

ARTICLE III.

NEW TESTAMENT USE OF ΣΑΡΞ.

BY REV. EZRA P. GOULD, PROFESSOR IN NEWTON THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION.

THAT which gives interest to this inquiry is the use of the word, specially by the Apostle Paul, to denote man's sinful nature, and the various and sometimes misleading explanations given of that use. And it is to present a view of the origin of that use that the writer has not seen elsewhere, and which, if warrantable, removes grave difficulties in the matter of New Testament psychology, that this Article has been prepared. A preliminary discussion of its other meanings is necessary, however.

And first, we have a class of passages in which *σάρξ* is used quite literally, or at least with no greater departure from the original meaning than is involved in the confusion of *σάρξ* and the wider *σῶμα*. The following is a full list of these passages; though it should be said here that in this matter of classification there is room for individual interpretation and for differences of opinion. Luke xxiv. 39; John vi. 51 sq., 63; viii. 15; Acts ii. 26, 31; Rom. ii. 28; iv. 1; 1 Cor. i. 29; vii. 28; 2 Cor. iv. 11; xii. 7; Gal. ii. 20; iii. 3; iv. 13; vi. 12, 13; Eph. ii. 11, 15; vi. 5; Phil. i. 22, 24; Col. i. 22; ii. 5; iii. 22; Heb. ix. 10, 13; x. 20; Jas. v. 3; 1 Pet. iii. 18, 21; iv. 1; 1 John ii. 16; Jude 7 sq.; Rev. xvii. 16; xix. 18, 21. In some of these passages the meaning is obscure or doubtful; but, on the whole, the primary signification has been assigned in them all. Thus the well-known verses in the sixth chapter of John in which Christ speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, represent under that figure the reception by faith of the benefits of Christ's crucifixion. In Gal. ii. 20: "And what I now live in the flesh, in the faith of the Son of God I live," while the apostle refers strictly to

the bodily state, he probably intends to suggest the disabilities and disadvantages of that state. In Gal. iii. 3: "Having begun with spirit, are you now ending with flesh?" Paul probably intends that the term *σαρκί* shall represent rather than comprehensively state his thought. The primary reference seems to be to the fleshly rite of circumcision; but this stands in the apostle's mind for a whole class of outward observances. So in John viii. 15 we have the term *κατὰ σάρκα*: "You judge according to the flesh," used to describe exactly the case in hand; i.e. the Jews' understanding of the birth or origin of Christ (cf. vii. 52); but representing an entire class of merely outward things to which that belonged. In Heb. x. 20: "A way new and living, through the veil, that is his flesh," as in John vi., the reference is to crucifixion. His flesh is conceived of as the veil before the heavenly holy of holies, by the removal of which in crucifixion his people find entrance there. And it must be remembered, of course, that the representation is figurative, not exact. In Col. i. 22: "He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death," we find *σάρξ* emphasized as the material of Christ's body, in opposition to the purely spiritual nature of the angelic beings to whom the false teachers of the Epistle ascribed the work of atonement. Eph. vi. 5 and Col. iii. 22 enjoin on slaves obedience to their masters *κατὰ σάρκα*, which evidently stands opposed to the mastership of Christ *κατὰ πνεῦμα*; and there seems to be no necessity of extending the meaning to the entire human, temporal condition, as commentators do. In Jas. v. 3: "The rust of them will be a witness against you, and will eat your flesh as fire," *σάρξ* stands, in accordance with the entire figurative expression, for the persons themselves; but this use is determined by the figurative setting.

The meaning of the word which comes nearest to this original meaning, and might even be classed under it, is that which recognizes *σάρξ* as the basis of human descent and propagation, and so contrasted with the spiritual descent or relationship, or a divine sonship, frequently depicted in scripture. Thus the national is distinguished from the spiritual

Israel as Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα (1 Cor. x. 18); Paul calls the Jews his συγγενεῖς κατὰ σάρκα (Rom. ix. 3), and μου τὴν σάρκα (Rom. xi. 14). The last passage is peculiar, as σάρκα is used to denote, not the ground of relationship, but by metonymy the relations themselves. In Gal. iv. 23, 29 κατὰ σάρκα is used to denote Ishmael's birth from the bondwoman Hagar, to distinguish it from that of Isaac, which is described as κατὰ πνεῦμα and διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. And this is peculiar, inasmuch as κατὰ σάρκα denotes not merely human birth by generation, but according to natural laws, without any divine intervention. The other passages under this head are Rom. i. 3; ix. 5, 8, and Heb. xii. 9. Those in Romans describe Christ's human descent. And the first deserves notice, as it contrasts his human and divine origin; the former being described as κατὰ σάρκα, and the latter as κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης, according to a spirit of holiness. The κατὰ σάρκα, as we have seen in analogous cases of human descent, does not signify that the body, nor even the fleshly psychical nature, is the exclusive seat of Christ's humanity. But it recognizes, as in these analogous cases, the fleshly basis or origin of that which in itself includes the whole nature.

A third class of passages is one in which σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, flesh and blood, is used as an equivalent for man, never the individual, but the *genus homo*. See Matt. xvi. 17; 1 Cor. xv. 50; Gal. i. 16; Eph. vi. 12. Also Heb. ii. 14; though this passage, which speaks of Christ as sharing the σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα of God's children, denotes by the phrase "human nature," rather than "man," and specially the corporeal part of that nature. It will be noticed that in all these passages man, described as σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα, stands contrasted with something greater, either in power or wisdom, even in the passage Eph. vi. 12, where the puny σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα is contrasted with the mighty world-rulers of this darkness. And we conclude, therefore, that this phrase is used to denote the weakness of man; probably because this is his corruptible part. We might expect to find a corresponding term in Hebrew. But there is no example of it in the Old Testament, though it is

found in later Jewish writings. See Cremer's *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, Article *αἷμα*.

Another use of the word reveals the same tendency to denote by it, in one way or another, the entire man; viz. *μία σάρξ*, *one flesh*, used to denote the union of man and woman in marriage. This usage is found in the Old Testament (Gen. ii. 24). It originated probably from the scriptural view of marriage as in its essence a union founded on the sexual relations. And hence, while the scriptures recognize the union of spirits and affections in marriage, they use *μία σάρξ* to express the fundamental idea. The passages in which this occurs are Matt. xix. 5, 6; Mark x. 8; 1 Cor. vi. 16; Eph. v. 29, 31.

And now we come to the passages in which *σάρξ* is used for the human race or humanity, viz. Matt. xxiv. 22; Mark, xiii. 20; Luke iii. 6; John xvii. 2; Acts ii. 17; Rom. iii. 20; 1 Cor. i. 29; Gal. ii. 16; 1 Pet. i. 24. This also is a Hebrew use; but in the Old Testament it is, like the New Testament *σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα*, a disparaging term, expressing man's inferiority, while in the New Testament this use of *σάρξ* alone points in that direction only in 1 Pet. i. 24. We have seen in the preceding uses of the word the successive steps leading gradually to this widest meaning. The first is that which recognizes *σάρξ* as the medium of generation, and thus the basis of human descent and relationship, and the starting-point in human existence even. Then comes the use of *σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα* to denote man generically, but always disparagingly. And last the employment of *μία σάρξ* to express the union of marriage. But we do not need to make use of these approaches to connect this with the original meaning. For *σάρξ* evidently in the Hebrew mind stands in constant contrast with *πνεῦμα*. And man as habited in flesh, although endowed with spirit, is described by that which distinguishes him from the world of purely spiritual being, which engaged so much of the thought of this religious people.

In accordance with this use of the word it is employed to denote the humanity of Christ. John i. 14; 1 Tim. iii. 16;

Heb. v. 7; 1 John iv. 2 sq; 2 John vii. Under the same general head belongs also Phil. iii. 3 sq: "And do not trust in flesh, although I have reason to trust also in flesh"; where Paul means by flesh the natural human state before conversion. The contrast with *πνεῦμα* intended, is essentially the same as in the class of passages to be considered, in which *σάρξ* denotes the sinful human nature; only here the sinfulness is not emphasized as characteristic of this natural state. Here also belongs Philem. 16, "a brother beloved both in the flesh and in the Lord," in which *ἐν σαρκί* refers to human relations, and *ἐν κυρίῳ* to relations to the Lord.

And now, finally, we come to the most important use of *σάρξ* to denote man's sinful nature, meaning by that the entire man before conversion, or the sinful part, the "old man" after conversion. Matt. xxvi. 41; Mark xiv. 38; John iii. 6; Rom. vii. 5 sq; viii. 3-13; xiii. 14; 1 Cor. i. 26; v. 5; 2 Cor. i. 17; v. 16; vii. 5; x. 2 sq; xi. 18; Gal. v. 13-vi. 8; Eph. ii. 3; Col. ii. 11-23; 2 Pet. ii. 10, 18.

The common explanation of this use of the word is that which supposes the fleshly or sensual, as opposed to the spiritual, nature of man to be the seat, or at least the starting point, of his sin. This does not mean that sin is confined to this part; it is believed eventually to overspread the whole nature; but that it starts there, finding in that the vulnerable point from which it proceeds to attack the rest. The view has in its favor that it is the most obvious explanation of the usage in itself considered. And it has found credence, partly for that reason, and partly because it accords with a common view of the antagonism between flesh and spirit, or, in a wider range, between matter and spirit, the former of which is regarded as essentially evil. As corollaries from which view we have the mischievous idea that death, which frees the spirit from the encumbering flesh, frees it also, in degree at least, from sin; and that asceticism, or the renunciation of bodily appetites and pleasures, is a road to holiness.

This view has against it also that it involves an unwarranted and superficial psychology. And first as regards the origin

of sin in human nature. We have two sources from which to derive our knowledge or theory of this, viz. our observation of the earliest manifestations of sin in children, and the scriptural account of the fall of man. Now I think that a wide induction of facts would show that in children the sensual passions were the very last to be sinfully excited, and that the first outbreaks of sin were in the region of spiritual things, especially selfishness and anger. Then, as far as we can understand the probably allegorical account of the fall of man, it was not through his bodily appetites that the tempter reached him. Possibly the key of man's nature was pitched too high to be disturbed by such considerations. The appeal was rather to his spiritual nature, to which was offered the tempting bait of knowledge.

If we examine next the metaphysical, instead of the historical genesis of sin, and attempt to find a class of sins which generally lead to the rest, or in a still deeper analysis, that principle which we may regard as universally inherent in sin, and possibly the root of it, I think that we shall fail equally in supporting the charge against the flesh that it is pre-eminently the sinful part of man. It is true that these fleshly sins sometimes furnish the occasion for others, through which they reach their ends or revenge the thwarting of them. But such a relation as this is not fundamental enough to warrant the prominence given to *σάρξ* and lead to its use as a designation of man's sinful nature. Even if it were the usual fact that these fleshly sins formed the occasion of others, it would still be insufficient to account for such language as Paul uses: "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." For the mere occasion, constant though it may be, has no essential connection with the result. There is only a surface connection. And, as we should expect from the character of the relation, it is only occasional, by no means general.

But besides the origin of sin in man, the specially evil nature of certain sins may cause the part of human nature to which they belong to be called *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, the *sinful part*.

But who can say deliberately that sins of the flesh have such a distinctive pre-eminence? No Christian would attempt to palliate them, or to wink at them as venial vices. But if any pre-eminence is to be named, it belongs to such sins of the spirit, rather than the sensual nature, as selfishness, malice, revenge, and the like.

What, then, is the reason of this use of *σάρξ*, to denote man's sinful nature? I think that we may find the key to an explanation of it in the preceding discussion of its other uses. We have seen that it is used to denote humanity, both in the concrete and the abstract, partly at least because through it the race is propagated. Humanity, which on the natural side owes its continuance to the *σάρξ*, is itself called *σάρξ*. Natural and sarkikal are therefore convertible terms in reference to man. On the other side the spirit, *πνεῦμα*, is that through which man is connected with the divine and supernatural, and specially in the new birth. It is there that the Divine Spirit works, implanting the germs of a new life, and so spiritual and divine or supernatural, are also convertible terms in regard to man. To this, let it be added, that the natural man, connected with the race through the *σάρξ*, is sinful, while the new man, connected with God through the *πνεῦμα*, is holy, and does it seem strange that *σάρξ* should itself be used to denote the sinful natural man, and *πνεῦμα* the holy renewed man? It is simply resolved into this: the former is that through which man, in his natural state, is descended from a sinful race, and inherits a sinful nature, and it is used to denote that nature; while the latter, is that through which and in which God implants a new divine life of holiness, and it is used to denote that life.