

THE CARNAL MIND



In this article, we address what the Bible calls the carnal mind.

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

-Romans 8:6-9

In the Scriptures, the "old man," the "carnal mind," and the "flesh" are all terms that generally describe fallen human nature. However, the Biblical use of different vernacular suggests there are perhaps subtle distinctions. The "old man," obviously represents our old, sinful life apart from redemption, with its' tendencies and its vice. Praise God, if we are born-again, he has been buried with Christ and he remains as long as we are in union with our risen Lord. Nevertheless, the old man can be resurrected in but a moment's time should we step outside faith in Jesus. The "flesh" with its works, typifies the unregenerate experience, dominated by sin and independence from God. But it is the "carnal mind," our subject in this post, that constitutes the mentality and the motives that fuel a fleshly life. As Christians, we are to reject this mind with all diligence.

Ephesians 4:23-24 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

We see then, to put on the new man and to reject carnal reasoning is a choice we must make by grace, an act of our will. If we fail to act on this command, and many others throughout the Bible, our end is sure...

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death...

In this article, for our admonition, I want to outline some of the distinguishing marks of the carnal mind.

THE CARNAL MIND IS DEAD TO GOD

Romans 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Here, the Bible clearly teaches that carnality and spirituality are incompatible. There are only two classes of people: those who live after the flesh and those who walk in the Spirit. To live "after the Spirit" is to submit to God's Word and be led by the Holy Ghost through a vital, living relationship with Jesus Christ. To be carnally minded is merely to fail to do so. We must act by faith if we are to be a spiritual people. But to be carnal requires absolutely nothing but negligence. Carnality is the human tendency apart from divine grace. The false notion that we can simultaneously be both carnal and spiritual has crippled the modern church. Sadly, this false notion is the root to our acceptance of an unholy mixture in experience. We fail to see our duty to be spiritual. We expect to always harbor sin and carnality, but the Bible teaches no such thing. On the contrary, it is impossible to live both in the flesh and in the spirit, though we admit, we can go back and forth.

Romans 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you...

Today, it's popular to banter about such unbiblical terms as the "carnal Christian." What a clash of vocabulary. No two terms are more opposite as carnal and Christian, neither is there such an individual. When the Apostle Paul, referred to believers in Corinth as "carnal," he was not establishing a new category of believers. On the contrary, he was simply lamenting, "you are not acting like Christians, but like sinners," or at best "as new born believers." Carnality is never to be expected, much less tolerated, hence, let us be warned...

Romans 8:13 ...if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die

THE CARNAL MIND IS OPPOSED TO GOD

Romans 8:7a Because the carnal mind is enmity against God...

Enmity: (Greek) *ekh'-thrah*: Hostility; by implication a reason for opposition.

The carnal mind is irreversibly and relentlessly set in antagonism toward God.

Matthew 12:30a He that is not with me is against me...

All sinners hate God. Though this is an unpopular, yet Biblical fact. Yet, the mind that thinks for the sinner, if embraced by the saint, is just as opposed to the Lord Jesus. Those who are influenced by such a mind are not spiritually neutral, but unconsciously on a crusade against Christ.

Matthew 12:30b ...and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

"I'm only occasionally carnal," you may say. However, be warned, that mind will unknowingly and unconsciously disrupt the spiritual.

"(The Apostle) does not say it is opposed to God merely, but it is positive enmity. It is not black, but blackness; it is not at enmity, but enmity itself; it is not corrupt, but corruption; it is not rebellious, it is rebellion; it is not wicked, it is wickedness itself. The heart, though it be deceitful, is positively deceit; it is evil in the concrete, sin in the essence." -C. H. Spurgeon

THE CARNAL MIND IS SELF-CENTERED

Romans 8:7b ...for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The carnal are burdened for the kingdom of self instead of the kingdom of God. By selfishness, I mean, the carnal mind regards its own happiness supremely, though it is often masked, or concealed. Selfishness can be crafty, subtle, even religious, and slippery as a wet snake. Carnal men seek their own good for no other reason than because it is their own.

2 Timothy 3:1-2 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...

“Self is not only the seat and habitation, but the very life of sin; the works of the devil are all wrought in self; it is his peculiar workshop.” -L.E. Maxwell

Selfishness fosters the most dangerous of spiritual atmospheres. The carnal mind inspires the thought, "what's in this for me?" and this is its governing motto.

Isaiah 56:11 ...they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Though they are often unconscious of their state, the carnal seek above all else to be content, happy, and satisfied.

“Submission and suffering are utterly contrary to the flesh. The thing man loves more than anything else in the world is himself. The thing man wants is to have his own way and to enjoy himself. Suffering, therefore, always crosses man where self is alive. There, self refuses and rebels.”
-L.E. Maxwell

Selfishness is not above putting on a religious cloak to attain its ultimate goal. Yet, you will never see selfishness thankful, worshipful, or broken. No, selfishness is always self-aborbed, it is a bottomless pit that can never be satisfied. Let us understand, it is the essence of love to give, but selfishness is marked by a propensity to take. In my experience, there are only two types of folks in the church, there are givers and there are takers. These classes are reflections of character, not influence or instruction. I believe it is impossible to teach a man to be consistently selfless, as it is a disposition of heart. Takers take and givers give because it is their nature to do so.. And neither preaching, nor correction, nor pleading seems to ultimately effect these two classes. Now, I'm not implying that takers never give, or givers never take, but I'm speaking of the general posture of their character.

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

At the reading of such verses what comes to mind?

Takers think on how little they get, while givers think how little they give: you may recall the parable of the sheep and goats? It is a matter of nature. Thus, we must understand that the demarcation line that separates the giver from the taker is spirituality. When men truly walk in the Spirit they naturally come under the governing law of Christ.

Mark 12:30-31 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

On the other hand, selfishness, (and all subtle forms, including self-interest, self-promotion, self-pity, etc.) are all fruits of self-government. As patriotism is a byproduct of loyal submission to government so selfishness is a result of fixed devotion to self.

THE CARNAL MIND CANNOT PLEASE GOD

Romans 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Those who are directed by that mind have forfeited the ability to believe God.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him...

At the root of the carnal mind is the rejection of God's Word.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...

We cannot live a life pleasing to God apart from believing God's Word. And Biblical faith is always validated by action.

James 2:20 ...faith without works is dead?

Faith, is to consecrate ourselves by an act of our will, to God's Word. Today, so few are resolved to submit to God's Word. It is common, but tragic, to see men boldly, yet blindly violate on Sunday afternoon what was preached on Sunday morning. You cannot walk in faith if you insist on using the carnal mind to reason.

THE ANSWER FOR THE CARNAL MIND: THE MIND OF CHRIST

Philip. 2:3-5 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man

on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...

To choose the path laid before us by the Master is to adopt the mind of Christ. The man who embraces the mind of Christ freely surrenders His life to be governed by God's Word. In essence, this is what it is to be born-again. In the cross, the carnal mind gives way to the eternal mind of the Lord Jesus. Such a life will always be displayed by love, order, service, and sacrifice executed with joy. Yes, the spiritual man is a cheerful giver. To reject the carnal mind is to utterly distrust every thought, every philosophy, and every method not founded on the Word of God.

1 Corinthians 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Let us examine ourselves. We must not entertain this mind, the carnal mind, it is enmity against our God. We cannot do our own thing, we must...

Romans 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

–B.W.