

Fighting the Flesh

St. Paul, in his letters, makes an interesting distinction between the terms “body” and “flesh.”

The body, for St. Paul, is innately good. Having been created by God, it is to be blessed and respected, from the “womb to the tomb” as the say. The Son of God become the Son of Man by assuming the totality of our human nature, including a body which through His resurrection has been exalted to the right hand of His Father. We, then, as disciples are to sanctify our bodies by offering them to the Lord. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit our bodies become living temples of God. *“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).*

The word “flesh,” for St. Paul, means something very different. The “flesh” is not the material aspect of human existence, but a consolidation of interior sins and passions that are externalized through the wrong use of our bodily members. The sin of lethargy, for example, is an internal apathy of the soul born outward behaviorally as laziness, listlessness, etc. In this way, St. Paul’s use of the word “flesh” can be conceptualized as a negative totality: as the form of existence we as human beings portray when separated from God by sin. If we make a habit of continually refusing the approach of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we become will be filled with evil spirits because, as the saying goes, “nature abhors a vacuum.” Having entered into the heart these evil spirits influence the mind and will towards delusion, and from thence to the destructive actions. As the Lord says, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander” (Matt. 12:34).*

Fighting the fleshly passions doesn’t mean we abhor the body the Lord gave us. Instead, it means we choose to love God by hating the sins of mind and heart that metastasize like cancer from the inside to the outside, from thought to action.

Fighting the flesh on a daily basis takes an immense amount of courage. We confess, how powerless we are and cry out to God for redemption. *“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck and I am sinking in deep mire.” (Psalm 69:1)* Yet, by uniting ourselves to Christ we allow Him not only to help us in this struggle, but we learn to let Him do the fighting for us. There is no other way to struggle against “the flesh” than this, than for Christ to battle for us. *“The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still” (Exodus 14:13).*

As human beings our lives are meant to be something more than a chaotic, animated biology of fleshly desires. Our lives must be motivated by something more than what the world of men idolize to their own destruction. By God's grace we as Christians do not live according to the flesh, but by the Holy Spirit. Having been transformed in Christ, we become not bodies containing a soul, but living souls that encompass a body. Only by becoming one with Christ can we know what it means to live the spiritual life. *“But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness” (Rom. [8:17](#)).*

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