

The Christian's Conflict (part 2)

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[0 : 00] Well, last week we talked about conflicts without. Remember we're going through the Christian life, a doctrinal introduction,! And we talked about those enemies that are outside of us,! The world, the devil.

The devil is a real being. He's not a principal. He's a real, violent, malicious spirit who dominates and leads a gang of fallen angels in rebellion against God.

And he's doing his best to bring dishonor to God. The world itself is an active enemy. The world's not a person, but it is collective humanity in rebellion against God.

And it's seeking to conform you into its mold. So there's this active, real pressure from the world, this active devil against us.

And so we face these attacks. This is what we said last week. We have these enemies without. But sadly and dangerously, they have a handle on us.

[1 : 12] They have a landing strip, ground in our hearts. And in John 14, Jesus says that the devil has no hold on me. He has no hold on me.

Sadly, that's not true of us. That is not true of us. Jesus, on that very same night, possibly early, early, early in that morning, said to the disciples, The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Pray that you don't fall into temptation. The disciples were in a precarious position that night. The Lord knew what they were going to face, and I think the disciples knew that something bad was around the corner.

The disciples were in this precarious position. They're on this narrow ledge. It is the time of darkness. The satanic wind is blowing. And to make things all the worse, there is something in them that is off-center.

If they're walking on a narrow ledge, they're not completely balanced. They are precariously, are very much in danger of being tipped off that edge by that thing in them.

[2 : 30] And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, the Christian's third enemy. And we call it the flesh or indwelling sin.

A few weeks ago, we said we looked at John, 1 John, and we saw that, yes, we have a divine seed in us. Something radical has happened.

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. And John says the man born of God cannot go on sinning. Now we talked about that.

That's not some sort of absolute statement for here and now, but it is to say that the man of God who is born of God cannot just continue on the way that he was.

Something radical has happened. Sin's dominion is broken. Salvation from sin has begun. But this is what we've said. We are in the already and the not yet.

[3 : 30] We're already starting to experience much of salvation. But we are still in the not yet as well.

Salvation from sin has begun, but it's not complete. We are waiting for the resurrection. We are waiting for that final resurrection.

Grace has come, but grace is coming. 1 Peter 1.13, Therefore, prepare your minds for action. So the situation is dangerous.

You have an enemy within. You have enemies without. 1 Peter 1.13, Therefore, prepare your minds for action. Be self-controlled. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

We've already received much grace. More is coming. And Peter says, Set your mind on that grace that is to come to you. So you haven't experienced everything yet.

[4 : 35] So, here we are. We're in this strange time of this already and this not yet. So salvation begun, but not completed. Something's happened to us, and yet we're not altogether rescued.

And that's maybe where we can begin to understand this idea of the flesh. The flesh. So, what is the flesh?

The NIV, which probably half of you are using, translates the flesh as sinful nature. The Greek word is sarx.

And sarx can mean simply flesh, like in an animal. So, it's anything but the bones. So, the flesh as opposed to the bones.

Sarx, that word, you can use it for our human bodies. It can also mean humanity. Just sort of generic humanity. So, flesh gives birth to flesh.

[5 : 43] That's people give birth to people. Romans 3.20, By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.

The NIV translates it as no one. No person. It's the same word. Sarx. But that's all clearly not exactly what Paul is talking about in Romans 7, and how we're going to use it today.

There's some connections to it. There's some overlap of meaning, and we can understand it a little bit from all of that. But that's not what Paul is exactly talking about in Romans 7.18.

And so, turn in your Bibles to Romans 7.18. And we want to look at 7 and 8 here, and dial in on this idea of, what is the flesh?

And what are we up against? And what does that mean? And where is this going? So, Romans 7.18. Romans 7.18. And Paul says here, I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my flesh.

[6 : 57] That is in my flesh. In verse 17, you can go down, or go up, I mean, as it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

I know that nothing good lives in me that is in my flesh. So, this idea of flesh, as Paul is using it in Romans 7 and 8, and in other places, it has to do with sin living in me.

That's where we get the idea of indwelling sin. But I do want to think about this a little bit more. So, what is the flesh? Look at verses 22 and 23.

It's good that we read the Scriptures carefully and think hard about it. And so, I want you to look and just think with me. Verses 22 and 23. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law.

But, I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

[8 : 05] Now, I want you to notice a couple of things. First of all, he's using the word law. He's used it a few times here. He's using that word law to mean principle or power.

Sort of like the law of gravity. Not exactly like that, but you get it. It's a principle. It's a power. On the one hand, he says, I have this principle of delight in God's law.

So, he's saying, I delight in my inner being. I have this principle, this power, I want to obey God's law. And so, truly, in the New Covenant, this is what the New Covenant promised, that God would take by his spirit and write that law on our hearts.

So, it's not merely something that someone else is telling me to do. It is what I want to do. So, the law on the outside meets a law, the same law on the inside, saying that is what I want to do.

But there's another principle at work. This principle of sin, disobedience.

[9 : 23] Now, another thing you should notice is two times he ties it to the members of my body. So, this power, this principle of sin that's at work, is at work in the members of our bodies.

It has something to do with our bodies. And that's why the word flesh is a good description of what Paul is saying. It has something to do with our embodied experience here and now.

It has to do with the fact that we are here now and we are living in these bodies in this time and this place. And this is where there's a real conundrum and there's been some major difficulties in the history of the church because people have taken this teaching and used it to say that the body itself is sinful.

That the body itself is sinful and therefore my body is an enemy. So, Paul talks in Colossians about these ideas about holiness that were floating around in Colossians and other places about these rules and they were all physical in nature.

And so these rules about do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. Those are all physical things. And he says this, such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom.

[10 : 49] At first blush, it seems like they make sense with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body.

But then he adds, but they lack any real value for restraining sensual indulgence. Paul is clearly saying that this harsh treatment of the body as if the body itself was the enemy, this obsession with the physical, it isn't helpful.

It's a dead end. It's not useful. But he does talk about, in Romans, he is talking about this power, this principle at work within the members, within the members of our body.

And he does use the word flesh. So there is some sort of connection, at least, whether it's just an idea connection, to the body. There's this reason that he's using the word flesh.

Now, as you read through chapter, and into chapter 8, he starts talking about it more, and he starts contrasting it with the spirit. And I think we can start to understand why he's using the word flesh and what our bodies and the members of our bodies have to do with it.

[12 : 11] So, go down to Romans chapter 8, verse 9. Romans chapter 8, verse 9. And he says this, you, however, are controlled not by the flesh.

Again, you see, the flesh is this controlling principle. Somehow, it really exhibits force to control.

He's saying, you're not controlled, however, not controlled, not by the flesh, but by the spirit.

If anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. And, just watch this closely. But, if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Your body is dead because of sin. So, what's true of you, Christian? Well, you're not controlled controlled by the flesh.

It doesn't dominate you anymore. But, yet, your bodies are still susceptible to death. You're still open to the power of sin.

[13 : 31] Just because Christ is in you doesn't mean that your body somehow will escape death. Death is at work. Sin is at work. And, so, that's what it means to be an embodied person here and now in this age.

We, we aren't completely rescued yet, are we? We get sick. We get old. Death is still at work.

And, he's saying because sin is at work. And, so, our bodies are still the victims of sin. And, to some degree, the power of sin still is at work in us.

And, so, we die. But, then, look at verse 11. Remember, we've taken the 10,000 foot look at Romans. And, this section, this huge section in Romans is all about why we can have hope.

And, that's not a very hopeful place to stop. But, he has a lot more to say. So, look at verse 11. He says, and, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who lives in you.

[14 : 52] Therefore, brothers, there's this connection here. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it. For, if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But, if by the spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. Now, skip down to verse 22. You know, or we know, that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

And, and we, not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we weigh eagerly for our adoption of sons, as sons.

And look what he calls it. The redemption of our bodies. So, in Paul's mind, the ultimate, the final answer to the flesh is, it's resurrection.

It's the resurrection. Again, if, verse 11, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit.

[16 : 11] All throughout this passage, the Holy Spirit is being identified as the spirit of resurrection. The spirit is who gave Christ life after death.

The spirit who raised Christ and we ourselves have the first fruits of the spirit. And so, we in part have begun to experience resurrection.

Our spirit is life, alive, but it's only the first fruits. We've only begun to reap a harvest.

The full harvest is coming. And you'll notice in verse 12 again, it's because we are going to be raised from the dead. That's why we don't have an obligation to the flesh to live according to it.

That's the therefore. We are going to be raised. That means we don't have this debt where we are enslaved and we just have to do what the flesh says.

[17 : 24] It's the therefore. Our future resurrection means we don't owe the flesh anything because the flesh isn't forever. The resurrection will be the complete reversal of the flesh, the complete

undoing of the flesh.

And so, what is the flesh? I think if we take sort of as much as everything into consideration, the flesh is our humanity, our creatureliness, still living in a sinful world, still living in a sinful age, we're weak, we're dying, sin is still at work within us, it's the indwelling sin, it's infesting all that we are, everything about us, it's all, everything part of us that has yet to enter in to the freedom and the glory and the salvation and the grace of Jesus Christ.

It's everything earthly as opposed to what's heavenly in us. And so, that's why Paul in Colossians 3 says that we are to put to death what is earthly, put to death what is earthly in you.

Instead, in that passage in Colossians 3, he says we are to set our minds on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. And remember, our lives are hidden with Christ in, or in Christ with God.

So, do you see why he uses this word flesh? It's because just sort of on the surface of things, our bodies are still most clearly those parts of us that are not raised.

[19 : 15] that have not yet entered into full salvation. And so, we've yet to experience resurrection in our bodies.

And our present existence in these bodies means we're still living and in some part in this age. We're still feeling and living in all the effects. of living in a sinful age. Yet, we have been raised with Christ.

Our lives are hidden above, but we haven't put on immortality yet. We haven't drank completely and fully of all the grace and the freedom and the glory that is going to be ours.

Now, again, I don't want you to think of, when he says flesh, don't just think of your physical bodies. Because we are body soul creatures.

[20 : 23] We use our bodies to think. We use our bodies to feel, to decide. We use our bodies to live out our whole life, to love God with all of our strength.

but it is our bodies that are clearly not resurrected. And the fact is, is that it's because we haven't totally entered into the age to come.

We haven't totally entered into Christ's glory. We haven't entered into heaven. And so our hearts and our minds and all of our faculties, sin is still present in them.

so it doesn't dominate, but it's there. It's still living in us. And so we can say with Paul, so I find this law at work.

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being, I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

[21 : 34] So we aren't controlled by it, aren't dominated by it, but it's still there. And so we groan, we groan as we wait for our resurrection, the redemption, the salvation of our bodies.

And only then will we fully enter into full and complete salvation when the perishable has been clothed with imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

And then the same that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of the sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, what can we take from all this? Just a few lessons.

One, as long as you are on this earth, you will be fighting indwelling sin. If the ultimate answer to the flesh is resurrection and immortality, then you should not expect anything less than a lifelong battle.

[23 : 04] The sooner we give up any notions that we can reform our flesh, the sooner that we give up any notions that here and now we can totally put it away and have nothing to do with it, if we can somehow reform it or convince it not to fight against us or whatever, if we give up these ideas, the better off we'll be.

You can't convince the flesh to stop fighting the spirit. It is hostile to God. It is the hostility itself to God. You can't just completely get rid of it.

The spirit is the spirit of Christ. The spirit is the spirit of glory. The flesh is by nature opposed to God. It can't and it doesn't obey God's law.

So we need to do away with any ideas that we're going to totally win this battle in this life. The total victory is coming when Jesus Christ comes and with a loud shout raises our bodies to be like his glorious body and we enter forever into the heavenly age to come.

God's love. Now, so that's the first lesson. Prepare, set your minds, be sober-minded and self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you.

[24 : 33] But for now, you have to expect this is a lifelong battle. The answer is not going to be found here. The answer is only going to be found in the resurrection when Jesus Christ comes completely.

And then we'll experience salvation completely. Another lesson, all your struggles with indwelling sin should make you long for the day of resurrection.

You aren't just looking forward to death. I hope you're not just looking forward to just death. Yes, it is better by far to be with Christ.

But brothers and sisters, even that intermediate state is not really our full hope. Brothers and sisters, we want to live in these bodies without sin, don't we?

We want to live a million years in these bodies without sin and the things that the flesh will not allow us to do because it's always present, it's always tripping us up, we want to do.

[25 : 37] we want to love God with all of our hearts and mind and soul and strength. We want 5, 10, 50 million years of perfect service in these bodies.

And so let all your struggles with sin and with weakness make you long and look forward to the day when you will at long last put on immortality.

Paul says for in this hope we were saved. But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Now, third lesson, don't live according to the flesh. Don't live according to the flesh. Why?

Because it's on its way out. it's going. It's going. The spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit.

[26 : 43] So therefore, you don't live according to the flesh. Part of living by the spirit, part of living in the strength of the spirit, part of living by the spirit and what Romans 8 is all about is living in the light of our coming resurrection.

That he's going to give my mortal body life. And so part of living according to the spirit is living for what will be ours because he is the spirit of resurrection. And so we don't owe the flesh anything. We don't owe it anything. It is a dead, dying, useless, obsolete, going out power.

power. It's like an old operating system on your computer. You don't go back to Windows 3.0 and try to make your new machine run on it because it just destroys it.

So it's here. The flesh is here. It is present with us. Whenever you do good, it will be there. But that does not mean you live according to it.

[27 : 58] Those, and this is what Paul says, those who live according to the flesh will die. The end is death. So don't live according to the flesh following its desires.

And what is the flesh's desires? Well, it's all about here and now, isn't it? The flesh does not have a very long-term view of things.

It's all about this age, this world, nothing to do with Jesus, nothing to do with heaven, nothing to do with glory.

It is so earthbound and time bound, and it's all entangled in the ruin of this age. So what does it desire?

It just wants the dead, dying, diseased things of this age. So don't have anything to do with it. Don't live according to its desires.

[29 : 02] Fourth lesson, be killing sin or sin will be killing you. Be killing sin or sin will be killing you. What is Paul's recommendation for indwelling sin?

sin. So he puts before us this hope that you are going to be raised. Does he say, therefore, just sit around and wait for it to happen? No.

He says, we just wait around for resurrection? No. Romans 8, 13, but if you by the spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

So this is the opposite of living according to it. You're actually 180 degrees trying to kill it, trying to kill the misdeeds of the body. So you put sin to death. And we put sin to death in the hope of resurrection.

So we're fully set on the grace that is to be given us, and in light of the grace, and in light of the glory, and in light of what we're going to be, we now actively, presently put sin to death here and now.

[30 : 04] The flesh, Galatians 5, 24, says, has been crucified. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. So the flesh has been crucified with Christ. It is nailed to the tree. It is as good as dead, but as long as you are alive, it will still try to make its power felt.

A crucified man did not, he was as good as dead as soon as he was nailed to that tree, and yet he did not die right away. The flesh has been crucified, and yet it still can speak, it can still try to make its power felt, but we are not to live according to it, and in fact, we are to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Now, I don't have a lot of time to get into everything that means. Do I? No, I have five minutes, but isn't it clear? if you are putting something to death, that is violent, decisive action.

We're not talking about manslaughter. You know, I think generally manslaughter is just like you accidentally killed someone, and maybe it was your fault, maybe it wasn't, but Paul is talking about mortification, putting to death, execution, violent, decisive action.

[31 : 32] And so that means you take off your gloves, you take off your oven mitts, you take up your knife, and you kill sin. So Colossians 3, 5, put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature, whatever is earthly in you.

So again, all those things that are just this world bound, time bound, entangled in the diseased desires of this time, and this place, and this age, and sin, whatever is earthly in you, whatever is not heavenly, not oriented towards God, put it to death.

And he gives you some examples of things that we are to put to death. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed.

greed. So anything from sexual immorality to greed, where all you're doing is living for the pleasures of this world and this age in sinful ways, again, violent, decisive action.

So what does that look like? Well, radical, this is the first, radical amputation of every opportunity. radical amputation of every opportunity of besetting sins.

[32 : 51] And what I mean is this, Jesus says it so much better than I do, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. The best way to win a fight is to keep the enemy from even showing up on the battlefield.

Get rid of opportunities to sin. sin. Jesus is saying, if the eye gate causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter into glory with one eye than into hell with two eyes.

So what does killing sin look like? It looks like gouging out right eyes and chopping off right hands. It's violent. It's decisive. You have to do it.

You can't compromise. You can't coax. You can't convince sin to do something and be something different than what it is. You just have to kill it.

What does killing sin look like? It looks like dragging that sin into the light. You know, they say sunlight is the best disinfectant.

[34 : 01] I don't know if that's true, but sunlight is obviously a good disinfectant. Dark hidden places, you know, they grow a mold. They fester.

Darkness grows, our sin grows in darkness. And you know what else? Darkness grows sin. The more we hide things, the more we keep them down and dark, that doesn't make the sin weaker. It just makes it stronger. But if you get it out into the light, you walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.

So, in the light, in the open, that starts with just being open with yourself. This is a real problem when you come to terms with it. But it means more than that.

It means bringing it to God, into his light, and really having dealings with God in your sin. And it also means telling someone. We're all sinners here.

[35 : 04] We are all sinners here. So, you can tell someone. And someone can help you. That's part of dealing with sin.

It's just being open and in the light. Not only drag it out into the open, John Owen says, drag it to the cross for the killing of it.

Sin loses its strength in the presence of our dying Lord. Sin loses its strength in the presence of our dying Lord.

We sin because we don't love God. The cross is specifically so designed to make us love God. So, drag your sin to the cross.

Get yourself to the cross. Get Golgotha in your mind. Get it clear.

[36 : 13] Get it real clear so that you're by faith. You're seeing him. You're feeling the blood and the sweat and the terror and the love and the grace of it.

And so, it's crystal clear in your mind, why is Jesus here? Is Jesus here so that I can just go on in my sin? Is Jesus here on this cross so that I can play with my sin?

So that I can, it's not a big deal. No. You get it clear in your mind, what is he doing? Why is he here? What is he thinking about?

What is this all about? What is he experiencing? And then you bring your sin into it, into the scene. And in love for your dying Lord, you raise your knife and you execute it.

And then you do it again and again and again and again. There's not going to be a total victory, but there can be a great deal of victory.

[37 : 24] John Owen says, you know, you can get to the place where you're walking on the throat of your lusts, where some sin that used to beset you, now you've routinely and continuously have victory over it.

And you can do that with Jesus. And that really is the key. It's with Jesus. Jesus is your hope, your present hope for help, for strength.

So you need help for killing your sin? Go to your risen Lord. You need clarity, you need purpose, you need determination, you need those things, go to Jesus for those things.

Ask him for it, plead with him for it. He's not only your present hope, Jesus is your future hope, because he is coming again. And when he comes again, he is bringing resurrection power with him.

And so ground yourself in him. And everything he is for you, and everything that he is for you now, and everything he's going to be for you then. And so with the resurrection in your eye, with that ultimate victory in your eye, you put sin to death now.

[38 : 40] Put it to death now. Well, we're dismissed.