

WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY "THE FLESH"?

NOTE

Inasmuch as our earlier chapters were considerably occupied with what we consider fallacious theories of holiness, I have thought it preferable, for the sake of new readers in the subject, to postpone until here the three questions raised in this addendum, so as to lessen early appearance of complicatedness. Now that our main aim has been fulfilled, however, it is important (so I think) that these three questions should be dealt with, as a further safeguard against easy and common error. Some of these further pages may need a somewhat concentrated reading; but to exercise the mind keenly on such matters is itself rewarding.

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IN these present holiness studies, two factors will have emerged prominently to every reflective reader: first, that Paul's teaching has been considerably misapprehended through inexact translation of his verb-tenses in our revered old "Authorized Version"; second, that it is decisively important to understand correctly such Paulinisms as "the old man", "the new man", "the body of sin", "the inward man", and "the flesh". We have halted at some of these already, but so often do we encounter Paul's phrase, "the flesh", that it calls for separate scrutiny. In itself, it is not peculiar to Paul, but its *usage* often is; and I am convinced that we cannot accurately teach Christian holiness unless we rightly interpret his usage of it. My purpose here is to show that he never uses it (as is generally supposed) to mean an "old nature", or a "sinful nature", or an "Adam nature", or a kind of aggregate "body", or separate subsistence of sin within us.

The Greek word behind this expression, "the flesh", is *sarx*. It occurs 91 times in Paul's epistles (excluding Hebrews, where its 5 occurrences do not affect our conclusion). Here are the component figures: 37 times of the physical or bodily; 25 times of humanity or that which is human; 27 times in a recondite way, i.e. of sin in our human nature; and twice in a borderline way. These are the references:

<i>Used of the physical or bodily</i>	<i>Of humanity or that which is human</i>	<i>Of inherent evil in human nature</i>
Rom. 1: 3	Rom. 3: 20	Rom. 7: 5
2: 28	4: 1	7: 18
6: 19	8: 3 (first)	7: 25
9: 3	8: 3 (second)	8: 5
9: 5	I Cor. 1: 26	8: 5
9: 8	1: 19	8: 6
11: 14	10: 18	8: 7
I Cor. 6: 16	2 Cor. 1: 17	8: 8
7: 28	7: 5	8: 9
15: 39 (4)	10: 2	8: 12
15: 50	10: 3	8: 13

2 Cor.	4: 11	10: 3	13: 14
	5: 16 (2)	11: 18	1 Cor. 5: 5
	7: 1	Gal. 1: 16	Gal. 4: 23
	12: 7	2: 16	4: 29
Gal.	2: 20	3: 3	5: 13
	4: 13	6: 12	5: 16
	4: 14	6: 13	5: 17
Eph.	2: 11 (second)	Eph. 2: 11	5: 17
	2: 15	6: 5	5: 19
	5: 29	6: 12	5: 24
	5: 30	Phil. 3: 3	6: 8
	5: 31	3: 4	6: 8
Phil.	1: 22	3: 4	Eph. 2: 3
	1: 24	Col. 2: 23	2: 3
Col.	1: 22		Col. 2: 11
	1: 24		2: 18
	2: 1	Two seemingly border-	
	2: 5	line occurrences be-	
	2: 13	tween the human and	There are also 8
	3: 22	inherent evil—Rom.	occurrences of the
1 Tim.	3: 16	8: 3 (third) Rom. 8: 4	adjectival form
Philem.	16		<i>sarkikos</i> :
			Rom. 7: 14, 15; 27,
			1 Cor. 3: 1, 3, 3, 4,
			9: 11, 2 Cor. 10: 4.

Anyone can easily verify whether or not we have placed the texts of the first two columns where they rightly belong. It is with those 27 in the third category that we are here concerned. Most of us, probably all, would agree that they refer to *a depravity within each human being*.

Romans 7: 5

"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."

Here, "the flesh" cannot mean the body, for the past tense, "when we were in the flesh" implies that they were no longer in it, whereas they certainly were still in the body. Note, however, the connection of "the flesh" with the "members" of the body.

Romans 7: 18

"For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Observe here the "I know", and "I find not", with the "in me" and "with me", indicating the one undivided personality all the way through. Then note that the "flesh" is *within* the "me" as

somehow *one* with it and *of* it; not as a separate *entity* in it.

Romans 7: 25

"So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

The "mind" here is the "inward man" (vs. 22, 23). That "inward man" is not a "man" *other* than the real man, nor is the "mind" any other than the one, thinking "I"—which is why Paul now says, "with the mind *I myself* . . ." The "mind" is the man which "serves the law of God", and by exact parallel here the "flesh" is the *same* man (not just a part) who serves "the law of sin".

Romans 8: 5, 6, 7

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind of the flesh is enmity towards God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

What are "the *mind* of the flesh" and "the *mind* of the Spirit"? They cannot be two minds co-existent but not identical in one person, for that would be two *persons*, since the mind is the "I myself." No, they are two *states* of mind. The "mind of the flesh" is the mind set on animal gratification. The "mind of the Spirit" is the mind set on spiritual satisfactions. My mind cannot be predominantly set on the physical and predominantly set on the spiritual both at the same time. It may be either the one or the other at any given time, but it cannot be both simultaneously.

Romans 8: 8, 9

"So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you."

This cannot mean, "They that are in the *body* cannot please God" nor can it mean, "But ye are not in the *body*"—for that is what they actually *were*. Here, again, "the flesh" must mean something *other* than the body, yet closely *connected* with it.

Romans 8: 12, 13

"Therefore, brethren, we owe nothing to the flesh, to live

It is important to see that here Paul *distinguishes* between the

after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit put to death the activities of the body, ye shall live."

Romans 13: 14

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

I Corinthians 5: 5

"To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh".

Galatians 4: 23, 29

"He who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh . . ." "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now."

Galatians 5: 16, 17

"This I say then: Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."

"flesh" and the "body". He says, "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die", therefore, "Make to die the activities of the *body*". Now it is plain as day that here he *cannot* mean the normal functions of the body, but the *animal appetites*.

This settles it that by "the flesh" Paul sometimes means an *evil propensity* in our nature. The body itself cannot "lust", but only the human self, *through* the body. As James 2: 26 says, "The body apart from the spirit [i.e. the human spirit] is dead". The body itself does not think or desire. So "the flesh" here must mean an *inward perversity of the mind*.

This was an exclusively Apostolic act of authority. Note, however, it is not said to have been for the destruction of the *body*, but "for the destruction of *the flesh*". The precise intent is not easy to determine; but the destruction of the *body* would have dealt only with the organ rather than the origin of the evil.

The "flesh" here cannot mean merely the body, nor even merely the animal appetites (as we know from the Genesis narrative). It must mean, again, a perversity of *mind*, though with somatic expression.

Here, most definitely "the flesh" is not the body, though the body is the earthly *organ* of "the flesh", as the context shows (19-21). The flesh is here said to "desire"—which is an attribute of mind; of

the human *self*. The desiring is evidently earthy, evil, voluptuary, and opposed to the desire of the Spirit. The "flesh" here is plainly a *self-centred perversity within human nature*.

Galatians 5: 19, 24

"Now the works of the flesh are these [17 such are instanced] . . . And they that are Christ's crucified [aorist] the flesh with the passions and the desires."

Of the seventeen "works" of the flesh here given, about half are *mental*, not physical ("hatred", "envyings", etc.); and those which are physical are varied effects from one cause in the mind. When Paul added "They that are Christ's crucified the flesh", he certainly did not mean that they had crucified their *bodies*. It is no longer open to doubt that by "the flesh" Paul means an active perversion within the human mind; a *perversion which uses the body for self-gratification*, sometimes, though not always, grossly.

Galatians 6: 8

"For he that soweth to *his own* flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal."

The reflexive pronoun, "his own", here emphasizes that "the flesh" is no mere generality, but intensively individual. See again, also, how it is the opposite of the "Spirit".

Ephesians 2: 3

"Among whom also we all had our conduct in times past, in the desires of our flesh, doing the things willed of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others".

Our translation here is rather stricter than in the A.V. The juxtaposition of terms is significant "desires", "flesh", "willed", "thoughts", "nature". Note: the flesh both "desires" and "wills", so it cannot be the body, even though the very word, "flesh" always indicates close *connection* with the body. But crucially important here is the word, "nature". The flesh is shown to be, not a kind of separate "nature" within us (as is usually taught) but an

active depravity in the one "nature" which we are. Mark well: both the "flesh" and the "thoughts" are *included* in the resultant words, "and were by nature the children of wrath".

Colossians 2: 11, 18

"In the divestment of the body of the flesh . . ." "Vainly puffed up by the mind of the flesh". (E.R.V. & A.S.V.).

There are two arresting phrases here:—(1) "The body of the flesh", (2) "The mind of the flesh". So "the flesh" is not *identical* either with "the body" or "the mind".

There we have the data. May we not deduce as follows?

- (1) In these passages "the flesh" denotes figuratively an evil reality in man's *moral* being.
- (2) Although non-physical, this evil reality is called "the flesh" because of its strong affinity for, and powerful influence over, our actual flesh.
- (3) "The flesh" is neither the body itself nor the mind itself; but it inheres *in* the mind, and behaves *through* the body.
- (4) "The flesh" is not a mind within the mind, a self within the self, or a nature within the nature; therefore it cannot be removed either wholly or partly like a parasite or an interloper or a malignant growth.
- (5) The "mind" and the "flesh" are in sharp contrast yet both are identified with the "I myself" (Rom. 7: 25); so that whether it be through "the mind" or through "the flesh" it is one undivided human ego which acts.
- (6) All this surely leads to the conclusion that "the flesh" must be regarded, not as a *locality* of the mind, but as a *disease*, in greater or lesser degree *throughout* the moral system.
- (7) The "mind of the flesh" and the "mind of the Spirit" are not two minds in one person, but two sorts or *states* of mind. The "mind of the flesh" is the mind predominantly set on sensory, earthly gratifications. The "mind of the Spirit" is the mind predominantly set on spiritual satisfactions. Therefore, although a human mind may be either of these at any given time, it cannot be predominantly both simultaneously.

Can we find a common denominator for these varied aspects? I think we can. Is it not the *animal and selfish* in our fallen human nature?—or, perhaps, more exactly, the animal and selfish inclination, predisposition, *propensity* within us? The "flesh" is a self-centred perversity and propensity inhering in and coextensive with our moral nature.

Always in cases of this kind, the decisive test is: Does the suggested "common denominator" truly fit all the data? Does it in *this* instance? Let us quickly run through the twenty-seven texts again, and see whether, in each, we may substitute our suggested equivalent, i.e. "the animal and/or selfish propensities". I know, of course, that a cumbersome paraphrase like "the animal and/or selfish propensities" is bound to read clumsily in place of the one familiar word, "flesh". The test here, however, is not elegance, but correctness.

Romans 7: 5. "For when we were in [i.e. living in and for] our animal and selfish propensities, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."

Romans 7: 18. "For I know that in me, that is, in my animal and selfish propensities, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Romans 7: 25. "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the animal and selfish propensities the law of sin."

Romans 8: 5, 6, 7. "For they that are [i.e. who live] according to the 'flesh' mind the things of the animal and selfish propensities, but they that are [i.e. who live] according to the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit. For the mind [or minding of] the animal and selfish propensities is death; but the mind [or minding] of the Spirit is life and peace: because the mind of [i.e. given to] the animal and selfish is enmity towards God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

Romans 8: 8, 9. "So then, they that are in [i.e. living in and for] the animal and selfish propensities cannot please God. But ye are not in [i.e. living in and for] the animal and selfish propensities, but ye are in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you."

Romans 8: 12, 13. "Therefore, brethren, we owe nothing to the 'flesh', to live after the animal and selfish propensities; for if ye live according to the animal and selfish propensities ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit put to death [such] activities of the body, ye shall live."

Romans 13: 14. "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the animal and selfish propensities, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

1 *Corinthians* 5: 5. "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh [in this case, the animal and selfish indulgence spoken of in the context] that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (We mention again, however, that the precise intent of the "flesh" here is not easy to decide finally. There are those who hold that it means the flesh *physically*.)

Galatians 4: 23, 29. "He who was of the bondwoman was born of [i.e. by the activity of] the animal or selfish; but he of the free-woman was by promise." "But as then he that was born of [i.e. by the activity of] the animal or selfish persecuted him that was born of the Spirit, even so is it now."

Galatians 5: 16, 17. "This I say then: Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the desires of the animal and selfish. For the animal-and-selfish lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the animal and selfish."

Galatians 5: 19, 24. "Now the works of the animal and selfish propensities are these [seventeen are instanced] . . . And they that are Christ's crucified [aorist] the animal and selfish with the passions and desires."

Galatians 6: 8. "For he that soweth to his animal and selfish propensities shall of the same reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal."

Ephesians 2: 3. "Among whom also we all had our conduct once, in our animal and selfish desires, doing the things willed of our animal and selfish (will) and thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as others."

Colossians 2: 11, 18. "In the divestment of the body of animal and selfish propensities . . ." "Vainly puffed up by the mind of (i.e. given to) the animal and selfish propensities."

I agree again that our circumlocutory phrase, "the animal and

selfish propensities", sounds strange and reads clumsily in some of these verses. It is not suggested as a translation, but as an *interpretation*. The question is: Does it give the true sense? I believe it does.

Some time ago I read a rather abstruse but learned article on Paul's use of the words, "body" and "flesh". It raised the question as to how far he was influenced by Stoic or Gnostic or contemporary Hellenistic ideas. Exploration, however, reveals little (it said) at which, personally, I am not surprised. There is an independent originality about Paul's specialised use of the word "flesh". Whatever concurrent influences may have affected him, the true way to interpret his recurring use of *any* word or phrase under guidance by the Holy Spirit is to compare carefully all its occurrences and contexts. When we do this with his use of the word "flesh", is not the meaning that which we have here abstracted? May we not repeat, with added conviction, that by the "flesh" he does *not* mean a something which is in us as a local or separable entity?

One point which the aforementioned article makes, and with which I thoroughly agree, is, that in this adapted use of the term, "flesh", Paul refers to "the whole man in his fallenness", or "the total self" in its present spoiled condition; not to a canker located somewhere in the system, but to a toxin chronically permeating the whole. This aspective yet inclusive use of the word has many parallels in common speech. We speak of a certain man as a "male", or as an "athlete", or as a "leper", or as an "alcoholic". We do not mean that the man is only partly male or partly athlete or partly leper or partly alcoholic. In each case the description is only aspective, yet from that one aspect it covers the whole man. Just so, "the flesh" aspectively describes our whole human nature in its present state of perverted animal and selfish propensities.

Whether our suggested "common denominator" may not be elegant or precise enough is of very small consequence just here. The emergent fact is: Paul's use of the word "flesh" gives no support to our usual holiness teaching that the "flesh" is an "old nature" or inner "body of sin" which as a thing in itself may be "crucified with Christ", or separately slain, or eradicated by spiritual surgery. That is the point which comes out clearly again and again.

Invalidity of Usual Teaching

The invalidity of the usual teaching, i.e. that "the flesh" is a sinful "old nature", may be seen in the peculiar contradictions which tangle it. I quote part of an editorial written by one of the ablest exponents of the holiness message. So far as I know, although it was written over fifty years ago, it still remains authentically representative of standard teaching.

"The Word of God does not teach us to expect, in this life, either the *eradication* or *improvement* of the 'flesh'. God's provision in Christ for us, in order that we may walk so as to please Him, supposes the existence, the incurableness, and the continuance of the sinful nature within us up to the very end of our earthly course."

Notice, in that quotation, the synonymizing of the "flesh" with the "sinful nature"; also that this so-called old "nature" cannot be either "eradicated" or even "improved". It is "incurable" and "within us" to our earthly end (which is indeed a gloomy picture). That sinful "nature", however, says the same beloved author, may be *counteracted*. But how? In order to show us the more vividly he uses the following effective illustration.

"When a light is introduced into a dark chamber, the darkness disappears at once. But the tendency to darkness persists; it has not been eradicated; and the room is kept illuminated simply because, and just so long as, the light counteracts the tendency. If it were possible for the room to continue in a state of illumination by passing the candle through it once, the room would not be dependent on the continued presence of the lighted candle for its light. Holiness . . . is a condition of life which must be maintained, moment by moment, through living fellowship with Christ. It is a *maintained condition*, never a *state*."

Now the distinction which the illustration draws between "condition" and "state" is merely verbal, for according to dictionary definition there is no practical difference. What is really meant here (and taught elsewhere) is that holiness is *not* *inwrought*; it is not something which changes *me*; it is only a "maintained" presence which is *not* the real "me", but which inwardly "*counteracts*" the "me". In saying this we are not in any way misrepresenting the writer, for in another article which we carefully quote he says, "It is *not* something that has taken place in *you*" (italics mine: and see fuller quotation below).

His figure of light ousting darkness from a room illustrates this, but only at the cost of fatal contradiction. "The darkness disappears at once," he says. Then where is it? If it has completely gone, is not *that* eradication? No, he says, "the *tendency* to darkness persists". It is only "counteracted" for "just so long" as the introduced light abides. What, then, if the light is withdrawn? Is there a return of the darkness which was there before? No, *that* darkness went for ever. It is a *new* darkness!—which parallels with the strange eradicationist vagary, that even though our "evil old nature" may be completely "destroyed", another one may grow in its place, if we "fall from grace"!

The fault in that attractive illustration is: Neither the darkness nor the light are part of the room *itself*. The teaching of the New Testament is that something happens to the *room*, that is, to the human *self*. We think of Romans 12: 2, "Be ye [i.e. yourselves] transformed by the *renewing* of your mind"—not to mention a score of other such texts; and at once we see the poverty, the mis-focus, of the above teaching. It loses (so I believe) a Scripture truth which shines clear as cloudless morn.

What strange solace to a holiness-hungry heart! I am asked to believe that despite regeneration and sanctification my "sinful nature" remains altogether "incurable". I keep looking at the quoted words, "It is not something that has taken place in you, so that you no longer have the tendency to sin." Putting this and the other comments together, what it really says is, that *no change at all* has taken place in the nature and tendencies.

Now with my New Testament open before me, I deny the Scripturalness of such teaching. According to the Word, regeneration and inward sanctification effect a dynamic and deep-going change in *me*, that is, in my moral nature, my desires, my reactions, my inclinations. I deny that regeneration and sanctification bring no more than merely a superinduced "counteraction" without a fundamental renovation in *myself*. What the New Testament teaches is not just "counteraction", but *transformation*—transformation of heart and character through *renewal* of the mind and will.

I submit just one more illustration. Its author was a master in the art of illustration, and I could well envy his ability at appropriating lucid analogies.

“Suppose that I take a rod and attach to it a piece of lead. I drop it into a tank of water. By the law of sinking bodies, it descends; that illustrates the ‘law of sin’. Now I get a piece of cork, and fasten that also to the rod; and placing it in the water I see that by the law of floating bodies, it has a tendency to ascend. But the lifting power of the cork is not strong enough to overcome the downward tendency of the lead, so that it may be kept from sinking. It rises and sinks alternately. There you have the ‘up and down’ life. ‘I myself’ by the cork serving the law of floating bodies, and ‘I myself’ by the lead obeying the law of sinking bodies. ‘Up and down’.

“Now turn to Romans 8: 2, and we read, ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *hath made me free from the law of sin and death*’. What has taken place? Let us suppose that I place my rod with the lead and the cork into a little life-belt, and put them into the tank of water. The rod [i.e. the ‘I myself’] now does not sink. Why? Because it is in the life-belt. There is sufficient lifting-power in it [the life-belt] to keep it [the ‘I myself’] from sinking; but it is only as it is in the life-belt that it has the benefit of that law. It is the power of a superior law counteracting the other law. The lead is not taken away, but the rod has the benefit of a stronger power so long as it abides in the life-belt.”

The speaker is solicitous to demonstrate that even “while we are floating in the life-belt, the lead is there all the same”; but he thereby occasions (we speak respectfully) a wry predicament. His illustration is in two parts, with the first part supposedly picturing what regeneration does, and the second part supposedly picturing a fuller deliverance which comes by the counteracting “superior law” of the “Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. The “rod” dropped into the water, he says, is “I myself”. The “piece of lead” is “the law of sin”, or the evil nature which pulls me down. The “piece of cork” is regeneration. Alas, the “cork” of regeneration is not as strong as the “lead” of the old nature, so there is an “up and down” life, mainly down, because “the lifting power of the cork is not strong enough”! (Surely a poor idea of regeneration!) And not only is the regeneration “cork” insufficient, but neither the “lead” of the old life nor the “cork” of the new is the *rod* (the “I myself”), but something separate!

Strangest of all, in the *second* part of the illustration, victory over the down-pull comes by placing all three—the “rod” and the “lead” and the “cork”, into a “life-belt” which represents our Lord Jesus. So now, all three—the “I myself”, and the new nature, and even the *old* nature (the lead) which is “incurably

evil”, are “abiding” in Christ! Yet how *can* that evil old nature “abide in Christ” if it utterly *cannot* be regenerated?

One wonders that congregations have listened so credulously, and that able men have taught such a mix-up of holiness teaching, for it is not true either to Scripture or to experience. The hereditary evil in my nature is no separable lump of “lead”, neither is the new life which regenerated me, in Christ, a cork-like attachment.

Take a last glance back over those two illustrations—the light in the dark room, and the rod in the tank; what do they illustrate? There is the usual confusing of “the flesh” with a so-called “old nature”; and there is the usual miserable outlook: the evil thing is linked to us till our very death, with absolutely no possibility of improvement, “*WE*” are to walk “so as to please Christ”. “*WE*”—but which part of us, if the “old nature” (which is the self, the *all* that we were before regeneration) *cannot* “walk so as to please Him”? Is it only the imparted “*new nature*” (so-called) which can do so? Then it is not the real *ourselves* at all who so walk; for it is not the real human self or person which has been regenerated.

One wonders how this teaching of the rod and the lead and the cork—the self and the “old nature” and the “new nature” all “abiding” together in the life-belt, ties in with that other component of the teaching, namely, that the “old nature” is “crucified” and “dead” and “buried”! Why do such contradictions arise? It is because, in the usual holiness message, the notion of “two natures” in the believer is unscriptural; and the supposition of an inward joint-crucifixion with Christ is unscriptural; and the assumption that “the flesh” is the so-called “evil old nature” is unscriptural. Yes, however dear the brethren who have taught so, and however sincere their motive, and however honoured their names, and however much we may have loved them, we say it again with deepest respect: such teaching is *unscriptural*.

A Truer Illustration

A much truer illustration is one used by Dr. R. A. Torrey, which we quote from an address given by him at a well-known conference a few years before his death.

“There is nothing that cleanses like fire. If I have a piece of gold, and there is dirt on the outside, and I want to get the dirt off, I can take soap and water, perhaps, and wash it off. But suppose that the

dirt is in the very metal itself, there is only one way to get it out—throw it into the fire! Just so with you and me.” “The fire of the Holy Spirit consumes those things within us which are displeasing to God—vanity, pride, temper, personal ambition, uncleanness of all kinds.”

I too believe in that refining fire of the Holy Spirit. With every fibre of conviction, I believe that the New Testament opens to us an inward purifying and refining of our whole moral nature. I believe that Charles Wesley’s famous stanza not only expresses the deepest longing of all Christian hearts, but exactly echoes the accents of the New Testament itself—

Refining Fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul;
Scatter Thy life through every part,
And sanctify the whole.

That stanza is often sung where the “old nature” doctrine is taught; yet how contradictory if (according to theory) there is a whole area inside us—the “flesh”, the “old nature”, which the refining Fire *cannot* sanctify? According to some, as we have seen, that “old nature” is the *larger* part of us. Indeed, a common implication is that it is stronger than the (so-called) “new nature” received at regeneration; and it must stay within us “to the very end of our earthly course”. Let us be frank: if such teaching is true, then there can be no such present reality as “*entire* sanctification”.

I sympathize with the sincere *motive*. Through the years there has been commendable concern not to countenance any teaching which might lessen the believer’s utter *dependance* on Christ for holiness. Any view, such as “eradication”, which might seem to lessen the need for continuous dependance on Him has been watchfully excluded.

But there can be right motive with wrong method. The “eradication” error has been countered by a teaching which in part is *equally* unscriptural. There seems to have been an over-zealous concern to keep that suppositious “old nature” alive within us, to the bitter end, so as to make sure that we depend on Christ all the more. If our hearts were set entirely free from inward sin, then (supposedly) that would *lessen* our dependance on Him, impairing our praisefulness for victory, our humility as unworthy sinners, and our adoring wonder at divine grace. What

a mistake! Do they need some degree of sin in *heaven* to increase trust or praise or humility or adoration? Is it not the inner working of sin which impedes and impairs our trust and praise and humility and adoration? To say that sin in *any* form or degree is contributory to trust or praise or humility or adoration is the strangest of strange daubs on *holiness* teaching!

As the preceding pages of this treatise will have evinced, I am as certain as anyone that the “eradication” theory is unscriptural; but I am just as convinced that other holiness groups will never utter the true corrective until they break free from this equally unscriptural idea that “the flesh” is an “old nature”—a kind of *lodger* inside the Christian believer, distinguishable from the human ego itself. I maintain again that according to aggregate Pauline usage, “the flesh” means our *animal and selfish propensities*. We must not lump these propensities together (not even as a convenient mode of thinking) into an entity, a core, an old “nature”, or “body” of sin, with a kind of mind or will or activity of its own—else we link arms with a subtle Gnosticism, and court error. These animal and selfish propensities within us, as members of Adam’s degenerate posterity, are *qualities* which inhere in our nature itself. They cannot be dealt with in bulk; but our nature itself may be refined by the Holy Spirit.

As we remarked in a reference elsewhere, possibly that word, “animal”, in our definition, may seem scarcely right to someone. Does not the word, “animal” refer to the *body*? And since the body itself cannot think or desire, how can the word “animal” be used of *mental* qualities? The answer is that the term, “animal”, refers just as definitely to the mind as it does to the body. Is that dog of yours a dog just because it has a dog *body*? No; it has a dog *mind*. It thinks and reasons, and desires as a dog. Even so, man is not animal only because he has a body. There is a relatedness of *mind*. Also, there can be animal *mindedness*, the mainspring of which is self-gratification of both body and mind through earthly things. That is precisely what Paul denotes in Ephesians 2: 3,—“The desires of the *flesh* and of the *mind* (or thoughts)”. See also Romans 8: 6,—“The *mind* (or disposition) of the flesh”.

The animals lower than man are self-centred, naturally so, but not sinfully so, for they do not have moral consciousness. In contradistinction, man is moral and spiritual, as well as animal. Therefore, as originally created, he was not self-centred, but God-

centred. It is *since* then, and because “by one man sin entered the world”, that human nature has become *self-centred*. This self-centredness inevitably emphasizes itself in the selfish and animal. Paul could scarcely have used a more photographic phrase for our gross selfish and animal propensities than “*the flesh*”.

Once we grasp that in Pauline usage “the flesh” means, not a so-called “old nature”, but our inborn *selfish and animal urges* which we have inherited along with all the higher and nobler impulses of our total humanhood—once we grasp that, and then realise that the Holy Spirit can refine our whole moral nature, with *all* its propensities, then, as we said earlier, we have taken the first big step toward a truly New Testament doctrine of holiness.

Whatever evils in my “self” I find,
 There is an *inmost* longing for the good;
 Tho’ treated badly, rudely pushed behind,
 It reasserts, however oft withstood:
 No psychiatric skill can diagnose
 This strange duality alive in me,
 This one deep “I” so subtly self-opposed,
 This civil war from which I’m never free:
 How high I mount in upward, pure desire,
 And wish all evil thoughts forever gone!
 How low I sink and wallow in the mire!
 Am I not two? And yet the two still one?

But if one integrated “self” am I,
 And if the *good* is basic in my mind,
 May I not be, O “Spirit from on high,”
 In all my thought and impulses refined?
 May not the very *spring* of wish and will
 Be cleansed by Thine indwelling purity?
 Blest Sanctifier, come, my mind infill,
 Transforming strife to holy harmony.
 Possess me, penetrate, restore, endue,
 No lurking evil can Thy light abide;
 My moral being in its depths renew,
 Let all I am, in Thee, be sanctified.

WHAT IS “CLEANSING FROM ALL SIN”?