

# Sarx (The 'Flesh')

by Robert Wurtz II

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*The sermon explores the concept of 'sarx' as it relates to human nature, sin, and the necessity of humility for spiritual growth and victory over sin.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 42:8, Romans 7:18, Romans 8:3, Galatians 5:16, Colossians 2:18

**Topics:** "Human Nature", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

Robert Wurtz II delves into the various senses of the word 'Flesh' (sarx) in the Bible, exploring its definitions from a physical to a metaphysical and ethical sense. The sermon emphasizes the distinction between the body as the external appearance of humanity and the flesh as the earthly nature of man prone to sin and opposed to God. It highlights the battle between the spirit and the flesh within individuals, pointing to the need for humility, constant grace, and victory over sin through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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## Transcript

SARX (Various senses of the word commonly translated as "Flesh")

Strong's Definition:

NT:4561 sarx (sarx); probably from the base of NT:4563; flesh (as stripped of the skin), i.e. (strictly) the meat of an animal (as food), or (by extension) the body (as opposed to the soul [or spirit], or as the symbol of what is external, or as the means of kindred), or (by implication) human nature (with its frailties [physically or morally] and passions), or (specifically) a human being (as such):

Thayers sense #4

NT:4561 4. sarx, when either expressly or tacitly opposed to to pneuma (tou Theou), has an ethical sense and denotes mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God;

The body is the exterior appearance of humanity. The words for body and flesh are sometimes used to denote external phenomena in general, as opposed to what is internal or spiritual. When we speak of Christ and the sense of the word flesh, it is the flesh without the contamination of sin. The obvious outworking of this is that He as was Adam was tested externally with sin--we are tempted from within. So, when Christ says to the Jews, "I judge not after the flesh," he means "the flesh is the rule by which you judge not the rule by which I judge" (John 7:15; compare also Philippians 3:3; II Corinthians 5:16).

The root of this weakness is in dwelling in the flesh (Rom 7:18; 17:20), by which man is divided within himself as well as separated from God, inasmuch as he -has, on the one side, the self-conscious spirit, which when quickened by the Spirit of God at regeneration submits to the laws of God, and takes pleasure in this obedience, desiring all that is commanded, and avoiding all that is forbidden. It is the "spirits" meat to do the will of the Father. Opposing the spirit is the flesh, which, being inhabited by sin and the law of sin is fulfilled by rebelling against God only. The flesh feeds off rebellion. The lusts, desires, and works of the flesh are only sinful (Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:3, etc.). To crucify the flesh and the works of the flesh is the great object of the Christian, which he attains through the power of the Spirit of Christ which dwells in him (Galatians 5:25; Romans 8:11). The fleshly mind is the vain mind, leading away from Christ to pride, and consequently to error (Col 2:18,19). When pride arises God resists and failure is imminent. Finally, to act according to the flesh is called to " be sold under sin" and to be a "slave to sin." (Romans 7:12; also compare. 1 John 2:16; Romans 8:3).

Flesh (sarx) does not always denote sinfulness (see Romans 1:3; 9:5; I Timothy 3:16; John 1:14). The flesh, in Christ, was not sinful; God sent him only " in the LIKENESS of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). Jesus Christ did not have a sin nature. He possessed an unfallen human nature as did Adam. Again, his trial and temptations were from without; ours are from within. I.e. satan found nothing IN HIM. In other words there was no sin to latch on to or attract to.

We see then, that the meaning of the word "flesh" is, on the one hand, gradually extended from a physical to a metaphysical, and finally to an ethical sense. In the ethical use of the term "flesh" in the New Testament, we do not find the idea of essential sin as necessarily lying in the flesh (body). Flesh in itself is neither bad nor sinful because it was created good. It is the tent or tabernacle of the soul containing within itself the interior and exterior organism of the senses, which, by its union with the soul and spirit, conceives ideas, sensations, desires, and contains the so-called faculties of the soul with their divers functions. In the regenerated state, its whole activity is to be governed by the spirit, and in so far as the latter remains in unison with God from whom it proceeds, it is in turn governed by him. But sin, which disturbs this unison of the Spirit with God, alters also the power of the spirit over the body. The key to maintaining victory over sin is to remain FULL of the Holy Spirit. Victory over sin is directly proportional to this one element. A person who denies "feeding" the flesh and walks in the Spirit FULL of the Holy Spirit, will succeed in regaining much ground towards total sanctification, but not in bringing back the state of total abnegation and of detachment from the world and sin that Adam and Christ knew. It is only through the action on the part of God through the resurrection that the original relation of the flesh (body) to the spirit will be restored. This is the HOPE that we have that we do not have yet (to wit the redemption of our bodies).

McClintock and strong further comment saying "According to Scripture, it is the heart, the centre of our personality, in which all the influences, both godly and ungodly, meet-in which the choice between them is made. If the heart then gives entrance to sin, permits any doubt of God's truth, any mistrust of his love and kindness, and thus lowers him to put self in his place (Gen 3), the union between God and man ceases; the inner man loses his energy to govern the; the flesh starts in opposition to the divine commands in its feelings and its desires. It asserts its independence. Self is made the centre. Hence hatred, strife., desire for worldly superiority. creating envy, and giving rise to all the "lusts of the flesh." (end of quote). Sin in some sense corrupted human nature and could not be repaired it had to be replaced. This is why we MUST be born again.

Paul and Christ make a consistent distinction in the CONTEXT of what they are referring to when simply using the word "flesh" as the body, etc. or as referring to it in the sense of the "sin nature." Whichever of the two is then alluded to when the Scriptures, and especially St. Paul, speak of the nature, the life, or the works of the flesh, as the context will clearly show. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, is not a verse by Christ to say he had a sin nature; it is a verse that shows that when He was in the place of learning obedience through the thing which He suffered; when in the place of trial as was Adam and Eve, the flesh (untainted human nature) truly is weak. His conquest over sin in spite of a "weak flesh" proves He is worthy that the Father would highly exalt Him and give Him a name which is above every name. He said it was weak not SINFUL. He was the second Adam and He passed the test. The circumstances and opportunities for failure were much greater as sin had made great progress in the earth after the Garden of Eden.

Satan used a similar line to try to defeat Christ as he used on Eve. But because of Christ's HUMILITY and lack of desire to be made of any reputation, the devil had NOTHING to grab on to and deceive Him. Satan's appeal to give all the Kingdoms of the world to Christ is "temptation maximus." But Christ's reply in his teachings was "What would a man gain He he gained the whole world and lost his own soul. Jesus would wash the saints feet His humility and meekness was so great. Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners. The Pharisees were too proud to make themselves of no reputation--and the devil destroyed them at Yavneh! He took all the pride that was in them and created a religious system that first was void of the grace of God, second, usurped the glory of God and finally desired to usurp the AUTHORITY of God. That is the progression of PRIDE. And it is the number 1 thing in God's list of seven that He hates.

Again McClintock and Strong write: "Sometimes, both are equally active, sometimes the one only to the exclusion of the other." This is the only way in which we can arrive at a true appreciation of the meaning in each case. The translators knew this difficulty. Those who cannot see the distinction in how sarx is translated and consider it as meaning exclusively the bodily, sinful side of human nature, fall into the dualistic error of the Manicheans (followers of Mani).

The ONLY possible way for a person to live free of the sinful nature in this life before the resurrection is to humble themselves greatly before God to the extent that they acknowledge their sins and need of constant grace. PRIDE, then, does not devour them and cause God to withdraw His grace when He resists the proud. We are STANDING in grace (this grace wherein we stand). And we have a hope of being ultimately liberated from the body of this death at the resurrection. We will walk in victory over sin ONLY when HUMILITY is the reaction to the work that God does in us to make us righteous. As we give Him the glory for HIS WORKMANSHIP He will keep pouring on the grace--- if we get puffed up as if we were righteous in ourselves He withdraws the grace and then we fall and beg for mercy as sinners again in humility. He will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). I have not seen humility as the key to sanctification through Grace in the writings of the Reformers that I'm aware of. Maybe that is why the Jews were written against by Luther and Michael Severetus was killed by Calvin. Those were not acts of humility and love friends. That is sovereignty teaching that make God's sovereignty the driving force in God's character and not his love- which is almost blasphemous and is a result of the Greek concept of God invading the early Church. God acts sovereignly because He is moved by compassion. As Wesley said; better would it be to say that the passages (on election, etc.) made no sense at all- as to say they have a sense such as this (Paraphrased). And it is a horrible stain on Christendom whether it is admitted or not. These men needed a good dose of humility and LOVE as we all do. If you are so proud as to be unteachable and argumentative that you always have to be right; I know from scripture that secret sin is

active in your life whether you would argue for Total Sanctification or not. It is reality. God RESISTS YOU and leaves you to stand in your own power vulnerable to all manor of sin. It is why Christians can only go so far in God's work on their life. Pride is the obstacle. Always has been and always will be.

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