

Discerning Between Flesh and Spirits

Learning to Recognize and Defeat the "Traitor Within"

This teaching on discerning between flesh and spirits is a practical application that companions the lessons set forth in "Matters of the Heart," our free [eCourse](#) for spiritual growth and emotional transformation. The 24 Main Healing Lessons from the course can be found in the downloads section in PDF and MP3 formats. They are also available in our [Store](#) as an eBook, a 176 page workbook and as CD and DVD sets of 24, 1/2 hour teachings.

The Flesh Is a Shadow of Its Past Power

Your flesh cannot be cast out, nor does it need to be. Simply having a fallen nature is not the real problem. In this life it will always be there with its tendency and disposition to sin—like a shadow that trails behind us as we walk in the Light. One day, when we enter into His glory, God will separate us from our fallen nature (1 Corinthians 15:53-54), but until then it is dangerous for us to try to eradicate the flesh ourselves. In fact, to try to eliminate our flesh is an act of unwitting disobedience to God's Word. And this is because Jesus has already defeated it for us.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 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. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:5-11



Whenever we trust in and rely on the Lord our flesh (the old man) is laid to rest by His Spirit and the new nature carries us forward in peace and freedom (Romans 8:1-2). Any failing of trust or obedience on our part and the flesh is only too ready to spring quickly back to life. The New Testament scriptures are clear that if what we are struggling with is an issue of the flesh, then we are to put off the flesh like soiled clothing—to just say no and turn from it.

That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,



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and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:21-24

The flesh is essentially a dead thing, crucified by Christ and, like a shadow, has no power of its own to overthrow those who walk by the Spirit (see [Walking in the Spirit](#)). But if we get our eyes locked onto our shadow we may easily trip and fall! Hence, we are told to keep our eyes on Christ and guard our hearts with trust in Him. Knowing the reality of our flesh and of its total depravity (no redeeming thing about it) will actually help to humble us and remind us to keep our focus on our Savior.

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Colossians 3:9-10

Strongholds Are a Different Matter

A stronghold indicates a strong "grip" of the flesh in some area of our life that is still unsundered to the Lord. To the degree that "putting off" the flesh is difficult a "stronghold" has likely been built into our flesh by prior activity of the enemy in our lives. Such stronghold areas of the flesh, when they are touched by present situations (words, events, desires) are very difficult to simply set aside and a struggle ensues within us if the sinful desire of the flesh is to be overcome.

At this level discerning between flesh and spirits is both difficult and unnecessary. It is unnecessary to discern if it is flesh or spirit or both, because this struggle is going to have to be engaged anyway. Deal with it first as a stronghold of the flesh, then the enemy (if present will lose its right to keep oppressing you).

We carry strongholds captive We are told to carry the thoughts of these strongholds captive to Christ—a much more intense image. The truth is we have to learn how to carry the stronghold captive, or its thoughts will carry us captive to the negative emotions and spiritual domination of the flesh (see [Strongholds](#)).

Alien Invaders

In addition, the strongholds may be occupied and defended by alien intruders—the kingdom of darkness whose temptations and deceptions built the strongholds in the first place. Here we are told to resist the devil and he will flee from us and even to cast out the evil spirits in the name of the Lord who conquered them at the cross. The most vigorous language of scripture has to do with opposing the enemy (Ephesians 6:11, 13). Such "occupied" strongholds cannot be defeated by simply shifting our focus back to Christ. They require the harder work of pursuing the steps of repentance and return in order to tear the stronghold down (see [Recognize and Replace!](#)).

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