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Permit #361

A new creation focus through Colossians ...

## Overcoming Fleshly Indulgence

One of the characteristics of members of the human race is feeling frustrated over their own weaknesses of the flesh. Some, of course, never admit to having any such weaknesses, or refuse to ever try to deal with themselves. But there are those who at times in their lives, or when certain circumstances have occurred, who are willing to look at those moral or character failures, and who then are upset or angry at themselves for having falling short of the glory of God. They then, not knowing about the principles of God for victory, or not understanding how to

apply those principles, are open to man-made "solutions." "These have," Paul avers, "the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Colossians 2:23).

▲ **Doctrine of penance** — One widely accepted teaching, promulgated by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern or Greek Catholics, is *penance*. Part of penance is that some penalty has to be paid for the commission of sin. Sometimes, then, as exemplified by the late Pope John Paul II, a person will whip themselves or have themselves whipped in order to penalize the body for sins committed. Sometimes they will crawl miles on their knees, ending up bloodied at some shrine in punishment. The idea is that this sort of hurting the body somehow expiates the sin that the "bad, bad body" committed. Millions upon millions believe in the efficacy of such severe treatment of the body.

▲ **Other self-abasement** — There are many more types of self-abasement practiced by individuals in their various religions. Some guy sitting on a flag pole — for years at a time — might generate curiosity for a moment in passers by, but it does not help him to overcome fleshly indulgences. The privations of a monkish existence may seem to help a person be holy, but the inspired record notes that there is "no value" in such isolation from the sinful human race; he still has to live with himself. "Fasting" for the purpose of punishing the body is similarly a waste. The problem is that fleshly indulgence does not originate in the body; the body itself is not sinful. As Jesus noted, "For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts", etc. (Mark 7:21). The human heart is corrupted from within, so beating on the body will not change the heart.

▲ **Focus on Christ** — The way God works is to take the focus off the sin-stricken, guilt-laden individual and to have him focus on Christ — specifically Christ in glory. The gospel of Christ is presented to the lost, describing how Jesus died to pay the price for the sinner's transgressions, how He rose from the dead and set in motion the eventual resurrection of the righteous to eternal life, and how He ascended to glory as the great High Priest and King. The repentant individual, upon believing the message of the Christ, confesses Jesus as Lord and is then immersed in the name of Jesus. He is thus buried with Christ, and raised to walk in newness of life, raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies. "If then you have been raised up with Christ," the apostle positively challenges the brethren, "keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). The focus clearly is to be "on things above, where Christ is."

The transforming power of the gospel to change the inner man is found in the revelation of Christ in glory to the inner man. When a person is immersed into Christ, "the body of the flesh" is removed in a spiritual circumcision. The "veil is removed in Christ"; the inner man in conjunction with the scripture can see the glory of the Lord, and be transformed into that same image. The only "punishment" inflicted is that the old man of sin is crucified, or that the individual's spiritual heart is circumcised. This is the exciting prescription that will enable the sincere person to overcome fleshly indulgence.

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