducing such things as entertainment, social media, luxuries, food or drink
  - Mt 16:24, “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”
    - What’s the first thing we must do if we intend to follow Jesus?
  - How might fasting affect your flesh’s influence over you? Why?
- Solitude
  - Choosing to be alone for a specific purpose and time
  - We can boost the effectiveness of solitude by dedicating the time to God
  - Mt 14:13, “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.”
  - Mt 14:23, “After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.”
  - Mk 1:35, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
  - Mk 6:32, “So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”
  - What kind of impact would uninterrupted time alone with God have on your relationship with him?
- Quietness
  - Deliberately quieting ourselves and our surroundings
  - Helps us develop inner quietness, which is essential to sensing inputs from our spirits and God
  - Gal 5:22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is ... peace.”
  - Col 3:15, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”
  - How might practicing the discipline of quietness improve your ability to be at peace regardless of your circumstances?

- Restrained speech
  - Jas 3:2, “If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.”
  - Mt 15:11, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”
    - “unclean” (Gk, *koinoo*): common, defiled, profane, polluted
    - What effect can our speech have on us?
    - How does our spiritual authority as believers make that happen?
  - Eph 4:29, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”
  - Various forms of restrained speech
    - Saying only what benefits others
    - Speaking the truth in love
    - Waiting before speaking to give others opportunity to finish
    - Not speaking at all (when appropriate)
  - How might restrained speech relate to stewardship?
- Other spiritual disciplines of self-denial include: simplicity of life, sacrifice, keeping Sabbath rest, keeping good deeds private, rejecting sleep to concentrate on spiritual matters

## **Closing**

- The Bible frequently uses the word “flesh” to represent a mindset or way of thinking oriented toward the world, which is dominated by sin and opposed to God
- The focus of self-denial or abstinence is destroying your flesh’s control over you

## **Blessing**

May you become so aware of your worldly mindset that you’re willing to do whatever is necessary to change the way you think.