

Lesson 6

Death to Our Sinful Nature

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THE GREEK WORD “SARX”

The power of sin is the law because the law forces man to make a choice between obeying or disobeying God, and natural man consistently chooses sin over obedience to God. Something within man predisposes him to sin. Man is consistently disobedient because of his sinful nature. Before we can discuss the Scriptures about man’s sinful nature, we need to consider the Greek word “sarx.” The King James Version of the Bible consistently translates the Greek word “sarx” with the English word “flesh,” but “sarx” can be used to describe four distinctly different things if the context is considered. In the following verse, “sarx” is used to mean meat:

*Not **all flesh** ^[sarx] is alike, but there is **one flesh** ^[sarx] for human beings, another for **animals**, another for **birds**, and another for **fish**.*

(1Co.15:39 NRSV)

“Sarx” is also used to mean the physical body of man:

*This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—**not the removal of dirt from the body** ^[sarx] but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

(1Pe.3:21 NIV)

“Sarx” is also used to mean human:

*Furthermore, we have had **human** ^[sarx] **fathers** who corrected us, and we paid them respect.*

(He.12:9 NKJV)

However, the Scriptures that we will focus upon in this lesson will use “sarx” to mean man’s sinful nature. To illustrate how context directs the translation of “sarx,” consider the following verse:

*Now those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the flesh** ^[sarx] with its passions and desires.*

(Ga.5:24 NASB)

If the previous verse refers to the body of man, then all Christians must nail their bodies to a cross; otherwise, they do not belong to Christ.

NOTES:

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT:

1. What are the meanings of the Greek word “sarx”?
2. What does the Bible mean when it says that Christians are no longer in the flesh?
3. What truth is expressed by the following statement: Jesus came in the flesh?
4. What is the sinful nature?
5. Why can God not dwell on evil?
6. What is God’s solution to the sinful nature, and is this solution permanent?
7. What does the Greek verb tense in “have crucified the sinful nature” from Galatians 5:24 indicate?
8. What does the following statement mean: Christians are not to make provision for the flesh?
9. What is the eternal destination for those who live according to the sinful nature (flesh)?

However, since the Greek word “sarx” can refer to man’s sinful nature, we understand from the verse that the nature that drove us to sin has died with Christ on the cross:

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the sinful nature** ^[sarx] with its passions and desires.* (Ga.5:24 NIV)

If “sarx” always refers to the physical body of man, then we would have to conclude that Christians can no longer have physical bodies:

*For while we **were in the flesh** ^[sarx], the **sinful passions**, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.* (Ro.7:5 NASB)

We were in the flesh or “sarx” until we received Christ into our lives. Hence, “sarx” in the previous verse cannot mean the physical body, or else we are not Christians since we have physical bodies. Fortunately, “sarx” can mean the sinful nature. Once in Christ, we are no longer in the “sarx,” under the control of the sinful nature with its sinful passions. Consider another translation of Romans 7:5:

*For when we **were controlled by the sinful nature** ^[sarx], the **sinful passions** aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.* (Ro.7:5 TNIV)

This translation also verifies that Christians are no longer of the “sarx,” controlled by the sinful nature. In the following verse, the correct translation cannot be the physical flesh or the human body; for God states that life in the Holy Spirit cannot coincide with life in the flesh. Those who insist that “sarx” should always be interpreted as the physical body deny their right to a physical body:

***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.* (Ro.8:9 NKJV)

Since Christians do have physical bodies, the previous verse can only address the sinful nature of man. Hence, the following translation:

***You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature** but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.* (Ro.8:9 NIV)

We were dead while we had our sinful nature, but God gave us rebirth through Jesus Christ when He put our sinful nature to death:

*When **you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature** ^[sarx], God made you alive with Christ.*

(Co.2:13 TNIV)

Consequently, while all Christians are in the flesh, the physical body, they are not of the flesh, the sinful nature! From the previous verses, we understand that the context of the word “sarx” determines how it is translated or understood. For instance, consider John 3:6:

*That which is **born of the flesh is flesh**, and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit**.* (Jn.3:6 NASB)

In the previous verse, the words “Spirit” and “spirit” are translated from the same Greek word “pneuma.” The words “flesh” and “flesh” are also translated from the same Greek word “sarx.” However, notice that the first usage of “pneuma” has a capital letter which signifies the Holy Spirit while the second usage of “pneuma” has a lowercase letter which signifies the spirit of man. Hence, one Greek word can have significantly different meanings from which the translator can choose. Like other Greek words, the Greek word “sarx” can have multiple translations. To translate both usages of “sarx” in John 3:6 to mean the physical body would be not only redundant but also meaningless. In the previous verse, two possible translations of “sarx” are the physical body and the sinful nature. These possible translations were inserted in the following verse:

*That which is born **of the body** ^[sarx] **is sinful by nature** ^[sarx], and that which is born of the **Spirit is spirit**.* (Jn.3:6)

In John 3:6, the word “sarx” is used twice; but I believe that the first usage refers to the physical body while the second usage refers to the sinful nature. Since “sarx” (the human body) gives birth to “sarx” (the sinful nature), everyone descended from Adam has a sinful nature:

*Surely I was **sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me**.* (Ps.51:5 NIV)

A fetus cannot sin; but a fetus has a sinful nature, a nature predisposed to the power of sin which will manifest itself after birth. In the same way that a father can give AIDS to his unborn son, Adam gave his sinful nature to all his descendants at conception. All mankind were born with a sinful nature:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (Eph.2:3 NIV)

The sinful nature predisposes Adam’s descendants to sinful thoughts and desires; hence, all of us were objects of God’s wrath from our birth.

Do not believe the lie that a Christian can still partake in the sinful nature. If we live to please the sinful nature, we will reap destruction in hell. However, because we were born again, the sinful nature was destroyed by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us:

*So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan **for the destruction of the sinful nature so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord**.* (1Co.5:4-5 TNIV)

The person described in the previous verses was actively participating in gross sin and was not saved. Paul exhorts the church to exclude this person from fellowship until he repents and discontinues his sin. The sinful nature is only displaced by the presence of the Holy Spirit Who imparts His divine nature to man. A person can never possess both a sinful nature and a divine nature:

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Ro.8:8-9 NIV)

Therefore, by our baptism into Christ, our sinful nature died. For whoever is baptized into Christ clothes himself with the divine nature of Christ:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Ga.3:27 NASB)

In the previous verse, the Greek verb tense of “have crucified” is the **aorist tense, active voice**, indicative mood—or, in simple English, it is translated as the past tense. The **aorist tense** indicates that the action occurs apart from time. Our sinful nature was crucified with Christ two thousand years ago. Ultimately, from God’s perspective, our sinful nature was crucified since the beginning of time because we were saved since the beginning of time. The **active voice** means that man must do something to crucify the sinful nature. The Scriptures state that our sinful nature was displaced (put off) by the divine nature when we took our first step of obedience in baptism:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature ^[sarx], not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. (Co.2:11-12 NIV)

When we were baptized, Christ eradicated our sinful nature. Hence, our sinful nature died in our baptism (an action). Since our sinful nature was crucified (put off), the Scriptures warn us to not make any provision for the sinful nature in our theology, in our thinking, and especially in our actions—it is dead:

*Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, **and make no provision for the flesh** ^[sarx], to gratify its desires.* (Ro.13:14 NRSV)

Through Christ, our sinful nature died; we are no longer predisposed to sin. Consequently, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, our divine nature naturally sheds the evil and causes us to live a holy life. If we partake in the sinful nature, we deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in us:

*For if **you live according to the sinful nature, you will die**; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* (Ro.8:13-14 TNIV)

If we live according to the sinful nature, we will die eternally. A person is either controlled by the sinful nature to do evil or controlled by the Spirit to please God. What controls us has eternal consequences:

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. People reap what they sow. Those who sow **to please their sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction**; those who sow **to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*** (Ga.6:7-8 TNIV)

We were dead in our sinful nature, for we were predisposed to sin. In this state, we were never able to please God:

*The mind of sinful ^[sarx] man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful ^[sarx] mind **is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature** ^[sarx] **cannot please God.** (Ro.8:6-8 NIV)*

Since the sinful nature controls man from his conception, man “does not submit to God,” “is hostile to God,” and “cannot please God.” The sinful nature is continuously rebellious toward God. I am not suggesting that man never does anything good but rather that man cannot stop his sinful actions. His sinful actions negate any of the good that he accomplishes:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*** (Isa.64:6 TNIV)

Therefore, we must understand what the sinful nature is and how it came into existence, before we can understand how to overcome it.

UNDERSTANDING GOD

The sinful nature is like yeast that is mixed with flour and water and left to rise. With just a few cups of flour, this yeast mixture will grow into a huge loaf of bread. The sinful nature was in us the day that we were born. But with each day that we lived, our sinful nature grew and permeated every aspect of our lives:

*Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that **a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough**? Get rid of the old yeast **that you may be a new batch without yeast**—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, **not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.*** (1Co.5:6-8 NIV)

In the previous verse, the yeast symbolizes man’s sinful nature which predisposes the whole of humanity to commit sin. However, Christ came to make us a new holy loaf, a loaf without the yeast of wickedness. We must conclude that what man became through Adam was not God’s design, for mankind was created good without even a thought of sin. To understand the sinful nature, we must comprehend the differences between God, Jesus, and man. God has two specific characteristics that He did not share with man at creation. First, God is

omniscient (all-knowing). Someone once said, “Did it ever occur to you that nothing ever occurs to God?” God simply knows everything that can ever be known:

*He counts the number of the stars; **He calls them all by name.** Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; **His understanding is infinite.***

(Ps.147:4-5 NKJV)

God’s knowledge is always current:

*But **the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*** (Mt.10:30 NKJV)

The previous verse does not say that God knows how many hairs are on your head but that He has all your hairs numbered. He knows when hair number 1,493 fell out. God has numbered every hair on every person’s head and has retained this knowledge for every person that has ever lived. Besides general facts, God knows not only good but also evil. When Satan tempted Eve, he tempted her with the prospect of gaining the knowledge of good and evil:

*But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**”*

(Ge.3:4-5 NASB)

Satan tempted man to become like God, knowing evil and good. After man ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God said:

*“See, the man has become **like one of us, knowing good and evil.**”*

(Ge.3:22 NRSV)

Because of Adam and Eve, man has the knowledge of evil; but God in His omniscience has the ability to know all the evil that can possibly be done.

A second characteristic of God, which man did not possess at creation, is God’s holiness. Holiness is sinless perfection:

*He is the Rock, his works **are perfect**, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who **does no wrong**, upright and just is he.* (De.32:4 NIV)

God is absolute, moral purity. He cannot possibly do wrong:

*This God—**his way is perfect**; the promise of the LORD **proves true**; he is **a shield** for all who take refuge in him.*

(2Sa.22:31 NRSV)

God does not take pleasure in evil. Hence, even though He knows about evil, He does not dwell on wickedness:

Just as the sinful nature predisposes mankind to sin, a new divine nature now predisposes Christians to holiness by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We must understand that the sinful nature had controlled us from birth until the Holy Spirit began to control us at our spiritual rebirth:

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you **will not** gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the **sinful nature** ^[sarx] **desires** what is contrary to the Spirit, and **the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.** They are in conflict with each other, **so that you do not do what you want.***

(Ga.5:17 NIV)

A person never does what he wants because he is controlled by either the sinful nature from physical birth or the Holy Spirit from spiritual rebirth. In Romans 7, Paul without the Holy Spirit could not do the good that he wanted but always did the evil that he despised because the sinful nature controlled him. On the other hand, a Christian discontinues his evil actions and conforms to God’s will because the Holy Spirit controls him. A person never has control of himself:

*Those who have **been born** of God **do not sin**, because **God’s seed abides in them**; they **cannot sin**, because they **have been born of God.***

(1Jn.3:9 NRSV)

Once a person receives the Holy Spirit Whom Christ says will remain in him forever, that person is **in the flesh** ^[sarx] (having a body) but not **of the flesh** ^[sarx] (having a sinful nature):

*But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, **who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh** ^[sarx]. For though **we walk in the flesh** ^[sarx], **we do not war according to the flesh** ^[sarx]. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.***

(2Co.10:2-5 NKJV)

Although Christians live in a physical body, they no longer live according to the sinful nature, obsessed by sensual, bodily pleasures. Once a person is in Christ, the sinful nature is crucified or put to death by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

*Those who belong to Christ Jesus **have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.** Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

(Ga.5:24-25 TNIV)

Because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the sinful nature cannot exist within us anymore than darkness can exist in the presence of light:

*For when **we were controlled by the sinful nature** ^[sarx], the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.* (Ro.7:5 NIV)

The Scriptures teach that Christians are no longer of the flesh (sinful nature). Man can possess only one nature at a time. When we received the Holy Spirit, our sinful nature's presence with its influence was eradicated. In fact, the Scriptures teach that the children of God are not of the flesh—the sinful nature:

*That is, **it is not the children of the flesh** ^[sarx] **who are children of God**, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.* (Ro.9:8 NRSV)

Once we became children of God, we were no longer of the flesh—controlled by the sinful nature. The presence of the Holy Spirit Who dwells **forever** in Christians secures **forever** the divine nature in Christians and displaces **forever** their sinful nature. For this reason, the Scriptures do **not** say, “When you are in the sinful nature” and “When you are in the Spirit.” In other words, the Scriptures do not say that one person can oscillate between the two natures. Rather, we read:

*Those who live according to the sinful nature ^[sarx] have their minds set on what that nature ^[sarx] desires; but those **who live in accordance with the Spirit** have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* (Ro.8:5 TNIV)

“Those who live according to the sinful nature [sarx]” are directly opposed to “those who live in accordance with the Spirit.” Each of these classifications represents a distinctly different group of people. Since Pentecost, the world has been a dichotomy of two types of people: the world (“those” controlled by their sinful nature) and the church (“those” controlled by the Spirit):

*Those who live according to the sinful nature ^[sarx] have **their minds set on what that nature desires**; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have **their minds set on what the Spirit desires**. The mind of **sinful man** ^[sarx] **is death**, but the **mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace**; the sinful mind ^[sarx] is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, **nor can it do so**. Those **controlled by the sinful nature** ^[sarx] cannot please God.* (Ro.8:5-7 NIV)

*For You are **not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness**, nor shall evil dwell with You.* (Ps.5:4 NKJV)

Since God considers wickedness repugnant, He considers sinful man repugnant:

Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing. (Hab.1:13 NRSV)

Because God is holy, sinful man cannot enter the presence of God. The holy nature of God allows Him to know of evil and yet not yield to it:

*Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, **"You shall be holy, for I am holy."*** (1Pe.1:15-16 NRSV)

God is holy in nature (absolute, moral perfection) and void of evil. In conclusion, God knows everything, even evil. But since He is holy in nature, He will only do and dwell upon what is perfect.

THE DYNAMICS OF JESUS

Jesus was both man and God. Since Jesus was man but without sin, His life demonstrates how a man can overcome the sinful nature. Jesus was a man in every way:

*For this reason he had to be **made like his brothers in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.* (He.2:17 NIV)

Even though Jesus is part of the tri-unity of God, He became a man with the tri-unity of body, soul, and spirit. Jesus' human tri-unity was obvious in the events that surrounded His death. Jesus had a physical body with five senses: touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing:

*Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked **for the body of Jesus**.* (Mk.15:43 NKJV)

Like our souls, Jesus' soul had the functions of intellect, emotion, and will:

*Then He said to them, **"My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."*** (Mt.26:38 NASB)

Jesus also had a living spirit which He committed to God the Father when He died on the cross:

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

(Lk.23:46 NRSV)

When Jesus became a man, He remained part of the tri-unity of God but also became a tri-unity unto Himself with a body, soul, and spirit. The Scriptures teach that Jesus became "sarx":

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh ^[sarx] is of God, (1Jn.4:2 NKJV)

Jesus had a human body ("sarx"), but He did not have a sinful nature ("sarx") because He is God, and God is holy in nature:

*In the beginning was **the Word**, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. He was with God in the beginning. **The Word became flesh** ^[sarx] and made his dwelling among us.*

(Jn.1:1-2&14 TNIV; 1Jn.4:2; 1Ti.3:16)

The Word (Jesus) became flesh (human), proving that a human body can exist independent of a sinful nature. The Scriptures differentiate coming in the flesh and living according to the flesh:

*For what the law was powerless to do in that **it was weakened by the sinful nature** ^[sarx], God did by sending **his own Son in the likeness of sinful man** ^[sarx] to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in **sinful man** ^[sarx] in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, **who do not live according to the sinful nature** ^[sarx] but according to the Spirit.* (Ro.8:3-4 NIV)

Jesus Christ came to earth in human flesh to condemn sin in human flesh so that we like Jesus can live in our bodies without being controlled by the sinful nature. Therefore, even though Jesus had a physical body, He did not have a sinful nature (a nature predisposed to sin) because He is God—absolute, moral perfection.

Like God and man, Jesus had the knowledge of good and evil. He walked among men and observed their wickedness. He was constantly surrounded by evil. Throughout Jesus' life, He was given opportunities to choose sin. By the time that Jesus was thirty years old, He was fully aware of man's depraved condition. Just like all men, Jesus was also tempted. After He was baptized by John, He went into the wilderness:

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness **to be tempted by the devil**.* (Mt.4:1 NKJV)

goodness within himself to overcome the choice to do evil (temptation). Consequently, man is predisposed to sin.

THE OLD TESTAMENT VERSUS THE NEW TESTAMENT

God's solution for the sinful nature is the Holy Spirit through Whom we received His divine nature. Consequently, with the indwelling of the Spirit, the divine nature displaces the sinful nature, thus preventing sin:

*So I say, **live by the Spirit**, and you **will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature**.* (Ga.5:16 NIV)

The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives displaced our sinful nature and negated its influence and control. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon a person for only a period of time and then left. But after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit permanently indwelt Christians. Jesus said:

*"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of **the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified**.* (Jn.7:38-39 NASB)

Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came briefly upon a prophet to give revelation. This was David's experience:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. **Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me**.* (Ps.51:10-11 NKJV)

The Holy Spirit would come upon David for a divine revelation and then leave. David longed for the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit; but because of the condition of his heart, he could only experience it for brief periods. However, after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit could permanently indwell Christians:

*"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that **He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth**."*

(Jn.14:16-17 NASB)

Forever is infinite. Once the Holy Spirit indwells a person, his sinful nature ceases to exist. Hence, for a Christian, his sinful nature existed in the past:

***You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature** ^[sarx] **but by the Spirit**, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* (Ro.8:9 NIV)

"The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and **there is no wickedness in him.**" (Ps.92:15 NIV)

The sinful nature exists because natural man does not possess the holy nature of God:

*And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.** If we say that we have fellowship with Him and **yet walk in the darkness, we lie** and do not practice the truth; but **if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light,** we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of **Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**" (1Jn.1:5-7 NASB)*

A person can eliminate his sinful nature like he eliminates darkness, by adding what is absent. Just as darkness is displaced by light, a person's sinful nature can be displaced only by God's divine nature, which the person receives through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

***His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness,** through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may **escape from the corruption** that is in the world because of lust, and **may become participants of the divine nature.**" (2Pe.1:3-4 NRSV)*

Our spiritual void was filled when we received the divine nature through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

***It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh ^[sarx] is useless.** The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (Jn.6:63 NRSV)*

When the Holy Spirit dwells within man, He grants him His divine nature which causes the sinful nature ("sarx") to cease to exist. The reason why Paul could not overcome his sinful desires (Romans 7) was that he did not have the Holy Spirit, for Paul stated that nothing good lived within himself. Without the Holy Spirit, Paul still contained a spiritual void:

*I know that **nothing good lives in me,** that is, **in my sinful nature.** For I **have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.** For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, **it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.**" (Ro.7:18-20 NIV)*

Mankind were predisposed to sin because they lacked the divine nature of God. The absence of the divine nature allows the power of sin to control man. Without the Holy Spirit, man does not possess enough

Satan specifically presented Jesus with opportunities to choose sin. Jesus had to experience temptation because He was like us in every way:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have **one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—** yet was **without sin.**" (He.4:15 NIV)*

Temptation is the presentation of a choice to disobey God. Jesus was tempted with the same choices and in the same manner that Satan tempts us in today. The difference between natural man and Jesus is that man has a sinful nature, and Jesus has the divine nature of God (holiness). Because Jesus is holy, He never yielded to temptation when He was presented with the choice to sin. Therefore, Jesus knew the power of choice; but His only option was to not sin because He is holy.

Jesus had the holy nature of God. The difference between Jesus and man is clearly seen in Jesus' conception:

***You will conceive and give birth to a son,** and you are to call him Jesus. . . . "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "**since I am a virgin?**" The angel answered, "**The Holy Spirit will come on you,** and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Lk.1:31&34-35 TNIV)*

A virgin conceives in a unique way. Jesus' conception is similar to cloning. In the cloning of a sheep, scientists take an egg out of an adult ewe in heat and remove the DNA from the egg. Scientists then take the DNA from any cell of a valuable ram (Super Ram) and place it in the egg of the ewe. The egg is then placed back into the ewe and allowed a normal gestation and birth. The cloned lamb will not have any genetic information of the ewe mother, making the lamb identical in every way to the donor, Super Ram. Someone may come to the farm and ask to see Super Ram, and the farmer could show the visitor the lamb. The lamb is not like Super Ram, but rather the lamb is Super Ram. In the same way, God placed Himself in the egg of Mary by the Holy Spirit. While on the earth, Jesus was not like God; Jesus was God:

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and **the exact representation of his being,** sustaining all things by his powerful word." (He.1:3 NIV)*

Even though Jesus was born from Mary's womb, Jesus was God. Like the visitors at the sheep farm, we could ask Jesus to show us the Father; and Jesus can honestly say that to see Jesus is to see the Father:

Philip said to Him, "Lord, **show us the Father**, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He **who has seen Me has seen the Father**; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (Jn.14:8-9 NKJV)

Jesus was not like God; Jesus was God:

*And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son **Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.*** (1Jn.5:20 NASB)

When Jesus walked on the earth, He was the fullness of God in a human body:

*For in Christ **all the fullness of the Deity lives** in bodily form.* (Co.2:9 TNIV)

Since Jesus was the fullness of God, Jesus possessed the nature of God—absolute moral perfection:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, **being in very nature God**, did not consider **equality with God** something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the **very nature** of a servant, being **made in human likeness**. And being found in **appearance as a man**, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!* (Php.2:5-8 NIV)

Jesus' holy nature prevented Him from yielding to the temptations that man and Satan placed before Him. Jesus' holiness prevented Him from committing the sin that He knew:

*You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and **in him there is no sin.*** (1Jn.3:5 NRSV)

And:

*God made **him who had no sin** to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2Co.5:21 TNIV)

Finally:

*For you have been called for this purpose, **since Christ** also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, **Who committed no sin**, nor was any deceit found in his mouth.* (1Pe.2:21 NASB)

Since Jesus was God, Jesus could not sin. Therefore, Jesus was a man with a holy nature. Because Jesus was a man, He was tempted (presented with choices to sin). Because He was God, His holy nature enabled Him to disregard temptation and to maintain a holy life.

OUR SINFUL NATURE

God made mankind in His image and likeness and forbade man to eat the forbidden fruit. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they stole the knowledge of God, the knowledge of good and evil. After man ate the forbidden fruit, God said:

*"See, the man has become **like one of us, knowing good and evil.**"* (Ge.3:22 NRSV)

Adam and Eve were created to know good; but now with the knowledge of evil, they became aware of the reality of choice. Adam and Eve did not realize that God was protecting them when He commanded them to not eat the forbidden fruit. Once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they became conscious of the possibilities for evil. When mankind gained the knowledge of evil without the nature of God, man's sinful nature came into existence; for man did not possess the character of God that would predispose them to choose good. Consequently, man was unable to overcome sin's allurements. We must understand that the sinful nature is not a thing but rather the absence of a thing. The sinful nature is similar to darkness. Darkness is not a thing; it is the absence of something—the absence of light. We control darkness by controlling light. We cannot make a room darker by bringing darkness into the room. We can only make a room lighter by allowing more light into the room. If darkness were a thing, then we could make a room half dark and half light; but because light displaces darkness, we cannot separate light and darkness in a room. In the same way, the sinful nature is not a thing but rather the absence of a thing. The sinful nature is the absence of the divine nature of God. When Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of good and evil without God's divine nature (holiness), man's nature became a sinful nature—a moral vacuum. Man became spiritually handicapped, a slave to sin. Because man lacked God's nature, man suddenly became predisposed to sin, and sin obtained a place of power in man's life. Man cannot overcome the sinful nature by his own resolve because man possesses nothing to fill the spiritual void. To overcome the sinful nature, a person has to receive the Holy Spirit (God's divine nature). Man cannot become holy without the Holy Spirit's presence. The divine nature fills the spiritual void that created the sinful nature, and this new nature predisposes man to holiness. God's holy nature is completely opposite to wickedness: