

The Biblical Meaning of “Flesh”

One factor contributing to Christians’ misunderstanding on how God has dealt with their old sinful nature is the translation of the Greek word *sarx*, which appears 147 times in the New Testament. The King James Version (KJV) translated *sarx* simply as “flesh.” Most versions of the Bible since then have followed the KJV’s lead and also translated *sarx* as “flesh.” However, the word “flesh” is not only archaic; it is ambiguous and confusing. When the apostle Paul and other authors of the New Testament used the Greek word *sarx*, they often used it within the context of explaining profound spiritual subjects critical to the Christian faith. For example, in the Book of Romans, which is the most important doctrinal book in the New Testament, Paul used the Greek word *sarx* 26 times. And, in the Letter to the Galatians, which is also a very important doctrinal book, Paul used the Greek word *sarx* 13 times. Paul certainly did not intend that the Greek word *sarx* would be misunderstood just because it is simplistically translated into English as “flesh.” In fact, the English word “flesh” is only appropriately used to describe “skin” one-tenth of the time where the Greek word *sarx* is used in the New Testament.

Consequently, when Christians read the New Testament today and they come across the word “flesh” in the Scriptures, they are not able to truly understand what many of these verses actually mean. This has had tragic and severe consequences for the body of Christ since the proper translation of the Greek word *sarx* is critical for Christians to be able to understand the purpose of Christ’s death on the cross. When Christ died, He died not only to forgive us from the penalty of sin; He died to free us from the power of sin. Therefore, when Christ died on the cross, He bore not only our sins on the cross; He also bore our sinful nature on the cross with Him. Consequently, when Christ died, our sinful nature died with Him and when Christ was buried, our sinful nature was buried (and removed) with Him (Romans 6:3-6). The divine outcome of Christ’s death is that we have been freed from sin and enslaved to God (Romans 6:7, 18, 22).

Now let’s first clear up the confusion about the word “flesh” and see what the Greek word *sarx* really means. Then we will look at a number of different Scriptures to see how the Greek word *sarx* should be translated to accurately convey the Biblical truth about Christ’s completed work on the cross. In actuality, the Greek word *sarx* has four basic meanings depending upon the content and context of each specific verse in the New Testament. The first possible meaning of *sarx* is “flesh” or “skin,” the thin, soft living membrane that covers the body. As we previously mentioned, the word “flesh” is only appropriately used in one-tenth of the Scriptures that contain

the Greek word *sarx*. The second possible meaning of *sarx* is the physical or natural body. The third possible meaning of *sarx* is the human or natural soul. This can also be described as the natural man (with his will and inherent abilities) or the natural mind, which is also called the unrenewed, carnal mind. The fourth possible meaning of *sarx* is the sinful nature. This is man's fallen spiritual nature (before he is born again of the Spirit) which he inherited from his spiritual ancestor Adam. This sinful nature, which the Bible also refers to as the old man or the old self, is hostile and rebellious to God. Since this is man's inward nature before he is born again of the Spirit, it controls man's attitudes and actions and compels man to sin. This is like a "sin factory" inside unregenerate man that continuously produces sinful thoughts and behavior.

To help shed light on key New Testament Scriptures, which contain the Greek word *sarx*, we have listed a number of these verses below. In each verse, we have translated *sarx* using one of the four definitions described above as is appropriate to best understand the proper meaning of the verse.

1 Corinthians 15:50 - "*Flesh (sarx) and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*" This is one of the few verses where *sarx* is accurately translated as *flesh*. The term "flesh and blood" means *mortal*. In other words, *mortal* man cannot inherit the immortal kingdom of God unless he is born again of the Spirit (John 3:3-7).

Ephesians 6:12 - "For our struggle is not against *flesh (sarx) and blood*, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." *Sarx* is again accurately translated as *flesh* in this verse. Our spiritual warfare is not against a *mortal* enemy but against the devil's evil spiritual forces.

John 3:6-7 - "That which is born of the *natural body (sarx)* is *natural man (sarx)*, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" The word *sarx* appears twice in this verse and, from the context of this Scripture, the *natural body* and the *natural man* are the accurate translations. Jesus Christ here is telling Nicodemus that the natural man, who has been naturally born from a woman, cannot enter the kingdom of God. Instead, you must be born again of the Spirit of God to enter the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:31-32 - "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one *body (sarx)*. This mystery is great, but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." The best translation for *sarx* here is *body*. Just as a man is physically joined to his wife and they become "one body;" Christ is spiritually joined to the church and they become "one body." What a beautiful metaphor!

Philippines 3:3 - For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the *natural man (sarx)*." From the context of this Scripture, it makes sense that this is the proper translation of *sarx*. No other definition of *sarx* (the skin, physical body, or sinful nature) would fit. The apostle Paul here declares that those who are true Christians worship God in spirit, boast in Jesus Christ's glory and do not rely on their natural ability to serve Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:1 - "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual men, but as men with *carnal minds (sarx)*, as to infants in Christ." In this Scripture, the apostle Paul uses *sarx* to refer to the *carnal or natural mind*. This is the natural mind that has not yet been spiritually renewed by God's Word (Ephesians 4:23). These Corinthians were born again believers who no longer had a sinful nature; however, they were still spiritually immature and beset with carnal attitudes. Paul goes on to say, "For you are still *carnal-minded (sarx)*. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not *carnal-minded (sarx)*, walking like mere men (1 Corinthians 3:3)?"

Colossians 2:11 - "In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of *the sinful nature (sarx)* by the circumcision of Christ." *Sarx* in this verse cannot possibly mean anything but the *sinful nature*. Our natural body, soul or carnal mind certainly were not removed and done away with through Christ's death on the cross. This Scripture is one of many that testify that when a person is born again of the Spirit, their sinful nature is removed from them.

Now we will look at the Book of Romans (Chapters 6, 7 and 8)

Romans 6:19 - "I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your *unrenewed mind (sarx)*." In Romans 6:6, the apostle Paul had just instructed these believers that their old self had been crucified with Christ and their sinful nature had been removed from them. Therefore, the appropriate translation for *sarx* here is the *unrenewed carnal mind*. Evidently, the Christians in Rome had to be reminded that when Christ died on the cross, their sinful nature died with Him and, as a result, they had been freed from sin (Romans 6:7).

Romans 7:5 - "For while we had a *sinful nature (sarx)*, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." Note Paul's use of the past tense: "we had a sinful nature." This was our spiritual condition before we were born again of the Spirit. In this passage, Paul is specifically talking to his fellow Jews who were trying to be righteous by keeping the Mosaic Law (see Romans 7:1). Paul tries to persuade them that their zeal to keep the Law will not produce

the righteousness of God but only frustration and futility. "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge (Romans 10:2)." This was Paul's own personal testimony before he received Christ as His Lord and Savior and he was born again of the Spirit. Paul explains to them that in Christ they not only died to sin; they also died to the Law (Romans 7:4 & 6).

Romans 7:14 - "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I have a *sinful nature (sarx)*, sold into bondage to sin." Based on his own past experience, Paul now shifts into the dramatic use of first person to emphasize the anguish and futility of trying to keep God's Law before you were born again and you still had a sinful nature that was hostile toward God. When reading Romans Chapter Seven, it is important to remember that Paul wrote this epistle in the Greek language, a precise and expressive language which often strategically uses the *present* tense to dramatically describe a *past* action and experience. In Chapter Seven, Paul made effective use of this *historical present* tense, as it is called in the Greek language, to vividly describe the futility and misery of a person who wants to serve God but finds himself continually frustrated and sabotaged by his rebellious sinful nature. In writing this chapter, Paul drew from his own past personal experience as a devout Pharisee before He became a born again Christian.

In this passage of Romans, Chapter Seven (verses 5-25), Paul is expressing how an unbeliever who wants to serve God is driven to frustration, futility and failure in his attempts to obey God because he is still a slave to sin and his sinful nature. Paul writes this passage in the first person since this was an experience he himself had passed through. However, from Paul's personal testimony in Galatians 2:20, it is clear Paul knows sin no longer dwells in him because his sinful nature has been crucified with Christ (see also Romans 6:6). These two contrasting statements (Galatians 2:20 and Romans 7:14) illustrate the great divide between a believer who is freed from sin and an unbeliever who is enslaved to sin. It would be a serious mistake to think Romans 7:14-24 is how the apostle Paul viewed himself after he was born of the Spirit in light of God's personal revelation to him ("God was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I may preach Him (Galatians 1:15-16).") It is inconceivable that Paul, who was a bondsman to God and so fully indwelt by Jesus Christ, would declare he was also a slave to sin (Romans 7:14) because evil indwelt him (Romans 7:21). If this were the case, Paul would have suffered a form of religious schizophrenia. If this were Paul's spiritual condition, it would deny the power of Jesus Christ's work in him. It would also directly contradict his own previous statement in Romans 6:6 where he clearly declared our old man was crucified with Christ and our sinful nature (this body of sin) has been removed. Paul further adds that since our sinful nature is dead, we have been freed from slavery to sin (Romans 6:7, 14, 18, 22). In Colossians 2:11, Paul also declares Christ has

removed our sinful nature. Finally at the end of Romans Chapter Seven, Paul solves the dilemma of this confused and conflicted person by answering his own rhetorical question, "Who will set me free from this sinful nature (this body of death)?" with the triumphant response, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:25).

Romans 7:18 - "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my *sinful nature (sarx)*; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." Paul continues his dramatic argument that the sinful nature of a person (who is not born again of the Spirit) is always prone to do evil, which prevents him from doing what is right before God.

Romans 7:25 - "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God, but on the other, with my *sinful nature (sarx)* the law of sin." Paul here summarizes the dilemma of the individual who is religious-minded and wants to serve God but still has a sinful nature, which drives him and enslaves him to sin, because he has not been born again. In this verse, Paul also introduces the One who has delivered mankind from this moral conflict by His death on the cross - Jesus Christ!

Romans 8:3 - "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was because of our *sinful nature (sarx)*, God did by sending His Son in the likeness of *sinful man (sarx)*, and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the *body (sarx)*." In this key Scripture, the Greek word *sarx* appears three times. The correct translation for *sarx*, the first time it is used in this verse, is the *sinful nature*. God was not able to impute righteousness to man because man's *sinful nature* prevented him from keeping the Law. The second time *sarx* is used in this verse refers to how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth in the form of *man*. Since Christ was not born with a sinful nature, it would be blasphemous to translate *sarx* as sinful nature here. The third time *sarx* is used in this verse addresses how Christ, as the Lamb of God, took the condemnation for our sins upon His own *body* through His death on the cross and fulfilled the Law for us so that we might have the righteousness of God in Christ. Therefore, *sarx* in this last instance refers to Christ's *body*.

Romans 8:4 - "So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the *sinful nature (sarx)* but according to the Spirit." The appropriate translation of *sarx* within the context of this entire passage (Romans 8:3-13) is the *sinful nature*. Paul teaches here that those who have a sinful nature cannot keep the Law but those who walk in the Spirit fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law by depending on Christ to fulfill the Law for them. This is what Jesus promised when He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to

abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).” God fulfilled this promise by performing a divine heart transplant. When Christ died on the cross, God exchanged our terminally sin-sick heart with His Son’s divine heart to make it possible for Christ to sovereignly live in us (Galatians 2:20). Therefore, when we walk in the Spirit and Christ sovereignly lives in us, we fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law through Him.

Romans 8:5 – “For those who are according to the *sinful nature (sarx)* set their minds on the things of the *sinful nature (sarx)*, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” *Sarx* is used twice within this verse. The appropriate translation of *sarx* in both cases is the *sinful nature*. Paul is continuing to contrast the difference between an unbeliever who is controlled by his sinful nature and a born again believer who is indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:6 – “For the mind controlled by the *sinful nature (sarx)* is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” Again, *sarx* is appropriately translated in this verse as *sinful nature*. Paul is contrasting an unbeliever whose mind is controlled by his sinful nature (for he is spiritually dead) with a born again believer whose mind is governed by the Holy Spirit (who is now capable of obeying God).

Romans 8:7 – “Because the mind set on the *sinful nature (sarx)* is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” Again, *sarx* is properly translated as *sinful nature* in this verse. Paul declares that the mind of the unbeliever, who is enslaved and controlled by his sinful nature, is in rebellion toward God and cannot subject himself to the God’s Sovereignty because he is not even able to do so. Paul earlier had said that before a person is saved by Christ, they are a helpless, ungodly sinner and enemy of God (Romans 5:6, 8, 10). This is in marked contrast to a born again believer who is able to subject himself to God’s Sovereignty because he no longer has a sinful nature and the Holy Spirit indwells him.

Romans 8:8 – “and those who are in the *sinful nature (sarx)* cannot please God.” Again, *sarx* is properly translated as *sinful nature* in this verse. Unbelievers who have a sinful nature cannot please God and are not even able to do so. This is why the Bible says we needed Jesus Christ to take our sinful nature upon His body on the cross so that when He died, our sinful nature died with Him. In a divine exchange, God then imparted Christ’s holy nature into us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:4-6). “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:8, 10).”

Romans 8:9 - “However, you are not in the *sinful nature (sarx)* but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” Paul’s use of the word “however” in the beginning of this verse signals a clear shift in the direction of his teaching. Before this verse, Paul had been contrasting unbelievers who have a sinful nature with believers who are born again of the Spirit. Now, in this key verse, Paul makes a clear statement that anyone who is born again of the Spirit does not have a sinful nature. It is obvious that *sarx* cannot mean anything but the *sinful nature* in this verse. No other definition of *sarx* (the skin, the natural body or soul) would properly fit. In this Scripture, Paul also confirms other Scriptures that clearly declare that Christians cannot possibly have two natures indwelling them. Paul declares that anyone who has the Spirit of God indwelling them cannot also have a sinful nature. Therefore, from this verse onward in Romans, Chapter Eight, whenever Paul uses the Greek word *sarx*, he will be referring not to the *sinful nature* but to a believer’s *unrenewed soul or carnal mind*.

There is a great difference between the unrenewed mind and the sinful nature. Because a Christian no longer has a sinful nature, he has been totally freed from the power of sin. Therefore, he no longer is captive to sin and he is free to choose not to sin. The unrenewed mind of a believer has no power in itself; it is like the body - a tool that must come into subjection to the Spirit of God within us. The unrenewed mind simply needs to be transformed in accordance with the truth and authority of the Word of God (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23). As Paul declared, “we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).”

Romans 8:12 - “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the *carnal mind (sarx)*, to live according to the *carnal mind (sarx)*.” *Sarx* is used twice in this verse and in both instances; it means the *unrenewed, carnal mind*. By the free gift of God’s grace (at Christ’s expense), we have been set free from sin. Our spiritual and joyful obligation to God is to now live submitted to Christ who indwells us and not allow ourselves to be dominated by the unrenewed, carnal mind. Our duty in Christ is to present ourselves each day to God and meditate on His Word so that we will be a living and holy sacrifice and our mind will be renewed and our soul transformed (Romans 12:1-2).

Romans 8:13 - “For if you are living according to the *carnal mind (sarx)*, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” Once again, *sarx* is properly translated as the *carnal mind* in this verse. Knowing we have already died with Christ and that we no longer have a sinful nature, it is not by soulish willpower; but solely by faith in the facts of the divine truth of the cross of Christ that we put to death

all carnal attitudes and activities. Carnal-mindedness or soulish-mindedness was also the condition of the Corinthian Christians. Although they were born of the Spirit and they no longer had a sinful nature; they were living according to their unrenewed, natural thinking. Consequently, Paul calls them worldly and still spiritual infants.

Finally, we will look at the Book of Galatians

Galatians 1:15-16 - “But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with *flesh (sarx)* and blood.” *Sarx* is properly translated as *flesh* in this verse since the term “flesh and blood” means mortal man. In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul said that he received the gospel he preached not from mortal man, but directly from Jesus Christ by divine revelation. In this verse, Paul says that he did not immediately consult with mortal man after he received the revelation of the gospel, which is “Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).”

Galatians 2:16 - “Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no *man (sarx)* will be justified.” *Sarx* in this verse means the *natural man*. Paul here teaches that no man can be righteous before God by keeping the Law; only faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, can justify us in God’s eyes.

Galatians 2:20 - “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me and the life that I now live in the *body (sarx)*, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” *Sarx* is properly translated as *body* in this verse. This verse is one of the most important verses in the New Testament. If John 3:16 best conveys the basic gospel message of salvation based on faith in Christ’s Atonement; then Galatians 2:20 best conveys the rest of the gospel, which is how a born-again believer walks in sanctification based on faith in Christ’s Atonement. By this verse, we see that Jesus purchased for us not only forgiveness from the penalty of sin but deliverance from the power of sin. Paul personally testifies that his old self was crucified with Christ. As a result, his sinful nature no longer lives. Paul then declares that he now lives by faith in Jesus Christ who sovereignly indwells him. It is clear from a review of Paul’s teaching on this subject in his letters to the Romans, Galatians and Colossians, that Paul believed that God did not reserve this Biblical experience of being indwelt by Jesus Christ and freed from the power of sin for only a special class of super Christians. When Paul said, “I have been

crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," he declared what God intended to be the normal spiritual life for every Christian who is submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

Galatians 3:3 - "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by your *natural ability (sarx)*?" Paul chastens the Galatians, who had started their Christian life by faith, for now trying to be righteous before God through their own human effort. This is a common mistake for many Christians. They know their salvation did not require any work on their part; yet they think their sanctification (holiness) demands their best efforts and they actually believe sanctification can be brought about through their own willpower! However, Jesus Christ is not only the author of our faith; He is also the perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). When we were saved, God sanctified us (made us holy) by exchanging our sinful nature with Christ's divine nature (2 Corinthians 5:21). After we are saved, our rightful obligation is to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ and present ourselves each day as a living (alive in Christ from the dead - Romans 6:11) and holy (holy in Christ - 1 Corinthians 11:30) sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1). Then God will renew our minds and transform us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:29; 12:2). This does not mean we do not apply ourselves. What it does mean is that we apply ourselves first and foremost to believe the facts of faith in the cross of Christ; then the righteous works will spring from our faith (not the other way around).

Galatians 4:23 - "But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the *natural man (sarx)*, and the son by the freewoman through the promise." The best translation for *sarx* in this verse is the *natural man*. In this verse, Paul introduces the theme that Isaac was born according to the will and promise of God; whereas Ishmael was born according to the will and self-effort of man. This can also be a metaphor for the true church and false church. The true church is made up of those who are born of the Spirit and are living by faith in God's promises; whereas the false church is made up of those who are trying to accomplish God's will by man's effort. This is what Jesus meant by His parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-32; 36-43). The wheat and the tares both grow up together and to the undiscerning can appear to be very much alike but, at the end of the age, when God separates the tares and throws them into the fire, it will be evident that they were children of the flesh (the natural man not spiritual) and sons of the devil.

Galatians 4:29 - "But as at that time he who was born according to the *natural (sarx)* persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also." Those who are born of the Spirit and submitted to the Spirit are the true sons of God (see also Romans 8:14). This means they are under the Spirit's Sovereignty in everything they do; whereas those who are not under

the Spirit's Sovereignty seek to establish their own righteousness through works initiated by their own will and energized by their natural strength (calling them "works of God"). Paul declares that those who live lawlessly by walking in the natural man under their own rulership actually persecute and are hostile to those whose righteousness is based on walking in the Spirit under the rulership of Christ. "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic (James 3:15)."

Galatians 5:13 - "For you were called for freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the *carnal mind (sarx)*, but through love serve one another." After we are born again of the Spirit, we are no longer in Adam; we are in Christ. Therefore, the decision we must make after we are born again is this: "Will we live according to the Spirit or according to the unrenewed, carnal mind?" Another way of expressing this daily challenge for each Christian is, "Will we be submitted to the power and rulership of the Spirit or enslaved to the power and rulership of our soul (our natural personality)? If we are living by the power of our natural personality, we are not serving God or one another in love. But if we lay down our soul-life daily by submitting wholeheartedly to Christ so that His resurrection life may be expressed through us, we are serving one another in love (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16). We are also serving God who only recognizes works accomplished by faith and through submission to Him.

Galatians 5:16 - "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the *carnal mind (sarx)*." *Sarx* in this verse is correctly translated as the unrenewed, carnal mind. The Bible says if we live by submitting to the Sovereignty of the Spirit, we are practicing righteousness. However, if we live by submitting to the power of our soul (or unrenewed mind), we are practicing lawlessness. The way to walk in the Spirit is to know (believe and act on) the truth that you have died with Christ and by presenting yourself each day as a living and holy sacrifice to God to do His perfect will (Romans 6:6-11; Romans 12:1-2). Now that we no longer have an old, sinful nature and Jesus Christ lives inside us, practicing doing His will daily is possible.

Galatians 5:17 - "For the *carnal mind (sarx)* sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the *carnal mind (sarx)*; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." The unrenewed, carnal mind sets its desire on earthly things instead of heavenly things (Colossians 3:1-3; see also Philippians 3:18-19). Earthly things are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:5). When a Christian is carnal-minded, his thoughts are hostile to the Holy Spirit because his mind is set on man's interests and not God's interests (Matthew 16:23). "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly (*carnal-minded*) lusts which wage war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11)."

Galatians 5:19-21 - "Now the deeds of the *carnal mind (sarx)* are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." This section is addressed to born again believers or brethren (Galatians 5:13). Therefore, once again, the best translation for *sarx* here is the *carnal or soulish* mind. Any born again Christian who does not submit himself to Christ's Sovereignty will not have his mind renewed according to the Spirit of truth (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:23). Consequently, a Christian may no longer have a sinful nature but if his mind is still carnal, he will continue to practice lawlessness of the kind described above. Paul in this verse strongly warns any Christians who are practicing lawlessness that they will not enter the kingdom of God. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching on the same subject when He said that anyone who claims He is Lord but who does not do what He says and continues to practice lawlessness will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23).

Galatians 5:24 - "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the *natural man (sarx)*, with its passions and desires." Once again, the proper translation for *sarx* in this verse is the *natural man* with its *unrenewed carnal mind*. Paul here teaches that anyone who truly belongs to Jesus Christ puts to death the carnal desires and deeds of the natural man (the unconverted soul or the carnal mind). Paul reiterates this truth in the Book of Romans: "By the Spirit we put to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13)." The way we put to death every sinful attitude and action is to abide (stay rooted by faith) in Christ and His death and resurrection (John 15:4-8). Once again Paul clearly states, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 1:5)." This Christian life of sanctification is possible because the divine truth is when Christ died, we died with Him and God exchanged our sinful nature with His Son's holy nature. Our sinful nature has already been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6) and, as we now abide in Christ and He abides in us, our soul will be submitted to Him and conformed into the image of His death (Philippians 3:10).

This obligation to live a holy life separated to God if you call yourself a Christian is confirmed by other Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, which declares that if God is your Father, you will purify yourself from everything that contaminates your spirit, soul and body and you will perfect holiness in the fear of God. With this in mind, Paul instructs Timothy,

“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having *this seal*, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from evil (2 Timothy 2:19).” Thus God has two seals that authenticate His people. The first seal is the deposit of the Holy Spirit given to each person when they are initially saved (Ephesians 1:13). The second seal is the evidence of sanctification in that person’s life after they are saved. Sanctification is the proof that a person has true and enduring faith in Christ and His Atonement. You cannot be saved by your works; however, after you are saved, your faith in Christ must produce works of sanctification or you prove yourself unworthy of being Christ’s bride. “Without sanctification no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).” Consequently, anyone who does not have this seal of sanctification on their life does not belong to Christ and will not inherit the kingdom of God. “For if you are living according to the *carnal or soulish mind (sarx)*, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live (Romans 8:13).” Of course, the only way to walk in sanctification is by faith in Christ’s completed work on the cross. The sanctified life is not a *changed* life but the *exchanged* life, or as Paul put it, “I no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20).” (For more information on the exchanged life, see our Teaching Tract: **The Divine Exchange**).

Galatians 6:8 - “For the one who sows to his own *carnal mind (sarx)* will from the *carnal mind (sarx)* reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” The proper translation for *sarx* here is the *carnal or soulish mind*. Here Paul continues his theme that a Christian who continues to live in carnal-mindedness will not inherit eternal life; only those who obey the Holy Spirit will enter the kingdom of God.

Galatians 6:12 - “Those who desire to make a good showing in the *natural man (sarx)* try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” The best translation for *sarx* here is the *natural man*. In the first century, the issue of dead works born of the natural man versus true works born of faith was about circumcision. False teachers were pressuring the Gentile believers to make a good outward impression that they were following God by getting circumcised. In our day, the dividing issue between true and false teachers is still over dead works. From a Biblical perspective, dead works include any works that we do to establish a religious or moral identity outside of Christ. Many works of service done by Christians today fall under this category. Dead works originate from our natural wisdom, are empowered by our natural ability and result in men’s approval. Good works originate from the mind of God, are empowered by the Spirit of God and result in God’s approval. False teachers desire to establish an outwardly religious image based on dead works rather than

submit themselves to the righteousness of God, which only comes through the cross of Christ. This is lawlessness and these lawless thoughts and actions are hostile to God! Paul warned the church to beware of these false teachers who masquerade as ministers of morality (2 Corinthians 12:15). "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision (Philippines 3:2)."

Galatians 6:13 - "For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your *natural man (sarx)*." Again, the appropriate translation for *sarx* in this verse is the *natural man and his efforts*. This seems to be a timeless rule: false teachers, who do not obey God themselves, always want to pressure their followers to maintain an outwardly religious image so they can boast in their followers' dead works. "For they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God (John 12:43)." As Jesus said of these false teachers, "You travel over land and sea to win a single convert and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are (Matthew 23:15)."

This concludes our study of the Greek word *sarx*. If the gospel you are hearing and trusting in is not increasingly permeating your entire being with its truth and radically transforming you from the inside out, so that your whole being is craving and delighting in Christ's Sovereignty, you are not receiving the true gospel. We pray this study has helped clarify the Biblical truth that a born again Christian does not have a sinful nature. Jesus Christ died to remove our sinful nature so that we would no longer be slaves to sin but instead be enslaved to God. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened to see the whole truth of Christ's Atonement on the cross and may the truth of Christ's gospel set you free from slavery to sin so that you might truly know Jesus Christ. "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free... so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:31-32, 36)."

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