

## Colossian 3 Series #8

*“A Life and Death Struggle”*

Last week we touched on deadening the members of our physical body to the imbedded passions left over from the old self crucified with Christ. The Bible often refers to these imbedded passions, habits, thought patterns and drives that come from previous programming in the brain and body systems as the “flesh” or the body of sin. Even though we were born again at the core of our being we live in a “body” racked by sin. Some drives can be linked to genetics. Others can be linked to the environment in which we grew up. Still others developed (invaded?) through external influence of parents, friends and peers. Even little babies exhibit self-centered fleshly behavior. We pick up numerous patterns by observation of our parents, relatives and peers. Exposure to modern media intensifies these fleshly patterns of thinking and acting or creates new ones. How much of what we think and values have been influenced by media?

Media often dictates our vocabulary, logic, truth, moral standards, and figures of speech. In a short period of time, media digressed from showing people in bed without any sexual expression to including sex outside of marriage as an acceptable and even expected way of life along with continually devolving details. If the television were your neighbor’s window the jails would be filled with voyeurs. Yet many find no problem watching sexual behavior reserved for the privacy of the bedroom on television or movies.

Many try to balance two different life styles. There is one standard for church and one outside of church. The longer one lived such an environment before committing to Christ the more deeply imbedded the evil passions and self-centered patterns. Paul clearly taught that those without Christ could only function on a flesh level.

*For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Rom 8:5-8*

At the moment of our new birth, God implanted new longings and a new person. The old person we were passed away and we became new. We now set our mind on the things of the spirit bringing life and peace. The problem is that our new core must now function in an old shell. This reminds me of a dear lady in a nursing home where I rotated teach duties in Hillsboro, Oregon. She had a handicap that ravaged her body but left her mind unaffected. By her speech and inability to walk or coordinate her body she appeared to the uninformed as mentally deficient. The reality was she was a fully functioning intellect trapped in an uncontrollable body. Sometimes that’s how I feel. My spirit is fully functioning but trapped in a “flesh” that fights against the desires of my spirit. Every Christian fights this war.

This is not a walk in the park.

*For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. Romans 7:5*

*I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Romans 7:21-24*

*Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. James 1:14-15*

*The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:8*

*The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Galatians 5:16-17*

*You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; Hebrews 12:4*

*Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24*

A life lived on the flesh level always leads to death. How do we win this battle? There are some critical realities we must understand and embrace. God brings all those who embrace Jesus as Savior into new life. Because of that, it is our new purpose to continually pursue and ponder things above. There is now a new connection to spiritual realities. Our new status guarantees a phenomenal future. We have been glorified; renewed, reborn by the power of God.

*God has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Peter 1:4*

Since we died and were raised up with Christ Jesus...

Since our life is NOW hidden with Christ at God's right hand...

Since we will be revealed in glory with Christ at His return...

...Deaden the members of your earthly body to sin, the old ways by which we once lived.

Rather than pursue and ponder (stir up) the earthly evil passions still embedded in our physical members, deaden your members from carrying out those passions. Refuse to satisfy the desires of the flesh. Put to death the deeds of the flesh. Conversion initiates a new war. We cannot even win daily battles until we get our thinking straight. Transformation transpires through the renewing of our mind. We are to consider (think, reckon as real) the members of our body as dead to sin. Our members are no longer obligated to carry out the desires of the flesh.

*Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1-2*

Whose desire will win out? We died with Christ and were raised with Christ.

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be rendered powerless, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; Romans 6:4-6*

That is the purpose of God's continual renewing work in our life.

*God is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13*

Today I hope to help all of us better understand this new life and death struggle with the flesh. There is a threefold war every follower of Jesus must wage. We must battle the **devil** and his sorry soldiers continually seeking to deceive us. We must battle a devil designed and directed **world** system seeking to influence us. We must battle the urges and passions embedded in the members of our body (the **flesh**).

Each battle requires a unique Biblical battle strategy. The battle with the devil requires God's strengthening and spiritual armor and direct resisting. The battle with the world requires us to avoid its allure. The battle with the flesh requires continual listening yielding to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

What is the flesh? There range of meaning for the Greek word "sarx" can be grouped into three categories.

Sarx acts as a synonym for the material body without any indication of good or bad.

Sarx acts as a synonym for human nature as something neutral.

Sarx refers to the fallen or rebellious human nature. This is often translated old nature, or sinful flesh as opposed to neutral human flesh.

Paul used the term mostly in reference to this category.

*Ray Stedman defines the flesh used in a morally negative sense as "the urge to self-centeredness within us, that distortion of human nature which makes us want to be our own god—that proud ego, that uncrucified self which is the seat of willful defiance and rebellion against authority."*

*Murphy, E.F., 1996. Handbook for spiritual warfare, Nashville: Thomas Nelson.*

Ed Murphy offers the following definition.

*My own definition of the flesh is our defective humanness inclined towards self-centeredness, with its center in our sinful bodies which includes our mind, emotions and will.*

Neil Anderson offers yet another take.

*The flesh is the tendency within each person to operate independent of God and to center his interests on himself. (Neil Anderson)*

The source of actions cannot always be immediately identified. Certain behaviors, many identified by Paul in his letter to the Galatians under "deeds of the flesh," are readily recognized as evil. On the other hand even seemingly spiritual activities can be motivated from our sinful flesh. If the activities, no matter how spiritual, come from a proud, self-centered, independent motivation it is fleshly. Paul severely chastised the Galatians (3:1-6) for acknowledging their salvation was the result of God's work of grace in response to their trust in His promise of salvation yet thinking their continued growth and perfection could be accomplished by their

own fleshly activities apart from humble trust and dependence on God's supernatural work. If your motivation for spiritual activity is to feel good, look good, gain blessing, get attention, gain acknowledgement rather than humbly service to God and others it is fleshly and is considered like wood, hay and stubble undeserving of heavenly reward. Any activity no matter how good or bad that ignores our need of God and focused on personal gain is motivated by and energized out of the sinful programing imbedded in our members. The bent of the programing imbedded in our brain and the physical / psychological aspects of our members has to do with proud self-centered independence. The bent of our new core is humble God-centered and others-centered interdependence.

This is clearly seen in many of the passages referencing the "flesh".

*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13*

The flesh has been programed by the old nature to be a taker and express the devil's selfishness. The reborn spirit longs to serve one another as an expression of God's love.

*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom (way of living) is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. Jam 3:14-16  
What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? James 4:1*

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-4*

The most effective tactic Satan uses against us is to convince us that our passions define us. Satan wants us to consider the passions raging in our sinful flesh flow out of our new core. He would have us think that we are spiritual schizophrenics. We have a bad side that selfishly desires evil things and does evil things. And we have a good side that desires good things but rarely does evil things. Paul categorically refused to personally own those evil passions as part of his true self. People appeal to Romans 7 to prove the old self and the new self exist simultaneously in constant battle and they are BOTH US.

As we saw early, the scriptures clearly indicate the "old self" died with Christ.

God crucified the old self as self-crucifixion would be impossible. Romans 7 actually teaches just the opposite as often taught. This content of this passage could be a series in itself. I want to draw your attention to Paul's grand conclusion.

After explaining the excruciating war raging in his members keeping him at times from pleasing and serving God the way he wants to, Paul makes this conclusion.

*So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.*

This almost sounds like “the devil made me do it” excuse. Paul does not try to avoid responsibility but recognizes the nature of the war. He recognized he was not fighting his evil self but the evil passions imbedded in his flesh. Selfish patterns of thinking, ambitions motivations, evil desires, evil passions, learned behaviors that inflamed the flesh and stimulated the pleasure centers in the brain, physiological impulses intensified by demonic influence.

He clearly declared that the true Paul hated those things but could not eradicate them. The logic of this dilemma caused him to conclude that if his true nature hated doing those things, it couldn't be his passion but some internal force imbedded in his flesh.

*I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Romans 7:17-24*

Notice he does not say, “I am evil.” He said, “Evil is present in me but I REALLY WANT TO DO GOOD!” In the core of my being I really want to please God. I want to please God wants at the very core of my being (inner man). I completely and joyfully agree with and embrace God's law written on my new heart. Even so, a different “law”, the law of proud, selfish, rebellion still imbedded in my “flesh” wages war against my new thinking and makes me a prisoner of that unwelcome bent imbedded in my members. Paul refused to own those evil passions and practices and affirmed his true longing to live godly.

Paul also extensively wrote on this subject to the Galatians.

*The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Galatians 5:17*

OK I get the war! I live with this war every day. I seem to be losing more battles than I am winning so tell me how to overcome the flesh.

*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. Romans 7:24-25*

Even though I am caught up in this war, the source of victory is through Jesus Christ our Lord. God works out of a new base in my inner man until with my whole self joyfully choose and to do His good pleasure. (Philip 2:13)

How do I know if I am being directed by the Spirit of the flesh? Look at the results? Self-centered, proud independent attitudes, thoughts and behavior are “old man” motivations. God honoring Obedient, humble, others-centered attitudes, thoughts and behavior come from the new self. Paul provided the Galatians with a representative checklist.

Old self behavior

*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

## New Self behavior

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:19-23*

Not mystery or guess work. So what is the battle strategy? I hesitate to reduce the answer to a list of dos and don'ts but I will provide some considerations from scripture related to the battle against sin imbedded in our members. These are some things we are called to actively do or practice.

### **1. Remember that because Christ set us free from the law of sin and death, there is NOW no condemnation. (Rom 8:1)**

### **2. Submit your new self and the members of your body to God and His purposes**

*Present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Romans 6:12-13*

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1*

*GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Submit therefore to God.. James 4:5-7*

You are not your passions. Your passions do not dictate your person. Begin to separate yourself from the old man's rubble.

### **3. Draw near to God (James 4:9)**

### **4. Resist the devil (James 4:8) Note: Put on the armor of God first**

### **5. Refuse to allow the imbedded passions of the flesh manifest**

Stop letting those imbedded passions rule your life. Put off the old habits. Consider yourself and you members dead to the old programing. Don't let the old programing run. Put to death the fleshly passions.

*Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11*

*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness;*

*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Romans 8:12-13*

*Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Colossians 3:5*

*But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new*

*self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—  
Colossians 3:8-10*

*The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. Romans 13:12-13*

## **6. Put on Jesus and His way of life.**

*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ... Romans 13:14*

*but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Romans 6:12-13*

*As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:12-14*

## **7. Take every thought captive and renew your thinking to correspond with God's ways.**

*For though we walk in the flesh (generic use of the term), we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. 2 Corinthians 10:2-6*

Paul identifies the fortresses established in our members by the old man and demonic suggestion and influence from the world. He instructs us to continually take captive every thought that flows out of our lie infested brain or suggested by the evil one and compare it to the truth of Scripture.

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2*

*and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—*

## **8. Make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lusts.**

*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. Romans 13:14*

The word translated provision communicates the idea of forethought. Again, the problem is in our thinking. Don't give the evil passions imbedded in our flesh a second thought or a space in our conscious thinking. Take it captive and put it to death.

## **9. Walk in the Spirit**

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16*

*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:25-26*

If we came alive and enjoy new life in Christ who is our life then we should continually align our life by the direction and power of the Holy Spirit.

## 10. Guard your heart

*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23*

**Continually pursue and ponder thing above.**

