

The Flesh

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Cancer is a strange disease. It's not an injury inflicted from outside the body. It's not a poison or a pathogen that attacks the body. The cancer is you. Cancer is a disease in which one of your own cells begins to reproduce uncontrollably, invading other tissues in the body, interrupting the essential functions of the body, and potentially (if left untreated) leading to death.

Sin is the same. It is not an injury, a poison, or a pathogen. It is the product of my own body. This condition is explained in **James 1:14-15**: "*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*" Every temptation and every sin is rooted in my desires. We are our own biggest problem.

The Bible calls this condition "the flesh," referring to our physical bodies and the natural desires of the body. It's not a "sinful nature" or a spontaneous creation of the fall. It's simply human nature, the same nature that has always existed in humans. The fleshly desires that lead to sin are essentially the same desires that God created in us in the beginning. The problem is Satan manipulates and even hijacks these desires to draw us into sin.

For example, it's perfectly natural to seek self-gratification and pleasure. That desire is neutral. It's not righteous; it's not evil. But that desire is what leads to fornication, adultery, pornography, every other sexual sin, and addiction. It's perfectly natural to seek self-preservation, but that desire is what leads us to lie, cheat, steal, and kill.

Consider the first sin in the Bible. Eve sinned because of the manipulation of her natural, God-given desires. **Genesis 3:6**: "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.*" Eve could see the fruit was good for food. The desire to eat is natural. Eve could see the fruit looked good to the eyes. Appreciating beauty is natural. Eve could see the fruit would make her wise. The desire for knowledge is natural.

What's the problem? Carelessly following the desires of the flesh is not a path that leads to God. **Romans 8:7-8**: "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*" Our natural human desires are exploited by Satan to trap us in sin. The flesh is like a cancer. These desires grow uncontrollably and invade every part of living and thinking. The flesh interferes with the essential functions of the mind and eventually (if left untreated) leads to death.

We are at war with ourselves. In **Romans 7:14-19**, Paul describes the nature of this conflict:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

We want to change, but we don't. We want to be better, but we aren't. We want to conquer some sin, but we don't know how. You've heard the saying, "*If there's a will, there's a way.*" According to Paul, that's not true. We have the will to do good, but on our own, this is no way to defeat that sin.

We need to be saved from our own flesh, and Jesus alone can do that. There is no amount of personal discipline that can overcome the flesh. As long as we are living in the flesh, governed by the desires of the flesh, we will continue in the endless cycle of unrelenting sin. Jesus alone is the cure.

Jesus will make you free from the flesh, but it comes at a cost. The flesh must die. How does a physician cure a person of cancer? It's different than other medical conditions. If you break bone, the doctor can put it back together and fix it. If you have a heart attack, the doctor can open the diseased blood vessel and you fix it. You don't fix the cancer. You cure cancer by killing it. A part of that person has to die. So it is with Christ. Galatians 5:24: "*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*" You have to die.

The Bible tells us exactly when and how we can crucify the flesh. **Colossians 2:11-13:**

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...

In baptism, we share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The body of the sins of the flesh is cut off.

This is possible only if we're baptized *with faith* in the operation of God. People baptized without faith in the work of God will go into the water dead in their sins, and they will come out of the water dead in their sins. Baptism isn't our work; it's the work of our gracious and almighty God. The fleshly nature begins to die, and we begin to live free. We still live in the flesh, but we live in anticipation of the day when we are totally free from the flesh. We live in the hope of our eternal and glorious bodies: **1 Corinthians 5:1-2,**

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven...