

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE FLESH - ALSO KNOWN AS THE SINFUL NATURE OR THE OLD MAN**

*<sup>3</sup>For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.*

*2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (NASB)*

*<sup>41</sup>"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

*Matthew 26:41 (NASB)*

*<sup>63</sup>"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*

*John 6:63 (NASB)*

*<sup>12</sup>The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

*Romans 13:12-14 (NASB)*

*<sup>1</sup>But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

*1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (ESV)*

*<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup>but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.*

*James 1:13-14 (NIV)*

The word "flesh" is a technical term used in the Bible. Most of the time it does not refer to the physical tissue in your body. It means your fallen human nature which is proud, selfish, sinful, and continuously opposed to God's will. Once you become a Christian your war really starts, not only out there on the battlefield of the world, or against the demons, but also inside yourself. The flesh or 'old man' is like a traitor living inside us, opposed to everything God stands for and always resisting His will.

Before you became a Christian, your flesh ruled you completely. It had things all its own way. Therefore, there was no meaningful battle against it because, at that time, your will wasn't opposing your own flesh. On the contrary, it was indulging it. Therefore, whenever your will had to make decisions it would go along with whatever your flesh wanted like a weak chairman of a committee who gives way to a loud and pushy committee member:

*<sup>3</sup>Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

### **Your main problem is yourself**

The further you go in the Christian life the more you realise how bad your flesh really is and that *you* are your own biggest problem. You are your own worst enemy because of the huge influence your flesh has over you. It is as if your new man was a pilot and your old man was the co-pilot of the same aircraft, constantly obstructing your new man's wishes, pressing the wrong buttons, pulling the wrong levers and being uncooperative.

That is rather like the position we are in. We want to please God and do His will but our flesh, the old man within us, doesn't want to. It wants to resist God every step of the way. Therefore, the key question is who is going to grasp, and keep hold of, the controls of the aircraft?

Remember the old man is *not a demon* influencing you from the outside, or even from the inside. *It is part of you*. Therefore, it cannot be cast out. It can only be weakened by being denied what it wants and 'crucified'. It is your own sin nature and is still very much alive in you even after you have become a Christian. It rebels against every good thing, craves for every bad thing, and opposes all that your new man wants to do.

My personal belief is that for most of us the flesh is more significant in our lives than demons are and is the main cause of our problems. Perhaps that is why, in the 21 letters in the New Testament, demons are mentioned only 10 times but the flesh is mentioned over 50 times. Plus 'the flesh' is only one of the phrases the Bible uses to refer to our own sinful nature. If you add all the other alternative phrases as well the level of emphasis given to the flesh is even more pronounced.

It's important to remember that and to keep a proper sense of proportion and balance. Everything in the Bible is important, but some things are emphasised more than others and the extent to which a thing is emphasised and how many times it is referred to helps us to assess its relative significance. Let us therefore look now at a list of the alternative phrases which the Bible uses for the flesh. There are lots of them but they all refer to the same concept, i.e. our fallen, sinful, fleshly nature which we inherited from Adam:

### **Alternative phrases for the '*flesh*'**

To prevent confusion let us gather together in one list the alternative phrases or euphemisms which the Bible uses to refer to our flesh. Then, whatever phrase we may see, we can be aware it is referring to our flesh. The biblical phrases used are:

the *flesh* (see John 3:6, John 6:63, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:4, Romans 8:8-9, Romans 13:14, 2 Corinthians 10:3, Galatians 5:19, Philippians 3:3 and many others)

the *old man* – (see Romans 6:6)

the *carnal mind* – (see Romans 8:7 KJV)

the *body of sin* – (see Romans 6:6 KJV) (or *sinful body* - RSV)

this *body of death* – (see Romans 7:24 RSV)

the *body of flesh* – (see Colossian 2:11 RSV)

the *old nature* – (see Ephesians 4:22 RSV)

the *natural* man – (see 1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV)

Some additional phrases which are not used in the best translations of the Bible but which are sometimes seen in Christian books, especially those written in the distant past, are as follows:

the *sin nature*

the *sinful nature*

the *Adamic nature*

the *carnal nature*

the *sinful human nature*

the *fallen human nature*

All these phrases refer to this part of us called the flesh or the old man. But it is useful to be aware of these other names for it in case you come across them in books or sermons. No matter how much you resist the Devil and his demons, which you absolutely must, you should place even greater emphasis on dealing with the problems of your own flesh. That said, few people take that advice because the flesh is not an “exciting” subject and dealing with it is far from enjoyable as it involves so much self denial and self discipline.

### **The 'works of the flesh' or 'acts of the sinful nature'**

See what apostle Paul said about our sinful nature and the fruit, i.e. the character qualities it produces, as compared to the fruit the Holy Spirit wants to develop in us:

***<sup>19</sup>The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.***

***Galatians 5:19-24 (NIV)***

Note the examples Paul gives of the '*acts of the sinful nature*'. Do you recognise those features in yourself? If not, ask God to open your eyes to see yourself as you really are with your character defects exposed. Pray that God will show you the truth about yourself, 'warts and all', because passages like this are not put in the Bible to benefit "*other people*".

Paul is not gossiping at a bus stop about others in the Church. *He is talking to you and me, and he is talking about you and me.* Therefore, ask God for self-knowledge and keep asking for it until you get it however much it hurts to face up to it.

Paul goes on to describe his battle against his own sinful nature in this famous passage. Remember this is apostle Paul speaking here, possibly the greatest Christian of all time. Therefore, if even he faced these problems with his flesh, isn't it inevitable that you and I will struggle with it even more?

*<sup>14</sup>We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup>I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup>And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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.*

*<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup>For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup>but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. <sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

*Romans 7:14-25 (NIV)*

This passage above was written by apostle Paul when he was in his fifties and therefore very mature. He had developed enough wisdom by then to be able to write the letter to the Romans, which is perhaps the greatest document ever written. Nevertheless, Paul freely concedes that because of the war raging within him:

- a) he does *not do* the good that he intends
- b) he *does* the evil that he doesn't intend.

So, even Paul never reached a stage where he had fully won the battle with his own flesh. He could crucify it daily and put it to death but, just as with us, his flesh refused to stay dead. It is like dealing with persistent weeds in the garden which never completely go away, whatever we do. All we can do is keep up a constant battle, tackling the weeds over and over again, as we gradually gain ground and they lose ground.

### **The need to "crucify the flesh"**

The Bible speaks of this battle against your own flesh in terms of us having to "crucify" it. In other words, you have to refuse to let your flesh have its own way by regularly saying "no" to it. Slap it down mercilessly as if you were in a fight to the death with a determined opponent. Its rebellion needs to be crushed, again and again, every time it rears its head. Don't give it any ground or make any provision for it:

*<sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

*Romans 13:14 (NASB)*

To understand why the Bible tells us to "crucify" your flesh imagine it as a cancer being dealt with by chemotherapy or radiotherapy. The aim of the treatment is to *kill* the tumour, not to improve it or heal

it. The only way to deal with cancer cells is to destroy them, or at least to diminish and shrink the tumour. That is the only effective policy and handling the flesh is the same.

We cannot come to any arrangement with our flesh or make peace with it any more than our immune system can come to an arrangement with cancer cells. We must just keep up the war and never stop fighting. Therefore, think of putting our flesh to death as if we were trying to shrink a tumour in our body which is seeking to spread and take over completely.

In this lengthy passage from Romans Paul goes into detail about the battle between our flesh and our spirit, once our spirit has been reborn at our conversion:

*<sup>5</sup>Those who live according to the sinful nature 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. <sup>6</sup>The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; <sup>7</sup>the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

*<sup>8</sup>Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>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.*

*<sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

*<sup>12</sup>Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup>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,*

**Romans 8:5-13 (NIV)**

So, we are to wage a constant and relentless war with our flesh. We cannot afford to show it any mercy or “take any prisoners”. We must consistently refuse to indulge our own pride, selfishness, temper and lusts. Whatever our flesh craves for, we must always refuse to give it and do the opposite instead. Never indulge or pamper it, especially your pride. When you notice pride in yourself give it a dose of what it hates most, which is to humble yourself.

### **We must regard our old self, or flesh, as having been 'crucified with Christ'**

As part of our battle against our flesh, or ‘old self’, the Bible urges us to consider it to have been crucified with Christ, i.e. put to death. Moreover, we are instructed to *continue* to put it to death thereafter by ‘crucifying’ it again every day.

Part of this process of dying to self is to realise that, technically speaking, every genuine Christian has already been put to death with Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. Therefore our ‘old man’ is now to be considered legally dead (even though in practical terms, it isn’t) and we are to refuse to take its cravings into account or to act as it would wish us to:

***<sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

***Galatians 2:20 (RSV)***

Instead, we are to choose at any given moment to operate through our new man. That is our reborn human spirit which thinks and acts as Jesus Christ does. Technically, the old man's death occurs when we are born again at our conversion. But we symbolically display that death and proclaim it publicly when we are baptised in water. (See my Book 1).

That is one reason why it is so important to be baptised in water properly and to know at the time exactly what you are doing and why. As we go down into the water we are declaring to ourselves, and to everyone else, that, legally, our old man has been put to death. Then, when we rise up from the water, it is to start a new life in which our new man can come to life and start operating as Jesus would.

Therefore, in the first century Church, baptism in water usually took place very soon after conversion, or even immediately afterwards, such that the two events almost became viewed as one. They didn't go in for the long delays before being baptised that we usually see in the modern Church.

***<sup>6</sup>For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- <sup>7</sup>because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.***

***Romans 6:6-11 (NIV)***

However, it is only in the technical, legal sense that our old man or old self is 'dead'. In practical terms, in our day to day lives, it is still very much alive and active. That is why we must continue to deny our flesh and put it to death again every day in the sense of not letting it have its own way so it can't get us to obey its evil desires:

***<sup>12</sup>Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup>Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.***

***Romans 6:12-14 (NIV)***

Note that final point above that we are "not under law but under grace." This is a concept that most of us struggle even to understand, let alone apply. It means that, for a Christian, Jesus has made available a new way to live. It is not achieved by observance of the Law of Moses, which, in any case, our old man is incapable of doing.

Instead, it is to live in obedience to *the Law of Christ*, which our *new* man is capable of doing, even though our old man isn't. That point is frequently misunderstood. Our old man is not capable of living in accordance with the Law of Christ, which one might say means allowing Jesus Christ to live through us.

Only our new man can do that, which is why we are urged to live in and through our new man, not our old man. Some make the error of thinking we are meant to try to get our old man to live the Christian life and obey Jesus. It won't, and never will. Only our new man can do that.

**At our conversion when our spirit or new man comes to life, the Bible says we become a “new creation” or “new creature”**

When a person becomes a Christian, i.e. at the moment when they are forgiven and justified, or made righteous in God's eyes, the Bible speaks of them being ‘born again’ or of being a ‘new creation’.

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”*

*John 3:3-8 (RSV)*

*<sup>17</sup>Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.*

*2 Corinthians 5:17 (RSV)*

Paul also speaks of this concept of being a ‘new creation’ or having a ‘new nature’ in his other letters:

*<sup>15</sup>For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*

*Galatians 6:15 (RSV)*

*<sup>22</sup> Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, <sup>23</sup> and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*Ephesians 4:22-24 (RSV)*

The fact that God considers our old man to be legally dead opens the way for us to learn how to live through our new man. Unlike our old man, the new man is capable of obeying Jesus Christ. In fact, it positively wants to do so. Accordingly, we can bear fruit through our new man which our old man has never been able, and never will be able, to produce.

*<sup>4</sup>So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup>But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*

*Romans 7:4-6 (NIV)*

So, if we will allow it, our new man is able to do right and have the life of Jesus Christ lived out through him. We have been set free from the hopeless task of trying to obey the Law of Moses, or any other set

of rules. Nevertheless, there is still something in our flesh which likes laws and rules. However, it only likes law for the sake of trying to impress others, not because it is law-abiding.

That is one reason why '*religion*', i.e. the attempt to impress God by keeping traditions and obeying rules, appeals so much to our flesh. That is also why, throughout history, churches are full of man-made rules and traditions. Keeping such rules makes people feel pleased with themselves as if they were worthy of God's approval. Please refer to my commentary on Galatians and also my lengthy article on the Law of Moses for a lot more detail. Both are also available in audio format.

### **Alternative names in the Bible for the '*new man*'.**

Just as the Bible uses several phrases to refer to our old man or flesh, it also uses different words to refer to the new man. Let's list some of these as it may help to avoid confusion:

the *new man* (see Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10)

the *spirit* (with a small s) (see Acts 17:16, Romans 1:9, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 1 Corinthians 14:15, 2 Corinthians 2:13, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 4:6)

the *inner man* (see Ephesians 3:16)

the *hidden man of the heart* (see 1 Peter 3:4)

Whereas the old man cannot do anything other than sin, our new man is unable to sin at all. Our new man or spirit, having come to life at the moment we were justified, is not sinful. It is not affected by the curse that came upon the whole human race because of Adam's sin. It was affected previously, which is why it was dead, unable to do anything at all.

But when we are born again our spirit comes to life and becomes as it was meant to be, i.e. sinless and in tune with the way God thinks. Therefore, our new man cannot sin and thus, *at the times when we are operating in it*, we are not sinning. That is why the Bible urges us to act in accordance with our new man, i.e. to do what he wants, not what the old man wants.

### **What is meant by the "*renewal of your mind*" and what does that have to do with overcoming the flesh?**

A Christian's own human spirit is incapable of sin. However, our body, mind, emotions and will are all entirely capable of sinning. They will sin whenever they act in accordance with the values and wishes of our old man. Conversely, they will not be sinning when they act in accordance with the values and wishes of our new man.

Therefore, it is important that we begin to get the rest of us, our body, mind, emotions and will, to change. This process of change takes up our whole lifetime and is known as 'sanctification'. Part of this process is retraining our minds to adopt the values of our new man. Paul refers to this as "*the renewal of your mind*":

***<sup>1</sup>I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good***



*and acceptable and perfect.<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him.*

*Romans 12:1-3 (RSV)*

Whereas the rebirth of our spirit or new man is instantaneous, and is *done for us* by God, the renewal of our mind is a slow process. Moreover, *we ourselves* have to play a deliberate part in causing it to happen. We need to make choices, day by day, to force our mind to learn God's Word thoroughly and to do what our new man wants and to reject what our old man wants. Paul elaborates on this ongoing process in Ephesians:

*<sup>17</sup> Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; <sup>18</sup> they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; <sup>19</sup> they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. <sup>20</sup> You did not so learn Christ!—<sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, <sup>23</sup> and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. <sup>25</sup> Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. <sup>28</sup> Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, <sup>32</sup> and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

*Ephesians 4:17-32 (RSV)*

The main part of us which is driving this process of change is our will, the part which ultimately makes all the decisions. So, when you "*put off your old nature*" as Paul urges us to do, it is your will which is making the decision to do that. There is also a circular process going on involving the will, the new man and the mind.

The more the will chooses to listen to the new man the more the mind is also renewed and changed. And the more the mind is renewed, the more influence it exerts over the rest of us and so the more capable our will becomes of making right choices. So, every part of this virtuous circle is vital.

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. <sup>3</sup> But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not associate with them, <sup>8</sup> for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead*

*expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; <sup>13</sup> but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. <sup>14</sup> Therefore it is said,*

*“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
and Christ shall give you light.”*

*<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, <sup>20</sup> always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.*

*Ephesians 5:1-20 (RSV)*

### **Our old man wants to be important and to be served, not to serve others**

One of the most distinctive features of the old man is pride. It longs to be important and to be served by others. By contrast, the new man has no such cravings. The new man is happy to serve others whereas the old man always desires to be served:

*<sup>33</sup>And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" <sup>34</sup>But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." <sup>36</sup>And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."*

*Mark 9:33-37 (ESV)*

The new man knows how to take the place of a servant and actually wants to do so, because it has the humility of a child. The curious thing about God's Kingdom is the highest place is to be found at the bottom, not at the top. We achieve success in Jesus' eyes by becoming servants, and by being happy to remain so, not by getting others to serve us, which is what the world sees as success.

The Bible is such an honest book it shows us incidents that do not reflect well on the disciples. In the passage below the apostles James and John are trying to grab for themselves the highest positions in Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus corrects them, but we all need to take note, because their attitude is the same as ours much of the time. We need to turn from such pride and seek a place where we can serve rather than trying to get others to serve us. That is the way to achieve real happiness.

*<sup>35</sup> And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." <sup>36</sup>And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" <sup>37</sup>And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." <sup>38</sup>Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" <sup>39</sup>And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, <sup>40</sup>but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine*

*to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." <sup>41</sup> And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. <sup>42</sup> And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

*Mark 10:35-45 (ESV)*

In this next passage all the disciples were arguing as to who was the greatest. Imagine doing that in front of Jesus! Yet, that's what we do much of the time, exalting and asserting ourselves. When we do that Jesus is just as much in the room as when He was with the disciples. He just isn't visible.

The disciples were later cured of their longing to be important and admired which is one reason why they were willing to include such unflattering passages in their gospels and to appear in a bad light, rather than editing them out, as most of us would have done:

*<sup>24</sup> A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.*

*Luke 22:24-27 (ESV)*

Would we have included passages which reflect badly on ourselves if we had written the Bible? One suspects not. Very few people do so when telling a story. We need to imitate the disciples and present our own faults and failures openly while being much quieter about our successes and strengths.

Consider whether you achieve that. It will indicate how far you have come. Listen to yourself in conversations and read what you write. Then set yourself the target of being as honest, modest and self-critical as the disciples were. Be frank about your failings and sins and quiet about your successes.