PAUL'S THEOLOGY
Lesson 43
Paul's Anthropological Terms –
Flesh

I was born in Dallas, Texas. I did not choose to be born there. Neither Mom nor Dad asked me my preference on this issue. Looking back, it seems a fine enough place to be born. I am not a big fan of the Dallas Mavericks, but I did like the Cowboys as long as Tom Landry was coach.

I did not live there very long, a matter of months, I am told. But for the duration of my life, when asked where I was born, the answer is always the same: Dallas, Texas.

This is something you and I share. Not necessarily that you were born in Dallas but that you were born *somewhere*! Wherever you were born, it is your birthplace for the duration of your life. None of us can go back and change this fact. Our names we can change. Our looks we can change. Our family we can change (at least legally). But, none of us can change where we were born. It is an event/location that endures throughout history.

What does this have to do, you might ask, with a lesson on Paul and his usage of the word "flesh"? Let us delve into the Pauline issue and see if we can fairly use our own birthplace to help us understand some of Paul's theology on the "flesh."

THE PROBLEM

Scholars have spent a lot of time and print dedicated to understanding and trying to explain Paul's use of the Greek word σαρχ (*sarx*), which is typically translated into English as "flesh." Paul's usage draws attention because Paul uses the word *sarx,* and uses it almost twice as often as all the rest of the New Testament writers put together. More importantly, Paul often utilizes the word in a manner that no other New Testament writer does.

Understanding Paul's usage is challenged by the fact that Paul uses the word in various ways. Sometimes, it means one thing; other times it means something different. Sometimes *sarx* (flesh) has no real theological depth or meaning; it simply references the biological human body. Other times, it is laden with complicated theological thought, and the *sarx* (flesh) is this wretched aspect of man responsible for deeds that are against God. These factors create a puzzling difficulty as we try to understand Paul's implications and teachings on this aspect of humanity.

Speaking of "puzzling," if you were to come over to my grandmother's some afternoon, then the odds are great you will find a puzzle spread out on a card table in her study. You would be able to tell how long she had worked on the puzzle by its state of completion. She first takes the pieces from the box, turning them over to be able to see each one. She then separates out the end pieces to set the boundaries of the puzzle. She sorts the remaining pieces into groups turning her attention finally to finishing the puzzle's inside parts.

Grandmother's approach to puzzles actually works quite well with the puzzling problem of Paul and *sarx* (flesh). As we employ her technique by analogy, we need to first turn over the pieces, looking at the various usages of Paul's. We can then set some boundaries by considering his Hebrew heritage and some of the historical references that would have shaped his personal usage of the word during his life. We can then sort through his uses and put them into some categories. Finally, we can consider the fullest picture that allows us to take home the points of teaching that seem to impact our time and place in God's world the most.

PAUL'S USAGE OF *SARX* (FLESH)

Paul uses *sarx* (flesh) 92 times in his writings, 28 times in Romans alone. To get a cross-reference sampling of Paul's usage, we can consider the first time Paul uses the word in each letter where we find it. With this approach, we first[1] find the word in Romans 1:3 about the promise of God through the scriptures:

> Concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the **flesh** (*sarx*).

In 1 Corinthians 1:26, we read Paul using *sarx* (flesh) in a way that prompted the English Standard Version translators to relegate the translation "flesh" to a footnote. The main text reads:

> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to **worldly standards** (*sarx*/flesh)

In 2 Corinthians 1:17, Paul wrote of changing his decision about seeing the Corinthians on a journey. Paul said:

> Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the **flesh** (*sarx*), ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time?

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[1] By "first," we mean in the typical ordering of the New Testament. The order in our Bibles is not the order in which Paul wrote the books. For more on Paul's order of writing, see the lessons from the Life & Teachings of Paul downloadable on our class website at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. There, we attempt to present Paul's letters within the chronological context of Paul's life.

As we continue to glance through Paul's usage, we find in Galatians 1:16 that when God:

> was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with **anyone** (*sarx*/flesh[2]).

As we continue to scan through Paul's usage, we can see in Ephesians 2:3 where Paul is writing about the course of the fallen world and the spirit at work in sins of disobedience:

> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our **flesh** (*sarx*), carrying out the desires of the **body** (*sarx*/flesh[3]) and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

As we continue to take Paul's first usage of *sarx* in each of his letters, we go next to Philippians. There, Paul uses *sarx* in 1:22 after the famous passage in verse 21 where Paul asserted, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain:"

> If I am to live in the **flesh** (*sarx*), that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

From Philippians, we turn to Colossians 1:21-22 where speaking of Christ, Paul writes:

> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of **flesh** (*sarx*) by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

Paul does not use *sarx* in 1 or 2 Thessalonians, but in 1 Timothy 3:16, we have Paul's confession of the mystery of Christ's godliness:

> He was manifested in the **flesh** (*sarx*), vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

We then see no usage in 2 Timothy or Titus, but in the brief, one-chapter letter Philemon, Paul uses *sarx* in verse 16, writing that the return of Onesimus, the believer, was something greater than simply the runaway slave. For Onesimus came back:

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[2] Paul actually uses three words in the Greek: *sarx kai haimati* (σαρχ και αιματι)

[3] Again, the ESV translates the second usage of *sarx* (the actual form used here is *sarkos*) as something other than "flesh" unless you look at the footnote.

No longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother—
especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the ***flesh*** (*sarx*)
and in the Lord.

Utilizing our puzzle analogy, these examples provide a true smattering of Paul's usage to help us take the pieces out of the box and turn them over. We see Paul using the word in ways that seem positive (Christ descended "according to the flesh") and negative (the "passions of the flesh"). Some uses seem neutral ("If I am to continue in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me"). Now, we need to set up the boundaries/end pieces to the puzzle.

SOURCES FOR PAUL'S USAGES OF *SARX* (FLESH)

Recognizing this is not a Greek seminar, but simply a 45-minute Sunday-School class, we are limited somewhat in the depth we can consider as we look at the meaning of *sarx* (flesh) from other Greek sources beyond Paul. We shall select just a few other sources from four different categories of writings: (1) The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the "Septuagint"); (2) Other usages in the New Testament reflecting Christ and the church surrounding Paul; (3) Jewish writings that post-date the Old Testament, but precede Paul; and (4) Pre-Paul usage in traditional Greek philosophical writings and literature.

1. The Septuagint

In the Old Testament, *sarx* typically translates a Hebrew word *basar* (בשר), which refers to the whole living being. It can be used for an animal or a person. It is frequently added to a Hebrew word meaning "all" (*kol*) and is translated "all flesh." Throughout the Old Testament, we see *sarx* used with translations of various body parts (tendons, skin, bone, *etc.*). On a few occasions, the translators of the Septuagint also used *sarx* (flesh) to translate the Hebrew word for "meat" (*s-er*).

One thing conspicuously missing from the Old Testament/Septuagint usage of *sarx* (flesh) is an indication of something morally negative, like we sometimes see in Paul. Richard Erickson notes:

> In the LXX [Septuagint] the term never seems to be used either in a morally negative sense…or as a designation for human rebelliousness toward God. This contrasts with Paul, for whom these two senses account for half of his usage of *sarx*.[4]

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[4] Hawthorne, Gerald, et al., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP 1993) at 305.

If Paul did not get his full sense and use of *sarx* from the Old Testament, then how are we able to find any more sources for his vocabulary?

2. Other New Testament Writers and the Words of Christ

There are 53 usages of *sarx* (flesh) in the New Testament outside of Paul's writings.[5] In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the word is used only a total of 11 times. John uses it in his gospel 12 times and 7 more in his epistles and Revelation. The Petrine Epistles use *sarx* (flesh) 9 times and Luke uses it 4 more times in Acts.

A review of these passages shows them to be in line with the Old Testament. For example, in John 1:14 we read:

> And the Word became *flesh* (*sarx*) and dwelt among us.

John is conveying to us that Jesus, the Word, became human. Similarly, *sarx* (flesh) is used when translating Christ's Aramaic in Matthew 19:5-6 as Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24:[6]

> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast
> to his wife, and the two shall become one *flesh* (*sarx*)… So they are
> no longer two but one *flesh* (*sarx*).

Spicq asserts in his analysis that the nuances of *sarx* (flesh) found in the gospels and Acts are like Paul where Paul charts the Old Testament usage of *sarx* (flesh). But, the other New Testament writings do not give us a source for Paul's theological usage:

> The Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles mention flesh
> only rarely, and always with its OT meaning. Likewise the Fourth
> Gospel…These nuances are traditional in Israel, and there is not the
> slightest theological elaboration.[7]

Having not found Paul's full theological usage of *sarx* (flesh) in either the Old Testament or other New Testament usage, we turn now to a third possible source.

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[5] Our counts do not include the related words *sarkikos* (σαρκικος) and *sarkinos* (σαρκινος). Save for three passages, Paul uses these words exclusively in the New Testament. These are two adjectives built off the noun *sarx*. Paul's usage of them is more in line with his use of the noun *sarx* (flesh).

[6] The Septuagint translators also used *sarx* (flesh) when translating Gen. 2:24 into Greek.

[7] Spicq, Ceslas, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendrickson 1994), Vol. 3 at 235.

3. Other Jewish Writings

We need to consider that even though the printing press was not yet in existence, there were a considerable number of other scrolls around in Paul's day. These writings were part of his study, and show up in other places in the New Testament beyond Paul. Jude, for example, quotes and references several of these works.[8]

A number of these writings have been in the hands of scholars for centuries. Many more were discovered in the last 50 years in the Dead Sea Scrolls. A study of these books shows a usage of "flesh" in line with the negative sense of Paul's.[9] It is not surprising that Paul would have used language and expressions common in the literature of his time as he sought to explain himself to his readers. We find these writings useful and illustrative of Paul because they set out a similar pejorative (negative) usage of the Hebrew *basar* as well as the Greek counterpart *sarx* (flesh). This insight allows us to understand Paul's negative usage of *sarx* (flesh) without accepting that Paul used *sarx* (flesh) in the full sense we see below as we consider the Greek philosophical writers.

4. Greek Philosophical Thought and Writings

The Greeks certainly used *sarx* (flesh) in the normative sense of the physical/biological body. We find "flesh discolored by disease"[10] and similar references to the human's body. However, flesh is used in another sense in these Greek writings.

There are sections of Greek writers who considered the *sarx* (flesh) as a corruptible garb worn by the incorruptible soul. Ideas of "the alien garb of the

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[8] See our lesson on Jude found on our website at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

[9] There are a number of writings included today in a group called "The Pseudepigrapha." These writings were around in Paul's day and they carried names as if someone other than the real author wrote them (this is the meaning of the words "pseudo - false and epigrapha – writing). The Pseudepigraphal work "The Testament of Judah" was likely written sometime between 200 and 100 B.C. It was well known enough to be found in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and even Armenian versions. In 19:4 we read, "The prince of error blinded me, and I was ignorant—like man, **like flesh, in my corrupt sins**—until I learned of my own weakness after supposing myself to be invincible." See, Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Doubleday 1985). In the Dead Sea Scrolls, Manual of Discipline (1QS 11:12) we read, "if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my salvation always; and if I fall **in the sin of the flesh**, in the justice of God, which endures eternally, shall my judgment be." *See* Martinez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Study Edition* (Brill 1997) Vol. 1 at 99. These are both very Paul-esque usages of the word.

[10] *See Ailos* (αιολος) entry in Liddell and Scott's Greek English Lexicon. *See also* line 1157 from Sophocles, *Philoctetes* translated as "quivering flesh" by Hugh Lloyd Jones in the Loeb Classical Library edition.

flesh" or the soul's beauty "tainted by human flesh"[11] are not Pauline. For Paul, God's creation of man was a creation of fleshly being that in itself was good. The fall is what brought corruption to man, not simply in a physical arena, but in every arena. The creation itself was something of dignity. Paul adds that a body of flesh will still be a part of man at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15).

CATEGORIES OF PAUL'S USAGE OF *SARX* (FLESH)

Having turned over the pieces and considered the various uses of *sarx* outside and prior to Paul's writings, we turn now to Paul in more detail to consider his usage. We find as we sort through Paul's passages that the verses seem to fall into several groups. As we do this, however, I need to lean a bit more heavily on the puzzle analogy and my grandmother.

My grandmother has this "system" for best putting together a puzzle. She takes paper plates and then puts the groups of pieces onto the various plates. For example, if the puzzle were of an American flag, one plate might be for the red pieces while another is for the blue pieces. This "system" drives me crazy because some of the pieces clearly have red and blue in them and it seems more sensible to me to have all the pieces grouped on the table. Of course, my views will never trump my grandmother's so the plates remain.

In similar fashion, the categories we use for Paul sometimes bleed one into another. There are a few verses where it is uncertain into which category the word should fall. This is an area where scholars are challenged and when doing personal study, a good commentary is always an aid.

We will use the categories Erickson sets out in his article in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.[12]

1. The Flesh as Physical Matter

Much like the Old Testament, Paul uses *sarx* (flesh) when speaking of the physical part of a living body, either human or animal. There is no special theological significance to these usages. A good sample of this is:

- **1 Cor. 15:39** "For not all **flesh** (*sarx*) is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish."

Scholars who believe that Paul spoke of a physical ailment would likely include this category for Paul's 2 Corinthians passage:

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[11] See Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1971) Vol VII at 102*ff*.

[12] See Hawthorne at 303ff.

- **2 Cor. 12:7** "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the **flesh** (*sarx*), a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited."

2. The Flesh as the Human Body

There are a number of times where Paul uses *sarx* (flesh) in the simple sense of the human body. These passages echo the usage found in the Old Testament and in the gospels. A sample of these would include:

- **Rom 1:3** "concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the *flesh* (*sarx*)"

The passage we also set out earlier in this lesson is not suggesting Jesus descended from David in some sinful sense. Rather, Paul is simply confirming that Jesus was truly human.

- **2 Cor. 7:5** "For even when we came into Macedonia, our **bodies** (*sarx*) had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within."

Here too, Paul uses sarx (flesh) to mean his body. Accordingly, the ESV translators only tell us that Paul is using the word "flesh" in a footnote!

3. The Flesh as the Human Person or Human Race

Again like the Old Testament, Paul can use *sarx* (flesh) simply as a reference to a human person. Consider:

- **Rom. 3:20** "For by works of the law no **human being** (*sarx*) will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Paul here uses *sarx* as a reference to a human person. This is so apparent that the ESV translators send us to a footnote to see that Paul is using "flesh" (*sarx*). Likewise, see:

- **1 Cor. 1:28-29** "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that **no human being** (*sarx*) might boast in the presence of God."

We see Paul using *sarx* (flesh) to refer to the nation of Israel in Romans:

- **Rom. 11:14** "in order somehow to make my **fellow Jews** [literally **those of my flesh** (*sarx*)] jealous, and thus save some of them."

Here, the ESV translators do not even give "flesh" in the footnotes! We can better see it in the King James translation, "If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them."

4. The Flesh in a Morally Neutral Sphere

At this point, we begin to see more apparent "bleeding" from one category to another–much like the red and blue pieces in Grandmother's flag puzzle! Consider in this sense the following examples:

- **1 Cor. 10:18** "Consider the **people** (*sarx*) of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?"

This is another passage where Paul uses sarx (flesh) and the ESV translators move the usage into a footnote and give us the thrust of Paul's meaning. We can go to the King James and get "flesh" in the translation, "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?"

- **Rom. 4:1** "What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the **flesh** (*sarx*)?"

There is no hint here that Paul is using "flesh" in some negative way. It is morally neutral and simply a reference to the normal human life of Abraham.

- **Rom. 9:3** "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the **flesh** (sarx)."

Again, we see Paul using flesh in a morally neutral way to refer to his Jewish kinsmen. Contrast these morally neutral uses of the word with the following sections.

5. The Flesh in a Morally Negative Sphere

Erickson calls this "Paul's use of *sarx* as applied to the "world," humanity's value systems as they stand in opposition to God's."[13] This would include passages like:

- **1 Cor. 1:26-27** "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to **worldly standards** (*sarx*), not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong."

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[13] *Ibid*. at 304.

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Again, the ESV translators try to help the reader by translating *sarx* in this sense of "worldly standards" and then giving the true Greek in a footnote. We see this also below:

- 2 Cor. 10:2-5 "I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the **flesh** (*sarx*). For though we walk in the **flesh** (*sarx*), we are not waging war according to the **flesh** (*sarx*). For the weapons of our warfare are not of the **flesh** (*sarx*) but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

Paul is contrasting the world's standard of decision making with his own. Paul lives in the midst of the worldly system, but does not live or operate under its influence!

6. The Flesh as Rebellious Human Nature

This is Paul's most unique and frequent usage of *sarx* (flesh). Paul uses the word over and over to refer to that aspect of humanity that is fallen and in rebellion to God. Most of these passages are found in Romans and Galatians. Consider the following:

- Rom. 7:5, 14, 18, 25 "For while we were living in the **flesh** (*sarx*), our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death… For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the **flesh** (*sarx*), sold under sin… For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh** (*sarx*). For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out… Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my **flesh** (*sarx*) I serve the law of sin."

Paul here writes of the flesh in the power it exerts as fallen human nature. Mankind is fallen and in rebellion to the Lord, to his laws, and to his Spirit. This is Paul's heritage. To return to our introduction, this is where Paul was born! Paul did not choose to be born in rebellion. But being born of the "flesh," he was. Paul had experienced a born again experience in Christ, and this gives an ultimate victory that is incrementally seen daily in his life and liberty from his first birth. Still, as Paul remained in this earthly existence, he remained in the arena of the rebellious flesh.

Consider how Paul continues to use *sarx* (flesh) in the next chapter of Romans:

- **Rom. 8:3-9, 12-13** "For God has done what the law, weakened by the **flesh** (*sarx*), could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful **flesh** (*sarx*) and for sin, he condemned sin in the **flesh** (*sarx*), in order that the

righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the **flesh** (*sarx*) but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the **flesh** (*sarx*) set their minds on the things of the **flesh** (*sarx*), but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the **flesh** (*sarx*) is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the **flesh** (*sarx*) is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the **flesh** (*sarx*) cannot please God…You, however, are not in the **flesh** (*sarx*) but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him… So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the **flesh** (*sarx*), to live according to the **flesh** (*sarx*). For if you live according to the **flesh** (*sarx*) you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Here, we find a slew of Paul's uses of *sarx* (flesh) in this rebellious sense. Paul uses the word in this passage in a continuation of the thought he was expressing in Romans 7 above. God has made available to the saved and Spirit-dwelt human an option beyond living like the rebellious fallen man as he was born. Man can walk according to the Spirit and not simply the passions and sin of the fallen nature. There is a new intervention in the believer giving the believer a choice between his or her birth nature and the nature of the rebirth!

This is the same context in which Paul uses *sarx* in Galatians 5:

- **Gal. 5:13, 16-21** "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the **flesh** (*sarx*), but through love serve one another…But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the **flesh** (*sarx*). For the desires of the **flesh** (*sarx*) are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the **flesh** (*sarx*), for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if the Spirit leads you, then you are not under the law. Now the works of the **flesh** (*sarx*) are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul notes the "works of the flesh" as against those of the Spirit. Again here, the flesh is the fallen man in rebellion to God and God's ways. Erickson sees this passage saying, "For Paul the unacceptable alternative for believers…to make an opportunity for this rebellion to indulge its desires."[14]

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[14] *Ibid.* at 305.

CONCLUSION

If we have sorted and filled out the puzzle, then we are left looking for the full picture of Paul and "flesh." Paul used *sarx* liberally, and in a multi-directed sense. It was a part of the created biological human, part of the human race as a whole, and specifically part of the fallen rebellious man. As such, it could be a part of God's creation, a part of God's incarnation, and a part of the rebellion calling for God's redemption.

As we move to finality in our studies of Paul's anthropological terms in the next two lessons, we will see the fullest picture of these terms in ways that help us define who we are before God and before each other.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"Concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the **flesh** (sarx)"* (Rom. 1:3)

    God made man, flesh, and blood. Unlike some Greek thinkers, the creation of man was not the imprisonment of man in a wretched shell we call "flesh." God made man as a whole being, a being of flesh. God properly called his creation "good." There is no profit in thinking of the physical flesh as some entombment of that which is truly good. The flesh/body can be used for good or evil. The body can be treated properly or improperly. But the flesh is integral and a part of who we are! It should be treated accordingly.

2. *"For though we walk in the **flesh** (sarx), we are not waging war according to the **flesh** (sarx)"* (2 Cor. 10:3).

    Paul knew that he lived in the world system that was fallen. Other than the Lord Jesus, every human who ever walked the planet was fallen. Not surprisingly the systems and values of the world are similarly fallen. Paul walked in this world, but did not live according to the world! He was "in it," but not "of it." The recreation of his being into God's eternal kingdom brought with it not rebellion, but obedience. Paul truly found a higher calling. This poses the question to each of us: Do we walk daily in the ways of the world or the ways of God?

3. *"For to set the mind on the **flesh** (sarx) is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace"* (Rom. 8:6).

    It seems amazing, but as believers still inhabiting the physical flesh of the fallen man, we can pursue the ways of the Spirit. We still struggle against

the fallen nature into which we were born (Roman 7), but we can find victory as we choose the ways of the Spirit. Paul gives us the assurance that each path has its distinct outcome: death for the ways of our fallen man, life and peace for the pursuits of God and his Spirit. Which shall you strive for?

We must ask, how do we do this? Is this will power alone? Does God give us the power? If he does, then where is it? How do we access it?

It would be nice to say, "The power is located right here!" (Wherever "here" is!), but that is not the biblical picture. We are in the position of living in the Spirit or living in the flesh. The "living" language allows us to ask simple questions like, "What are you feeding, the flesh or the Spirit?" Is it not rather silly for someone to put themselves in positions of sin and wonder why they struggle with the sin? Should an alcoholic be a bartender? The proverbs say to avoid even the street of the adulteress (Prov. 7). Do we spend daily time filling ourselves with the word of God? Is our time spent in fellowship with believers? These are questions that bring aid in walking in God's Spirit of peace rather than the flesh of our birthplace!

In another aspect, I have a good friend who recently told me of his decision to join an anger management group. He did this out of love for God and his family, and a desire to live in God's Spirit rather than his own flesh. These types of decisions are ours to make! Let us choose to strive for God!