The body of sin

Pandit teaches series

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### Introduction

This Bible study is presented in the form of a dialogue between a Bible teacher, Pandit, and his Kannada-speaking student in South India. At the end you will find some questions that can be used for group discussions. The groups should have 5–8 members each. The Bible quotations are based on the World English Bible (WEB) translation.

### Dialogue

Student

Sir, in our church cell group last week one brother asked the question, “How can we do away with the body of sin?” We discussed this question for a while, but we really did not make any progress. Could you, please, answer this question for us?

Pandit

This expression is a quotation from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). An expression like this can easily be misunderstood. It must be seen in the context of the teaching of the whole New Testament. So before I can answer your question in a good way, I must give you some background information. Do you have the time and patience for this?

Student

Yes, of course. I really want to know the answer to this important question. So please take all the time that you need.

Pandit

When God had finished creating the earth and everything on it, the Bible says that God saw all that he had made, and it was very good (Genesis 1:31). But as you know, it did not remain good. What happened?

Student

Sin came into the world, because Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

Pandit

Yes, and since that day God’s plan to save mankind started to unfold. First through some god-fearing individuals in the Old Testament. Then through God’s covenant with the people of Israel. And finally the plan was fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1.29).

So the first background question we must answer is: What happens when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior?

Student

I know! Our sins are forgiven!

Pandit

Yes, that is part of the answer. But let us look at some Bible verses to get a more complete answer.

The apostle Peter writes like this is his first letter: “Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle Paul uses the same expression: “We who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:2). And later in the same chapter he writes: “We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be in bondage to sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:6–7).

So when we accepted Jesus as our personal Savior not only our sinful past was forgiven. Salvation is not only the forgiving – or covering up – of sinful actions, but it is a change of our innermost personality. It is the death of our old life and the birth of our new life. That is why we can use the expression “to be born again” about our salvation experience. Jesus himself uses this expression when he speaks to Nicodemus in John’s gospel: “Most assuredly, I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3) and “Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John3:7). This new life is not something we ourselves can give birth to. No, it is the result of the death of our old self, which in its turn is the result of the death of Jesus on the cross. Paul said that our old man was crucified with Jesus (Romans 6:6). And with the death of our old man we have been freed from sin and we should not live in sin any longer. So we are no longer slaves to sin. Instead we can live for righteousness.

Further on in the same chapter in Romans Paul writes like this: “But now that you have been made free from sin and have become slaves to God, the advantage you get is sanctification, and the end result is eternal life” (Romans 6:22). Here he uses another expression “you have made set free from sin.” So when we experience salvation through Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. No, we have been set free from sin and as a result of that we should live lives that lead to holiness. And the end result of our holiness is eternal life.

Let us look at one more verse, this time from Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae: “When you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh (your sinful nature), God made you alive together with Christ, when he forgave us all our trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). Until we accepted Jesus as our personal Savior, we were dead in our sins and trespasses because of our sinful nature. But in Christ, God forgave us all our sins and trespasses and made us alive with Christ. So in Christ our sinful nature (or flesh, or our body of sin, Romans 6:6) is dead.

Student

Yes, Pandit, I believe you are right about this. But at the same time I do not see how it is really possible that we as believers are set free from sin (Romans 6:22), when we constantly have to struggle with sin in our daily lives. To me it seems as if our personal experience contradicts Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter 6. Please explain this to me.

Pandit

Before I explain this to you, I need to answer a second background question: What is the meaning of the expressions “body of sin” and “sinful nature”? [dEha or sharIra or sharIrabhAva in Kannada]

Student

I suppose these expressions refer to our human bodies, Sir.

Pandit

Not really. You know that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language and that you and I have to read the Bible in translations – perhaps in English or in Kannada or in some other language that we know well – as we do not have sufficient knowledge of the original languages. So the translators must have a correct understanding of what the words in the original languages mean in order to produce a good translation. Sometimes a word in the original language has more than one meaning and then the translator may have to use different words depending on what the word actually means in each context.

Student

I understand what you mean. When I use an English dictionary I often come across words that have more than one meaning. Sometimes that can be very confusing.

Pandit

Yes, most words are easy to translate. But with some words you have to struggle to find out the correct meaning of the word in each sentence. One such word is the Greek word sarx, which is the word that the apostle Paul uses when he writes: “You were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh (or your sinful nature), God made you alive together with Christ” (Colossians 2:13) and “make no provision for the flesh (or the sinful nature), to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14).

The Greek word sarx has at least three distinct meanings. The first meaning is “flesh or muscle” [mAmsa or mAmsa khanDa in Kannada], which is the fleshy part of a human or animal body. The second meaning is “body” [dEha, mai, oDalu, sharIra in Kannada], such as the natural body of a human person. The third meaning is “sinful nature” [paapapUrita svabhAva in Kannada]. One English Bible translation also uses expressions such as “the acts of the sinful nature,” “the sinful mind,” “the mind of sinful man,” “sinful man,” “the standards of this world,” and “the sinful world” for this third meaning of the Greek word sarx.

The first meaning of the Greek word sarx is not a problem for the translators, because the text in which it is used will clearly show the meaning of “flesh on the body of a person or of an animal.”

But the second and third meanings of the Greek word sarx are much harder to keep separate, because the text will not always show which meaning the author has in mind. So the translator must decide whether the author means “the natural human body” or “the sinful nature of man” when he translates the Greek word sarx into English or Kannada.

Student

Yes, Sir. I think I understand what you mean. But could you please make it even clearer to me, so that I can explain this point to my friends in our church cell group?

Pandit

I think I can! In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul uses the expression “the desires of the flesh” [dEhada AshegaLu in Kannada] (Romans 13:14). Let us take this expression and think about what it could mean in the second and third meaning of the Greek work sarx.

So first you answer this question: What are the desires of our “natural human body”?

Student

Do you mean the needs of our human bodies, the cravings of the natural bodies that we as human beings have?

Pandit

Yes, exactly! So please tell me: What the desires of our bodies?

Student

When I am hungry and thirsty, my body desires food and water. When I am tired after a long day’s work, my body desires rest and sleep. When I am sweaty and dirty, my body desires a bath. Is this what you mean, Sir?

Pandit

Yes. Our natural human bodies have a lot a natural human desires! To go to the toilet is such a natural need or desire. To spend time together with our family and friends is another such natural need or desire. For husband and wife to have a sexual relationship is another such natural need or desire.

Student

So you mean that all these things – food, drink, rest, sleep, bath, going to the toilet, spending time with family and friends, marital sex – are desires of the “flesh” [dEhada AshegaLu in Kannada] in the second meaning of the Greek word sarx? So, is this what the apostle Paul is writing about in his letter to the Romans “not to think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14)?

Pandit

No, please wait one second! If we read the context, we will find that the apostle Paul is not at all writing about eating or drinking or sleeping or going to the toilet or having sex with your husband or wife. Let us read the whole passage from chapter 13 in Romans: “The night is almost over, and the day is near. Let us therefore throw off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us live honorably, as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and lustful acts, not in strife and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:12–14). As you can see from the context, Paul is here using the Greek word sarx in the third meaning, which is “sinful nature” [pApapUrita svabhAva in Kannada]. The context shows that the “desires of the flesh” [dEhada AshegaLu in Kannada] in this text is everything that is against the Lord Jesus Christ. And then Paul gives some examples of what he means: works of darkness, indecent living, reveling (which means wild parties where you are drunk and do a lot of bad things), drunkenness, sexual promiscuity (which means having sex with other persons than your husband or wife), lustful acts (leading a shameless and bad life), strife, jealousy. So Paul is not at all referring to the normal functions of our natural human bodies. Have you now understood the difference between the second and the third meaning of the Greek word sarx?

Student

Yes, I have. You have made your point very clear, Sir. But it there not some kind of connection between “our natural human bodies” and “our sinful nature”?

Pandit

Yes, there is indeed. Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, sin has affected our natural human bodies. Instead of satisfying the body’s natural desire for food, man overeats and becomes a glutton. Instead of satisfying the body’s natural desire for drink, man drinks too much and becomes a drunkard. Instead of satisfying the body’s natural desire for rest and sleep, man avoids work and becomes lazy. Instead of satisfying the body’s natural desire for marital sexual unity, man get involved in illicit sex and in unnatural sexual activities. And so on. This shows that the acts of the sinful nature, the mind of sinful man, and the standards of this world can affect our natural human bodies. So now we have to come back to your initial question: “How can we do away with the body of sin?” But before I answer this question properly, there are some more background questions that I need to deal with.

Student

Please go ahead, Sir. But I am eagerly waiting for your answer to my initial question!

Pandit

Please be patient! Now I want to answer this third background question: What should be our attitude towards our natural human bodies? What do you say?

Student

Well, Sir. If I remember correctly the apostle Paul writes somewhere that nothing good lives in me, so I suppose that we should have a negative attitude towards our human bodies.

Pandit

Come on, son, is that really what the apostle Paul says? Let us read the whole sentence from which you quoted only a few words: “For I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing” (Romans 7:18). In this verse Paul does not write about “our natural human bodies” but about “our sinful nature” [pApapUrita svabhAva in Kannada]. So this verse does not say that we should have a negative attitude towards our human bodies!

Let us first look a little at India. In our Indian culture we have the ideal of the sanyasi, the ascetic, who leaves normal human life to go to the forest or to the mountain cave to do penance. He gives up food and drink. He gives up family life and human fellowship. He does not take bath or shave or cut his hair. He may even impose all kinds of suffering on his body. We can often find in our Indian culture that bodily suffering is seen as a method to gain spiritual merit. Once as I was travelling in South India I met a large group of pilgrims on their way to a temple. They were walking barefoot and their feet were scarred and cracked and bleeding. If you suffer more on a pilgrimage, you will get more benefit out of it! Another time I saw a temple festival, where the devotees were pulling this huge wooden cart with the idol. They were not pulling it with their hands. But they had metal hooks through the skin and the flesh of their shoulders, and as they were pulling the cart they were in much pain and suffering. And a lot of blood was pouring down their bodies. When I asked some people, why the devotees were pulling the cart in this way, they said that bodily suffering and pain gives spiritual merit. These examples show that in our country many people have a very negative attitude towards our natural human bodies.

Student

Yes, Sir. I think that you are right about this. This negative attitude toward our human bodies is very common in India. But please tell me: what was the attitude toward the natural human body during New Testament times?

Pandit

As the apostle Paul was travelling in Asia Minor and Greece, he was ministering in the Greek culture. In that culture many philosophers made a very sharp distinction between body and spirit. They looked upon the spirit as a person’s real being. They said that the spirit is good and that it that is held prisoner in the body, which they considered evil. So they looked upon life as a constant struggle between the good spirit and the evil body. And they taught that the purpose of life – or “salvation” if we want to use that term – was to deliver the spirit of man from the bondage of the human body.

Student

So the apostle Paul looked upon the spirit of man as something good and the human body as something bad?

Pandit

No, I did not say that! Please listen! I said that this view was a common view of the Greek culture of those days. I did not say that this was the view that the apostle Paul had. As a matter of fact the Jewish culture has always had a very positive attitude toward the human body. This is true about Jewish people even today. If we read the Old Testament keeping this question in mind, we will find that it sometimes even has what we could call a materialistic or worldly view on life. We read in the book of Proverbs or the book of Psalms that the blessings of God lead to a good life in this world: good health, sufficient food to eat, material wealth, prosperity to the land and so on. Much of the focus is on life in this present world.

Student

So the Jewish culture and the Old Testament have a positive view of natural human body. But what about the New Testament?

Pandit

The New Testament presents a much less materialistic or worldly viewpoint. But even then the New Testament has a positive view of the human body. I will just give you two examples of this. First a quotation from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus: “For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes it and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. For we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:29–30). Here the apostle Paul says that it is normal human behavior to love our body and that we should take care of it. Then he widens the perspective and says that we as believers constitute the body of Christ. And Christ takes care of his body, his church. In the same way we should take care of our human bodies.

Christ lives in his church, his body, through the Holy Spirit. But not only that. The Holy Spirit also lives in the individual human bodies of those who have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. The apostle Paul puts it in this way in his fist letter to the believers in Corinth: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). The picture that Paul uses here is a very strong one. Our body is a temple, where the Holy Spirit dwells. The Holy Spirit is holy and he wants to dwell in a place that is holy. So our bodies should be holy and sanctified. This means that we should take care of our bodies and not let the evil of this world take control of it. We should not give room for the sinful nature [pApapUrita svabhAva in Kannada] in our lives. One way of doing this is to flee sexual immorality, which Paul says in the preceding verse (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Student

So how do we do this? Now we are back to my initial question: How do we do away with the body of sin?

Pandit

Before we come to that question, I want answer a fourth background question: What is the New Testament perspective on life?

Student

You have just said that the New Testament has a positive view on the human body. This must mean that it also has a positive perspective on life.

Pandit

Yes – and no. What I really want to explain to you is that the New Testament views our human life from a certain perspective. It views our human life in the light of eternity. Let us look at a passage in Paul’s letter to the believers in Philippi: “For many walk, as I have often told you before and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their god is their belly. And their glory is in their shame. They think about earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, from where we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself” (Philippians 3:18–21).

In this text the apostle Paul is writing about two different groups of people. In the first group we find the unbelievers. They are the enemies of Jesus Christ. They don’t believe in the message of salvation through the death of Jesus on the cross or in his resurrection. They are worldly people, who always think about worldly matters. They worship the things of this world. They think so much about good food that their stomach becomes their god. They brag about things that they should be ashamed of. Their future is destruction. That means that they will not be saved.

In the second group we find us who believe in Jesus. We have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. We are waiting for Jesus to come back and take us to heaven, which is our real home. And when that happens our simple human bodies will be changed. The bodies that we have in this world are weak, because we live in a fallen world. We live in a world that is affected by the fall, by sin and destruction. And this can be seen in our bodies. Our bodies get tired. Sometimes we get sick. Sometimes we have pain. We all get old and weak, and finally our bodies die. But when Jesus comes back our lowly bodies will be changed and they will be like his glorious body. This is our hope. This is our perspective on life as believers. We are guests and pilgrims in this world. This world is not our real home. We are eagerly waiting for Jesus to come back and take us to where we really belong. We are citizens of heaven!

Student

Yes, Sir, I understand this point. But how does this perspective affect how we live our lives?

Pandit

One consequence of this perspective is that the conditions of our life here in this world are not as important as we often think they are. The apostle Paul writes like this about his own life in his letter to the believers in Philippi: “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that now at last you have revived your concern for me. Of course, you had concern even before, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in any real need, because I have learned to be happy with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in all circumstances, being well fed or hungry, living in plenty or in need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:10–13). In his long service for Christ and during many journeys, Paul had learnt to be satisfied and content in any kind of circumstance. He had experienced all kinds of conditions during his life. Sometimes he had suffered because he had nothing. At other times he had had plenty. Sometimes he had been starving. At other times he had had plenty of food to eat.

As I said before: We believers are guests and pilgrims in this world. This world in not our real home, but we are citizens of heaven and that is where our real home is. Because of this, the material conditions of our life in this world are not really important. It does not really matter whether we are rich or poor. It does not really matter whether we are healthy or sick. It does not really matter whether we live a peaceful life or are persecuted. It does not really matter whether we live alone or have a big family. It does not really matter whether we are well fed or hungry.

Student

I find what you say quite shocking, Sir. I never considered this perspective on our life as believers in this world. I always thought that God wanted us to have a good life, to have enough food to eat, to be strong and healthy, to have a good house, to be successful.

Pandit

But have you not read about Jesus when he spoke to a teacher of the law about his own homelessness during the years of his ministry? “The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).

Have you not read about the believers in Jerusalem that they were so poor that Paul he took up a collection among the churches in Greece to give to them: “But now I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Romans 15:25–26).

Have you not read the apostle Paul’s own testimony in his second letter to the church in Corinth: “I have worked much harder than they. I have been in prisons more often, been flogged more severely, and often been close to death. Five times I received the forty minus one lashes from the Jews. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered shipwreck. I spent a night and a day adrift at sea. I have been on frequent journeys. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own people, and in danger from Gentiles. I have been in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers. I have toiled and labored. I have often been sleepless. I have been hungry and thirsty. I have often gone without food, suffering from cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:23–27).

Finally, have you not read the wonderful description in the book of Revelation of Christian believers, of all those who belong to the Lamb: “These are those who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb’s blood. Therefore they are before the throne of God. They serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will never again be hungry. They will never be thirsty. The sun will not beat on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb who sits in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of the water of life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:14–17).

Student

Of course I have, Sir. But I have never before quite understood that our lives in this world is just temporary and that our real home is heaven. One reason could be that I have listened to some cassettes where one preacher speaks about God wanting to bless us materially. He says that if we live our lives according to God’s will, he will surely bless us with money, good health and success in life.

Pandit

Yes, this kind of teaching has been quite common, especially in America, which is a very materialistic country. This teaching is sometimes called theology of prosperity. I think that it is a heresy, which does not have the support of the Bible. The New Testament teaches us that the conditions of our lives as believers in this world can vary. There may be abundance or poverty, hunger or plenty of food, sickness or health, success or failure. But our trust is in Jesus and our hope is heaven. There is well-known English song that says: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

Student

Sir, from now on I will have this perspective on my life! But I have one question in this connection: Do you mean that it is wrong for a believer to ask God for physical healing, or success in an exam, or for a job appointment, or for food in times of starvation?

Pandit

Of course not! Our God is our heavenly Father, who really cares for us. He is our healer. He is our provider. He is our protector. He wants us to depend on Him for our daily needs. I often come back to Jesus’ beautiful words in Matthew’s gospel: “Therefore I tell you. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink. And do not worry about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and is not the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the sky. They do not sow. Nor do they reap and gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add anything at all to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his gory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink? or ‘What will we wear?’ For the Gentiles strive for all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first God’s Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:25–34).

I think that these words of Jesus show us how our attitude to life should be. We should be living our lives trusting God and being dependent on Him. Every day is a blessing from God. Good health is a blessing from God. A job that will bring income to the family and food on the table is a blessing from God. But we should not think that our prosperity or our success in this life is the result God blessing us and rewarding us because we have worked so hard for him, or because we are so good or so spiritual or so holy! God blesses us because He is good. He does not necessarily bless us because we are good. Do you understand the difference?

Student

Yes, I do. You mean that we can never earn God’s blessings through our goodness or our sanctified lives. But then I have another question for you: If this is the case, does it really matter how I live my life? What is the benefit of being good? What is the benefit of being sanctified?

Pandit

Of course there is! In two different ways. First: there are a lot of benefits even from a worldly point a view. If we are good to people, it is more likely that they will be good to us. If we avoid bad habits, like drinking, smoking, sexual promiscuity, it is more likely that we will be healthier and live longer. If we do not waste money on bad habits, we will have more money to feed our family and to give good education for our children. If we do not break the laws of our country, we are more likely not to have trouble with the authorities or end up in prison.

But even more important is the spiritual point of view. So now I come to my fifth and final background question: Why should believers be holy and live sanctified lives?

Student

That is a simple question, Sir! I know the answer! God is holy and he wants us – his children – to be holy like him.

Pandit

Yes, you are right. During the Old Testament times God spoke these words to the people of Israel: “Speak to the whole assembly of Israel and tell them: ‘You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy’” (Leviticus 19:2). In the New Testament the apostle Peter quotes these words: “But just as he who called you is holy, so you yourselves be holy in all your behavior. For it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:15–16).

The apostle Paul uses the Greek word for holy about the believers several times in his letters. I will give you a few of these references (but note that the Kannada translation sometimes uses other words). Writing to the church in Corinth Paul addresses the believers like this: “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints, together with all those in everyplace who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul says here that the believers in Corinth were called to be holy (to be saints). But not only they, all believers are called to be holy. To the believers in Colossae Paul writes like this: “Clothe yourselves therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Colossians 3:12). To the church in Thessalonica Paul writes: “For God called us not to impurity but to holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:7) and earlier in the same letter: “And may the Lord strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

So from these, and other, New Testament verses, it is very clear that God wants His people to be holy and to live sanctified lives, as we wait for Jesus Christ to return and take us to our heavenly home.

Student

Yes, Sir. I understand this and I know that there are many more texts in the New Testament that speak about holiness and sanctification. So what do we need to do to become holy?

Pandit

The first thing we have to understand is that the foundation for our holiness is the redemptive work that Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary. This is something I mentioned already in the beginning of this lesson. When we accept Jesus as our personal Savior he becomes our righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). The letter to the Hebrews puts it in this way: “We have been made sanctified through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). And the apostle Peter expresses it like this, when he speaks to the people who believe in Jesus: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9). So from one point of view God’s holiness is given to us through the salvation of Jesus Christ. Holiness is nothing that we deserve, but it is God’s gift to his people.

But on the other hand we have to understand that the Bible also teaches us that we have a responsibility for our holiness. Writing to the church in Corinth the apostle Paul puts it in this way: “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). The letter to the Hebrews instructs the readers to make every effort to be holy: “Pursue peace with all men and the holiness; without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14). The apostle Peter tells his readers that they ought to lead lives of holiness and godliness (2 Peter 3:11) waiting for the Lord Jesus to return. So even if holiness is God’s gift to his people, we have the responsibility to use this gift. There are several Bible passages that deal with this topic. Here we will just look at one of them, taken from Paul’s letter to the church in Colosse: “If you then were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, appears, then you will also be revealed with him in glory. Therefore put to death whatever is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, depraved passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming [on those who are disobedient]. You also once walked in these ways, when you were living that life. But now you must put away things as these: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to each other, since you have put off your old man with his practices and have put on the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator” (Colossians 3:1–10). Here Paul uses expressions that show what the believer should do: seek the things that are above, put to death all that belongs to our earthly, sinful nature, get rid of our old self and put on our new self according to the image of Christ our Lord and Savior.

Student

So now, Sir, through these verses from the letter to the believers in Colosse you have finally answered my initial question: “How can we do away with the body of sin”? The answer must be: We have to focus spiritual things and not on earthly things. We have to do away with all our bad habits. We have to get rid of everything in our lives that is part of the old, sinful nature. Is this what you are saying, Sir?

Pandit

Yes – and no. These verses give only part of the answer, as they only focus on the human aspect of our sanctification.

But before we continue with this matter, I want to take up something that is very important. It has to do with the difficult question: How should we live our lives as believers in this world in the light of eternity, knowing that we are guests and pilgrims in this world, waiting for Jesus to return any moment? One way to describe the problem is to say that our life as believers in this world is torn between two poles, two extreme alternatives. The first alternative is to sacrifice everything for the spreading of the gospel, every moment expecting Jesus to return and end this present age, to only focus on “Christian” matters, only read the Bible, only sing Christian songs, pray all the time, have no “worldly” interests, only be involved in church work. The other alternative is to responsibly live a more or less “normal” life in this world: to get a good education, to get a good job, to get married, to take good care of our family, to live a normal life and have normal interests – read newspapers and different kinds of books, watch sports on TV, play cricket with friends, go sightseeing, enjoy good food.

Student

Yes, I understand what you mean, Sir. I myself feel torn between these two alternative ways of living my life. Sometimes I feel that I should spend every day in fasting and prayer in the presence of God. At other times I feel that I need to study for my exam and help my parents with household chores. Sometimes I feel that I want to give up everything, discontinue my college education and leave my parents, to go out and preach the gospel, as Jesus will return very soon. At other times I feel that I should finish college, get married and become a responsible citizen, as it may take some more years before Jesus returns.

Often I think that a person who gives up everything for God – family, friends, house, vehicle, nice clothes and all the comforts of life, even a good education – must be a more holy and sanctified person than I am. And one of my friends spends four hours every day reading the Bible and praying, so I am sure he is a more holy person than I am.

Pandit

My friend, it is not easy to know how we should live our lives. It is also not easy to know if one person is more sanctified than another person. One person may read the Bible a lot, but still be selfish and hard-hearted. One person may seem very holy and spiritual in church on Sunday, but have a bad reputation as an unreliable businessman on Monday and Tuesday.

How we live our lives and what choices we make, must be a personal decision. We can set our own standards. We can make our own commitments. But we cannot force other believers to do as we do. And we cannot condemn other believers who do not do as we do. And also: We cannot boast about our holy life, and we must not think that our own life is more sanctified than the life of our fellow believer. This would be pride and it would reveal that we are far less holy or sanctified than we think we are! Only God, who knows each man’s deepest secrets, can judge. As the apostle Paul says: “Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness. He will disclose the purposes of the hearts. Then each man will get his praise from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Student

Thank you, Sir, for you valuable advice. So now you have given two points about what we need to do to become holy. The first point is that God’s holiness is given to us through the salvation of Jesus Christ. Holiness is nothing that we deserve, but it is God’s gift to his people. When we received Jesus Christ as our personal Savior we were set free from sin and Christ became our righteousness, our holiness and our redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). The second point is that the Bible teaches that we as believers have a responsibility for our holiness, that we should purify ourselves, put to death everything that belong to our earthly nature, get rid of all our bad habits and perfect our holiness, work on our sanctification.

So are these the answers to my original question: “How can we do away with the body of sin”?

Pandit

Understanding these two points will give you part of the answer to your question. But the rest of the answer – and that is the most important part of it! – you will find in a key text in Paul’s letter to the believers in Galatia: “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh (the sinful nature). For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. They are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing the things that you desire. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The works of the flesh are obvious: adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, outburts of anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I also did before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16–25).

The first thing you must understand is that this text is not about our natural human bodies. The Kannada word sharIrabhAva, which is used five times in these ten verses, does not refer to our natural human bodies. No, it refers to the sinful nature of man. In verses 19–21 we find a list of some of the acts of the sinful nature. This is not a complete list of the acts of the sinful nature. In other New Testament texts we find other such lists with things like: falsehood, stealing, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, slander, malice (Ephesians 4:25–31), greed, impurity, vulgar talk, obscene joking, empty words (Ephesians 5:3–6), fornication, evil desire, abusive language (Colossians 3:5–8), conceit, disputes about words, obsession with controversy, malicious talk, evil suspicions (1 Timothy 6:4), selfishness, love of money, boastfulness, arrogance, blasphemy, disobedience, ungratefulness, lack of love, lack of forgiveness, lack of self-control, brutality, treachery, rashness (2 Timothy 3:2–4).

All these bad things are results of the sinful nature (the flesh). But we who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature (the flesh) with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). So what should we do instead?

Student

Sir, we should walk by the Spirit, as it says in Galatians 5:16. What does that mean?

Pandit

In this text the apostle Paul uses two expressions that mean the same thing: we should walk by the Spirit and we should be led by the Spirit (verse 18). They both mean that the Holy Spirit should control our lives. When we allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, the result will be the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). These things are expressions of a holy and sanctified life!

When we belong to Christ, our sinful nature has been crucified. Now we live by the Spirit and we should walk by the Spirit (or keep in step with the Spirit, verse 25). How do we do that?

Student

Please tell me, Sir!

Pandit

We invite the Holy Spirit to control our lives! We just do not give any chance for the sinful nature to control our lives. When we read the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament and discover something in our life that seems to belong to the sinful nature, we should immediately ask the Holy Spirit to take it away. The Holy Spirit lives in us who believe in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul puts it like this: “Don't you know that you are the temple of God and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16) and “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and make us holy. He is holy, as God is holy, and He wants to make us holy. But we have to allow him to do so! Paul prayed like this for the believers in Ephesus: “I pray that according to the glorious riches of the Father, he may strengthen you in your inner being with power through his Spirit” (Ephesians 3:16).

So now I think that I have given you the answer to you question: “How can we do away with the body of sin”?

Student

Yes, you have, Sir. But before we finish this lesson, could you please repeat you answer in a short way? That will be very helpful, both for me and for my friends in my church cell group.

Pandit

All right, I will summarize the answer in three brief points:

1. It is not in our own power to do away with the body of sin (the sinful flesh). But this happens when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, through his redeeming work on the cross of Calvary. Our old self was crucified with him and our body of sin (the flesh) was done away with, so that we no longer should be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6–7). When we accepted Jesus as our Savior, God’s Holy Spirit took his dwelling in us. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and he lives in us (1 Corinthians 6:19).

2. As long as we live in this fallen world, our old sinful nature (the flesh) pops up its ugly head and tries to control our lives. It is our responsibility not to allow this to happen. We do not have any obligation to the sinful nature, the flesh (Romans 8:12)! As we read the New Testament and meditate on the teaching of the apostles and as we pray, God will show us things in our lives that are not in accordance with his will. By inviting the Holy Spirit to control our lives, we put off our old self, which is corrupted by its deceitful desires and we put on the new self, which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22–24). This is what the apostle Paul calls to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12) until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. It is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us (1 Corinthians 6:11). We can never become holy through our own efforts. Our job is to constantly invite the Holy Spirit to take control of our lives as we submit ourselves to his sanctifying and strengthening power. (Ephesians 3:16). The holy life that is the result of this process is not our own achievement, but altogether the work of the Holy Spirit. We must never boast about, or take pride in, our holy life or our sanctified living. It is all God’s grace (2 Thessalonians 1:11–12).

Student

Thank you very much, Sir! This has been a very interesting and useful lesson. I have taken note of all the Bible references and I will go through them one more time, so that I am well prepared when I meet my church cell group again next week. Good-bye!

Pandit

Good-bye, and may the Lord bless you!

### Questions for group discussion

Instructions

There should 5–8 persons in each group. Each person in the group should contribute to the discussion and share thoughts and experiences. Be careful that nobody speaks too much or dominates the discussion.

Questions

1. Which is the question that the student wants Pandit to answer?
2. Why do you think that it is a difficult question to answer? Please discuss!
3. Before Pandit answers this question, he deals with five background questions. Which are these background questions?
4. Summarize Pandit’s answer to the question: What happens when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior?
5. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
6. Summarize Pandit’s answer to the question: What is the meaning of the expressions “body of sin” and “sinful nature” [dEha or sharIra or sharIrabhAva in Kannada]?
7. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
8. Summarize Pandit’s answer to the question: What should be our attitude towards our natural human bodies?
9. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
10. Summarize Pandit’s answer to the question: What is the New Testament perspective on life?
11. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
12. Summarize Pandit’s answer to the question: Why should believers be holy and live sanctified lives?
13. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
14. The student asks Pandit this question: What do we need to do to become holy? Summarize Pandit’s answer to this question.
15. Do you agree with what Pandit says? Why? Why not?
16. At the end of the booklet Pandit summarizes his answer to the main question: How to do away with the body of sin? Read this summary one more time and try to memorize it.
17. Do you think that Pandit has given a good answer to this question? Please discuss!