

THE FLESH

When the Bible uses the word 'flesh' metaphorically it is referring to the nature we were born with. We inherited this nature from fallen Adam and so we have a natural leaning towards sin. Even when we are *born again*, (we must be if we are to see the kingdom of God; see John 3:3) the 'sinful nature' (NIV) or 'old man/self' is not removed and it comes into conflict with our new spiritual nature. If we do not hold it in check and triumph over it, we will become 'carnal' or 'worldly'. Scripture calls this 'walking according to the flesh'.

The flesh is like a burden on a person's back

– rather as Romans tortured murderers by tying on their backs the corpse of their victim. (This amounted to a slow death sentence, a 'living death', and may be referred to in Romans 7:24.)

Genesis 1:27; 5:3; Psalm 51:5; John 3:6; Romans 7:14–24; Ephesians 2:3

How is 'the flesh' or sinful nature overcome?

First of all we need to be born again and thus to receive a new nature. Then we begin to live 'in Christ' and we can be baptised in Holy Spirit and can go on being filled with Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to be holy and throw off slavery to the flesh and sin. However, we shall only be enabled to be victorious over the flesh if we are fully devoted to the Lord and choose to live in step with the Spirit, obeying the law of Christ, going on believing in him. Abiding in Christ, with the help of the Spirit, we can win battles over the old sinful self.

Genesis 4:7; Psalm 55:22; John 1:12–13; 6:63; Romans 6:4, 6–8; 7:4–6; 8:5–6; 13:14; Ephesians 5:8–15

The regenerate person belongs to Christ

Christ gives new life to those who repent and believe in him, and the new believer should want to please the Lord by walking closely with him and starving the old nature (the flesh). Our old self was crucified with Christ (see Romans 6:5).

If we are to experience continual victory over the flesh we cannot do this just by our own efforts but by constantly and consciously relying on the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. We are to live 'according to the Spirit'. We need to remember that in baptism we were baptised into the death of Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead, so that we may live a new life in Christ.

Romans 6:6; 7:21–25; 8:1–4, 8–10; 1 Corinthians 3:1–4; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 10:3–4; Galatians 2:20; 3:3; 5:1, 16–17; Ephesians 5:24–25; 6:11–12

– and must no longer walk according to the flesh

If believers become 'carnal' ('fleshly') in their lives, they will bear such 'fruits' as selfishness, jealousy, rivalry, divisions, and they are being defeated by sin. They are not glorifying their Saviour and may fall away.

1 Corinthians 1:11–12; 3:1–4; 2 Corinthians 12:20–21; Philippians 1:15–17; 1 John 2:16; Revelation 3:15, 19