

Trials After Embracing Christ

Part 3: Wrestling with Our Sinful Nature

By Marc MacArthur

As Christians, our journey involves not only an external battle but also a deeply personal struggle against our own flesh. This internal conflict is rooted in what the Bible calls our sinful nature, encompassing the inherent desire within us that stands opposed to God's divine will.

Romans 7:21-23¹

[21] I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

[22] For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

[23] but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

The apostle Paul describes this internal struggle in Romans, where he speaks of the presence of evil within himself despite his desire to do good. He describes the tension between delighting in God's law within him and feeling the opposing pull of sinful desires within his flesh.

These fleshly desires can manifest in various ways. Pride surfaces as an inflated sense of self-importance, leading to arrogance and disobedience against God. Lust represents uncontrolled sexual desires that can drive individuals toward adultery, pornography, or other immoral acts. Greed is an insatiable craving for material wealth and possessions, distracting away from spiritual growth. Anger, an unbridled rage and bitterness, damaging to relationships and hindering spiritual development. Laziness is seen as a lack of motivation to pursue spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, and serving others.

Despite the powerful nature of these tendencies of the flesh, the message of Scripture is one of hope and encouragement. It assures us that we are not enslaved to our sinful nature but can, through Christ, overcome its influence. No matter how much we grow spiritually, the flesh itself does not improve; instead, as we become more guided by the Holy Spirit, we are less dominated by the desires of the flesh.

Galatians 5:16

[16] This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Central to this victory is the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16 urges believers to "walk in the Spirit" to "not fulfil," or avoid, the lusts of the flesh. Surrendering to the Holy Spirit's guidance provides the strength and discernment needed to resist temptation and to help align our lives with God's will. It empowers us to make choices that align with God's will and gradually transform our desires into a reflection of His character.

¹ All Bible Verses are KJV unless otherwise noted.

Galatians 5:24

[24] And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Romans 8:13

[13] For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

The concept of crucifying the flesh highlights the active role we must play in subduing our sinful desires. It involves a deliberate effort to align our thoughts, attitudes, and actions with God's word, with the teachings of Scripture, continually putting to death the deeds of the flesh: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Romans 12:2

[2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

In Romans 12:2 it emphasizes the transformation that occurs as our minds are renewed, enabling us to discern God's will and help to reject the impulses of the flesh. Immersing ourselves in scripture allows us to develop a Christ-centered perspective.

Philippians 4:8

[8] Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

This verse instructs us on what the focus of our thoughts should be on, highlighting the importance of directing our minds toward positive and godly thoughts, which helps in overcoming the sinful inclinations of the flesh.

The battle against the flesh is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey. By continually surrendering to God's will and actively resisting the temptations of the flesh, we are gradually transformed from within, becoming more like Christ each day. This journey will lead to a deeper relationship with God and a life that increasingly mirrors His holiness and love.

To be continued in Part 4: Exposing the Devil's Lies