

We return to this text of Scripture for the 5th time. Thus far, we've only considered the positive (put on Christ), which brings us this morning to begin our consideration of the negative (and make no provision for the flesh). I want to consider the negative command under three questions (each question will be answered in a sermon): What is meant by the flesh? What is meant by making no provision for the flesh? What is meant by fulfilling the lusts of the flesh?

- I. Defined
- II. Expanded
- III. Applied

I. Defined

1. As I've mentioned several weeks ago, Scripture uses the term flesh in two ways: of human nature and fallen human nature.
2. (a) Human nature—that is, sometimes Scripture uses the term "flesh" to simply refer to human nature.
3. Jn.1:14—"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"—the Son assumed to Himself human nature.
4. 1Pet.4:1—"Christ suffered for us in the flesh"—that is, He suffered for us in human nature (body and soul).
5. This how the NT usually uses this term flesh—it simply refers to human nature and especially the body.
6. (b) Corrupt human nature—the NT often speaks of the flesh in a moral negative way—as fallen human nature.
7. While Christ had flesh in the first sense, He had no flesh in this second sense—He possessed true humanity but not sinful humanity.
8. Rom.8:3—"God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin, to condemn sin in the flesh."
9. By "sinful flesh" Paul means "post fallen and weakened flesh"—flesh that is now able to suffer and die.
10. God condemned sin "in the flesh" or real humanity of our Savior; this is why the Word became flesh.
11. And so, while Scripture usually uses the word flesh for human nature, it also uses it of sinful human nature.
12. Gal.6:8—"He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption" Eph.2:3—"we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh" 2Pet.2:10—"those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority" Jude 1:23—"others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh."
13. Thus, the question I want to answer here is this: Why does Scripture refer to the corruption of our soul as flesh?
14. Why describe our sinful nature with a term (flesh) that almost always refers to our bodies (let me suggest three reasons).
15. (1) Because it's corrupted when joined to the body—as soon as our soul is united to our body (at conception), our souls are corrupted as a punishment for our sin in Adam.
16. This is called original sin—this refers to the fact that our souls are born (conceived) originally sinful.
17. Christopher Love—"The corrupt nature is called flesh, because man is naturally corrupted as soon as soul and body join together."

18. (2) Because it works intimately with the body—the flesh uses the members of the body as instruments of unrighteousness.
19. Our eyes, tongue, hands, and feet never act independent of the soul—they are instruments of the soul.
20. And because the flesh is technically speaking lodged in the soul, the flesh uses the members of the body to sin.
21. Rom.8:13—"by the Spirit you must put to death the deeds of the body"—here "body" is put for "the flesh."
22. The flesh uses the members of the body as instruments of unrighteousness; they are intimately related.
23. (3) Because it's cherished as our body—just as no man hates his own body but cherishes it, so native man cherishes the desires of his corrupt nature.
24. It's for this reason, our Savior described mortification as cutting off right hands and plucking out right eyes.
25. Everyone cherishes their right hand and eye, and unfortunately, this is also true of the lusts of the flesh.
26. Man by nature nourishes and cherishes his flesh, just as he nourishes and cherishes his own body (flesh).

II. Expanded

1. Here I want to expand upon the subject of the flesh, by suggesting three broad important principles about the flesh (and especially as it relates to Christians).
2. (1) The flesh remains—that is, the flesh remains in every Christian, regardless how mature or sanctified.
3. Now, it's important to clarify—while the flesh remains in every Christian, it no longer reigns in any Christian.
4. Gal.5:24—"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires"—this describes a past fact true of every Christian.
5. To have "crucified the flesh with its evil desires" means it has received a deathblow—this is true in two ways.
6. First, it no longer reigns, and second, we have the promise that it will one day no longer remain (glorification).
7. But my point here is this—the flesh, old nature, or old man (these are all synonymous words), has died.
8. Thus, it's never right to suggest that Christians have two natures—the old nature or man has been crucified.
9. That man, who was a slave of sin, Satan, and the world, no longer lives—a new man has been raised in his place.
10. Perhaps I can illustrate it this way—if we liken our souls to a country, in conversion the capital taken is taken.
11. Christ has dethroned the flesh from reigning, and He Himself, by His Spirit, now occupies the throne.
12. Rom.8:8-9—"So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His."
13. The world is comprised of two people—there are those who are in the flesh and those in whom Christ lives.

14. But while Christians are no longer "in the flesh" this doesn't mean the flesh no longer dwells in them.
15. (2) The flesh remains evil—by this I mean, the flesh remains the same; it never changes; it's evil and corrupt.
16. While it no longer reigns it nevertheless remains, and to the extent it remains, it remains evil and corrupt.
17. Perhaps the simplest way I can put it is—the flesh that remains, remains flesh—it's evil and opposes good.
18. Rom.7:18—"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells"—there's nothing good in our flesh.
19. He then uses two words, in vv20-21, to describe the flesh, v20—"sin that dwells me" v21—"evil is present with me."
20. In other words, sin, evil, and flesh are all the same thing—or put another way, our flesh evil and sinful.
21. Gal.5:17—"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (desire)."
22. By Spirit here is meant the Holy Spirit as He empowers and energizes our spirit—as He leads and guides us.
23. The flesh opposes the Spirit—it hinders us from doing the things that we desire—we want to walk by the Spirit.
24. But the flesh keeps us from doing that to the degree we desire—it actively opposes the motions of the Spirit.
25. Thus, the flesh as it remains in Christians, remains evil and corrupt, and is the cause of all actual sin.
26. Gal.5:19—"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like."
27. Now, what I want to do here, under this point, is to give you a quick reminder of the truth of regeneration.
28. Historically and Scripturally, the human soul has been distinguished into three faculties: mind, heart, and will.
29. The human soul thinks, feels, and desires (or chooses)—these are three ways to view the human soul.
30. There are not three parts of the human soul—there is only one soul—and this soul thinks, feels, and desires.
31. Because a non-Christian is all and only flesh—his mind, affections, and will (desires) are all corrupt.
32. But in regeneration, every faculty (the mind, affections, and will) is radically renewed (or made new).
33. And yet, while every faculty is renewed, no faculty is perfectly renewed, and that unrenewed part is called the flesh.
34. This fixes a misconception many Christians have—many think that our flesh is in our soul like cancer.
35. A spiritual tumor in one part of the soul—but this is wrong—our flesh is a cancer that's spread to every part of the soul.
36. Every part of the soul, every faculty, remains infected with the flesh—our minds, affections, and will (desires).
37. John Owen—"The flesh is universal and wars in the whole soul. The mind has its own darkness to wrestle with; the will its own stubbornness; every affection its own perversity and aversion

from God, and its sensuality, to deal with: so that no one faculty can help the others as each, as it were, have their hands full at home."

38. (a) The flesh is sinful and evil—that is, the flesh remains evil in and of itself—it's nature or essence is evil.
39. This is why no Christian can ever be sinless in the life—because the sinful and evil flesh remains in us.
40. Thus, Scripture refers to the flesh as sin, Rom.7:17—"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."
41. By "sin that dwells in me" is meant the flesh—the flesh is called sin because it is in and of itself sinful.
42. And so, even if a person never actually sinned (which is not possible), they would still guilty of the evil that dwells them.
43. (b) The flesh opposes all good—by this I mean, the flesh hates and thus opposes the holy law of God.
44. Rom.7:21—"when I would do good, evil is present with me"—that is, the flesh opposes every good desire.
45. Everytime we seek to love God and our neighbor, there is an evil principle that hinders and opposes us.
46. John Owen—"Would you pray, would you hear, would you give alms, would you meditate, would you be in any duty acting faith on God and love towards Him, would you work righteousness, would you resist temptations—this troublesome, perplexing indweller will still more or less put itself upon you and be present with you; so that you cannot perfectly and completely accomplish the thing that is good."
47. (c) The flesh is the source of sin—that is, though the flesh is sinful in itself, it gives birth to actual sin.
48. Thus, Scriptures speaks about the "works" or "deeds" of the flesh—the flesh gives birth to all manner of sin.
49. Jas.1:14—"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"—by "his own desires" is meant, "the desires or lusts of the flesh."
50. The flesh is the source of all inward temptation and enticement (which again, underscores its evil nature).
51. (3) The flesh remains until death—by this I mean, the flesh never weakens or fades—it stays the same until death.
52. Nowhere does Scripture speak of Christians killing the flesh—we are never told to kill or mortify the flesh.
53. I fear a lot of Christians think like this—as I get older the flesh becomes less and less an adversary or foe.
54. As if the flesh becomes less evil as you mature—dear people, the flesh never becomes less evil or corrupt.
55. The flesh remains in Christians; the flesh remains evil in Christians; and the flesh remains evil in Christians until death.
56. We are told to put to the death (or mortify) the deeds of the flesh, but we are never told to mortify the flesh.
57. We never mortify or kill the flesh—it remains; remains evil; and will always remain evil until our death.
58. Now don't get me wrong—while the flesh remains evil until death, there are many things we can do.
59. We must starve the flesh (or make no provision for it); we must mortify the works of the flesh; and we must strengthen grace and pursue holiness.

60. These are three things that every Christian can and must do—but, what I am saying is this—none of these will change the flesh.
61. The flesh remains, and the flesh remains evil until death—it is a constant companion for every Christian.
62. John Owen—"There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so while we live in this world."

III. Applied

1. Here I want to make application of all that we've said this morning in three ways (by way of examination, exhortation, and thanksgiving).
2. (1) By way of examination—here I want to briefly suggest three ways to know whether the flesh reigns or remains.
3. (a) Saints lament the presence of the flesh—that is, the presence of their own flesh is more troubling to them than any other thing.
4. Rom.7:15—"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do."
5. Paul found himself doing things that he hated—he hated the flesh and the sin that the flesh produced.
6. But what I especially want you to notice is this—Paul didn't merely hate sin but he hated his own sin.
7. And why did he hate it? Because he wanted to do the opposite! He wanted to love God and his neighbor.
8. You see, it's possible to hate sin and not be a Christian, if you only hate another man's sin and not your own sin.
9. Furthermore, it's possible to hate sin and not be a Christian, if you only hate sin because of its consequences.
10. But Paul hated his own sin first, and he hated it because of its very nature: an affront against God and His law.
11. This is the greatest cause of sorrow for the saint—not sickness, poverty, persecution, or mistreatment.
12. The greatest cause of sorrow for the Christian is his own flesh (which he hates more than anything else).
13. Rom.7:24—"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death (remaining flesh)?"
14. (b) Saints resist the lusts of the flesh—that is, they not only hate the flesh but they fight against the flesh.
15. Christians are a mixed bag—they have within them a perpetual conflict—the flesh and Spirit are at war.
16. Gal.5:17—"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."
17. Christians are soldiers in a constant warfare—they are in continues uphill race that only ends in death.
18. A Christian who's not in the fight or in the race is a contradiction in terms—we are soldiers and athletes.
19. Rom.6:12—"Therefore do not let sin reign in your moral body, that you should obey it in its lusts" v14—"For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

20. Sin (or the flesh) desires to reign over us! And thus, we must starve it, mortify its deeds, and strengthen grace.
21. And so, while every Christian is exhorted "not to let sin reign" every Christian is also promised "sin shall not have dominion over you."
22. Why? Because you are under grace! That is, you are a member of the NC and have all the provisions of grace.
23. Gal.5:19-21—"Now the works of the flesh are evident...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
24. The word "practice" refers to lifestyle—a doctor practices medicine (it's his profession); it's what he does.
25. People often ask—How often can a person commit a sin before it becomes a practice? But that's the wrong question.
26. The longer any professing Christian continues to live in any sin, the more they have reason to fear they will not inherit the kingdom of God.
27. But Christians don't make a practice of any sin—even sins they commit regularly—they hate and resist them.
28. (c) Saints are more than flesh—they not only hate and resist the flesh, but love and rejoice in God and His law.
29. Rom.7:15—"I will to do good" v19—"the good that I will to do" v22—"I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."
30. This is one reason why Romans 7 is describing a Christian person; because he loves and longs to obey God's law.
31. Rom.8:7—"Because the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."
32. A person who is all flesh (or ruled by the flesh), does not and can not subject himself to the law of God.
33. Thus, let me ask you this—Do you willingly submit yourselves to the holy law of God from the heart?
34. Salvation isn't merely negative but also positive—we are liberated from something and for something.
35. (2) By way of exhortation—the truth, thus presented, exhorts us to two things—understanding and caution.
36. (a) Understanding—by this I mean, we need to rightly understand how the flesh does and does not relate to us.
37. I personally believe this is one of the greatest reasons behind much confession and failure in the life of Christians.
38. They fail to understand what is the flesh, how does it remain in them, and what must they do about it.
39. For example, how important is it for a mechanic to know cars—can he fix cars without knowing cars?
40. Or think of a surgeon—can he effectively operate on someone if he has no medical understanding—or else, think of a carpenter—can a carpenter build a house without any knowledge of his tools.
41. Well brethren—every Christian is called to make provision for flesh and to mortify the works of the flesh.
42. (b) Caution—every Christian has to live aware of the fact that their enemy lives within them and never sleeps (we will return to this theme next week).
43. (3) By way of thanksgiving—here I want to end our time together by reminding us of our many privileges.

44. The flesh has been dethroned; it will never again reign; and one day, we shall be liberated from its presence.