

# Fleshing Out The Flesh

July 29, 2022



*One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise....Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac. (Galatian 4:23, 28)*

The first thing to be said is that “the flesh” is not bad in itself. Simply stated, the flesh is merely the natural powers of the human being, based in the human body—our capabilities, wants, and desires as they are in themselves, unaided by divine assistance or guidance. The flesh is not identical to human nature, but simply one aspect of it. It is not to be thought of as being essentially sinful, “fallen,” or bad; our bodies are intended to be “members of His body,” and our life in the flesh lived “by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Eph. 5:30; Gal. 2:20).

For example, we read in Galatians that Abraham’s servant, Hagar, gave birth to their son, Ishmael, “according to the flesh” (4:23)—that is, in the way that normal human reproduction takes place. This contrasts with the birth of Isaac, whose birth was through “promise” (v. 28). This was God’s promise to Abraham that the child would be born of Sarah through the action of God in combination with the normal abilities of Abraham and Sarah. Human beings have natural abilities, and those abilities are good when they are used in accordance with God’s designs and desires.

The problem with the flesh lies in its weakness and lostness when uncoupled from God’s Spirit, which is precisely the condition of humanity apart from Christ. To live in the flesh, to live with uncrucified affections and desires, is simply a matter of putting them in the ultimate position in our lives. Whatever we want becomes the most important thing. This is what happens when we are living apart from God; we make our desires ultimate because they are all we have. We look to them as if they were everything in our lives; thinking of my worth, my glory, my appearance, thinking of my power to sustain myself.

Desire is essentially the impulse to possess or experience something. It cares for nothing else other than its object. Desire proclaims, as the old song puts it, “I want what I want when I want it.”<sup>1</sup> There is nothing wrong with wanting or desiring. Desire is a fine thing, and it is one of the things that keeps us alive, but desires are terrible masters.

James 4:1-3: Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? (2) You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

Ephesians 4:22: You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts.

## REFLECT

The objects of desire may differ; I may want to eat or sleep, I may want to dominate others, I may want great wealth. Taken by themselves, desires are inherently chaotic and deceitful.



*How do your desires wage war within you? How do they create conflicts and dispute among your relationships and social interaction?*

**Note:** The devotional content has been made available through a partnership with [Dallas Willard Ministries](#).

