

## Context for Revising Definition of "Flesh"

### Original GFI Definition

When I was entrusted with the responsibility of clarifying and defending the GFI message and methodology, the definition of "flesh" came up for review. The definition in *Gems and Jargon* (by Charles Solomon) is:

18. *Flesh* in unregenerate man is used synonymously with the "body of sin". Both are indicative of *sin's control of the personality* through the *old man* (cf. section 27).

This original GFI definition in reference to the believer was "*flesh* is the condition of the Christian where the personality is yielded knowingly or unknowingly, to the control of indwelling sin" (Exchanged Life Conference Glossary).

When I checked the Greek lexicons (dictionaries) for a definition of *sarx* as used in an ethical sense (especially as it remains in the believer) I did not find this original GFI definition substantiated. A primary method of clarifying the meaning of a biblical word is to trace its meaning through its usage in the Bible. The original occurrences of "*sarx*/flesh/" and "*soma* /body" in the Greek New Testament were studied. The results of that research are in separate documents (attached).

In discussions with Dr. Solomon, it became evident that the *Gems* definition was postulated to harmonize the interpretation of Galatians 5:24 with Romans 6:6 (*Gems*, section 26). "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6, KJV).

Thankfully, Dr. Solomon (CRS) rediscovered that our co-crucifixion with Christ was more than a positional or metaphorical union; it involved the old man being removed and replaced. This clarification was enabled by discerning the distinction between the soul and spirit. The old man is *who we are in Adam spiritually before salvation*. So, in a real sense, who were were in Adam *was put off* through our identification with Christ in His death and burial (Rom. 6:3-6).

### The Connection of "Body of Sin" and "Flesh" Definitions

With his engineering mind and attention to definitions, CRS came to Galatians 5:24: "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Galatians 5:24, KJV. He noticed a couple of factors about the flesh in this context.

- 1) The flesh continues as a detrimental influence in the life of the believer: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth

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against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Galatians 5:16,17, KJV).

2) Yet, in some sense, believers "*have crucified the flesh...*" (v.24). That verse does not limit this "crucifixion" to some victorious believers; rather, it says "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh..."

This raised the question, How can the *flesh* be on ongoing sinful influence in the believer, yet the flesh has been "crucified"? Assuming this had to be more literal (ontological) as was the co-crucifixion of the old man (Rom. 6:6), CRS considered what definition of "flesh" in the believer would harmonize these issues.

Also, the second half of Romans 6:6 states "...that the body of sin might be *destroyed* (KJV)." This called for clarifying the meaning of "body of sin" as well. CRS doesn't mind confessing that he does not know or use Greek or Hebrew. And his primary Bible translation has been the King James Version. Therefore, he deduced that the "body of sin" was identical with "flesh" in Galatians 5:24. What was, then, "destroyed" (interpreted as meaning "removed")? It could not mean the conventional definition of flesh (ethically) as the lower nature that remains in the mortal body, since it was "destroyed." Therefore this definition was postulated:

26. Simultaneous with the new birth, the crucifixion of the old man destroys the *body of sin* (Romans 6:6) or flesh in unregenerate man. Galatians 5:24 states: "*And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh...*" This statement exempts no believer. Thus, the *body of sin* or *flesh* in unregenerate man is done away with by the Cross. This is reinforced by Romans 8:8, 9 which concludes: "*So they that are in the flesh (unsaved persons) cannot please God. But ye, (saved persons) are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you: Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*" According to the foregoing passage, the unbeliever is always *in the flesh*, whereas the believer is always *in the Spirit*. It follows logically that something *permanent* happened to the *flesh*. That "something" was the crucifixion of the *old man* that the *body of sin* or flesh might be *destroyed* (not just rendered inoperative!) - *Gems and Jargon*.

This attention to detail and consistency is commendable. The *Gems* definition is a possible interpretation because it is not overtly contradicted by Scripture, and it permits a consistent model of Cross-emphasis sanctification.

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### Reevaluation of Definitions

One of the challenges of the second generation GFI teacher/trainer is that he must not only explain and support such definitions (i.e., "body of sin", "flesh") but prove them in the original text and defend them.

When the term "body" (*soma*) in Romans 6:6 ("body of sin") was studied in Greek and in context, the definition in *Gems* became doubtful. Throughout Romans Paul uses "soma" to identify the human body (cf. research documents). Other evangelical teachers/commentators--including Exchanged Life ones--interpret Romans 6:6b as the physical body.

But, if *body of sin* were more accurately the human body as vulnerable to sin, what about Galatians 5:24? "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." This required a re-study of "flesh" (*sarx*) as used in reference to sinful tendencies in the believer. Verses such as these are typical:

"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" (Romans 7:18, KJV).

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from *fleshly* lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11, KJV).

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the *flesh*, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14, KJV).

The *Gems* definition implies that "flesh" is not always in the believer; it is limited to a phenomenon, i.e., when the believer allows "indwelling sin" (Rom. 7:20) to bring about a carnal condition of the personality. However, the usage of "flesh/*sarx*" does not give evidence for a periodic condition as a definition of *sarx*, rather the *flesh* is a constant influence and threat that must be counteracted by the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:11-13).

But, the original problem of interpreting Romans 6:6b and Galatians 5:24 still would need to be resolved. Returning to Romans 6:6 "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (NKJV). Note that instead of "destroyed", the New King James and other modern translations use "done away with", "rendered inoperative", etc. A word study of *katargeo* (KJV - "destroyed") bears out this more moderate definition. The primary meaning in the lexicon is "to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative 1a) to cause a person or thing to have no further efficiency 1b) to deprive of force, influence, power"

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The word *katargeo* is used in Luke 13:7 in a literal was of an unfruitful tree, and Hebrews 2:14 uses the word to describe Christ mission to "destroy" Satan. Therefore, one could respect the contextual definition of "body of sin" as the mortal body as sin-prone. It was not destroyed (annihilated) but *rendered inoperative as a servant of sin* (when the Holy Spirit is allowed to reign). This meaning is consistent with the following phrase in Romans 6:6: "...that the body of sin might be done away with, *that we should no longer be slaves of sin*" (Romans 6:6, NKJV). Although the believer is not sinless or exempt from the sinful pull of the flesh, he/she is *no longer under sin's dominion* (Rom. 6:14,17,18).

Then, how does one interpret Galatians 5:24? "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"(NKJV). The *Gems* definition did not fully consider the possibility that the crucifixion here was *positional* instead of literal/actual. (Note that CRS was inclined to a literal/actual definition because it was a significant adjustment--along with other deeper life writers--to discern that *the old man* was not just positionally put off/crucified, but literally/spiritually co-crucified.) However, "positional" usage is accurate in other matters such as the believer's justification (Rom. 5:1) and *position* "in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:30). Returning to Romans 8:9, "But ye, (saved persons) are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you..." This refers to the believer's new *position*; he is identified by his/her regenerate spirit and *no longer under the authority of the flesh*.

What would Galatians 5:24 mean if "crucified the flesh" were *positional*? It would convey the truth that everyone who is in Christ (has put on the "new man" Eph. 4:24) has been transferred into the kingdom of God's Son (Col. 1:13). He/she has been raised with Christ and is seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-7). Therefore--through our citizenship in His kingdom and identification with Him in His enthronement--we are on His side. *Christ's enemies have become our enemies*. His victory has become our victory! (Rom. 8:37). We anticipate how God's enemies will be made a footstool for our sovereign Savior: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'" (Psalms 110:1, NKJV).

Therefore, "those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh" in the sense that they concur with Heaven's verdict on God's enemies. Since the flesh wars against the Holy Spirit, the flesh is doomed; it is judged as sentenced to ultimate annihilation. It is *rendered inoperative* when the believer walks in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), and it will be left behind (gone forever) after physical death or the rapture (Phil 3:20,21). As an illustration, consider how Pontius Pilate "crucified" the Lord Jesus. He did not actually, personally hammer the nails, but he *rendered the verdict*. Similarly *the believer automatically*

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*concur with God's verdict on the flesh* when he/she is joined to the victorious Christ. (But in this case of condemning the flesh the verdict is *just*, whereas Pilate's decision was *unjust*.) God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, "on account of sin: He *condemned* sin in the flesh..."(Rom. 8:3) and His redeemed ones are on His side judicially.

If "crucified the flesh" is interpreted this way, there is no need for the postulated, narrow definition of "flesh" (Gal. 5:24) and "body of sin" (Rom. 6:6) as given in *Gems*.

### A Challenging Task

When deeper life author, Victor Matthews, was asked about the definition of "the flesh" in this context, he replied that it had not been defined. This indicates how challenging it has been to have precise, biblical, effective definitions for "flesh", *sin principle*, etc.). Plus, the traditional concepts and term of "old /sinful nature" versus "new nature" blur the definitions of the literal biblical terms. In *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, J. A. Motyer states,

The 'flesh' is a dynamic principle of sinfulness (Gal. 5:17; Jude 23)...The flesh, producing 'acts' (Gal. 5:19) in those who live [walk] after the flesh (Rom 8:12), is characterized by 'lust' or evil 'human desires' (1 John 2:16; Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 2:10)... [Believers] need to be watchful. For the fact of the flesh means dullness of spiritual perception (Rom. 6:19), and though Christians need pay none of the claims of the flesh (Rom. 8:12), yet they must remember that in their flesh there is nothing good (Rom. 7:18), and if they should repose their trust there again (Gal. 3:3; Phil 3:3), they would lapse into bondage (Rom 7:25). They have become recipients of a new principle of life sufficient to oust the old principle of death (Rom. 8:4,9,13; Gal. 5:16-17), 'the life of Jesus' in their mortal bodies (2 Cor. 4:10-11). [p. 456].

The original GFI definition of *flesh* was "a condition of the personality when yielded knowingly or unknowingly to indwelling sin." This definition is still accurate in describing a believer's potential "carnal" *condition*. For example, "for you are still *carnal*. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not *carnal* and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:3)

The less abstract definition of *flesh* given in the Greek lexicon, and advocated in this article, does not imply that the flesh in the mortal body is a separate "part" of a person. Our essential distinguishable "parts" are body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess 5:23). In a similar manner, the definition of "heart" is distinct from soul and spirit, yet "heart" is not a fourth distinguishable "part" of a person. As the "heart" is an *aspect* of the immaterial person

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(the seat of one's motivation, reflection, and affection), so the flesh is an *aspect* of the material side of a person. Yet, because we are a unified being (one in personhood), the heart influences the body, just as the flesh influences the soul.

### Concluding Definition

The following is a working definition of *flesh* in verses such as 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” (KJV)].

*The flesh* is an aspect of a person's mortal body that is a perpetual sinful influence. Flesh is distinct from "the old man" (which that was crucified with Christ - Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9). It could be considered the *residue* of the "old man." Positionally, the believer is not "in the flesh", but "in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:9). Through his/her identification with Christ, the believer is freed from the authority of the flesh, the world, and the Devil (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24). The flesh includes personal conditioning based upon one's beliefs, values, identity messages, and coping mechanisms acquired through living independently of God (paraphrasing Dr. Neil Anderson). It is sin-stained (by depravity from Adam) and sin-trained (from each person's life experiences and choices). Since one of its essential characteristics is selfishness (James 3:14), the carnal (fleshly) condition can be also called "the self-life." One person's unique version of the flesh could be primarily self rottenness, while another's might be self righteousness (Gal. 5:19-21; Phil 3:3-8). The flesh is *in* the believer this side of heaven (Rom. 7:18), however, it is not his essential nature or identity. The flesh is hostile to God's Spirit and wars against the soul (Gal. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:11). If a believer grieves or quenches God's indwelling Holy Spirit (through rebellion and/or unbelief) a carnal condition results and is shown behaviorally as "walking according to the flesh" (Eph. 4:17,30). Therefore, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal.5:16, NKJV).

[Italics in Scripture quotations are editorial, for added emphasis]

John Woodward  
Grace Fellowship International  
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#### *Related Documents:*

- Flesh Notes
- Galatians 5:24 Notes
- Body of Sin Notes
- Old Man / Flesh - Needham