

# Carnal—or Spiritual?

A young man approached me recently who was seriously in shock, because he was experiencing some sexual feelings going on in his body. And he came to me and said, “You know, I must be carnal.”

“Well,” I told him, “I’ve got good news for you. You happen to be a normal male. That’s the good news. You’re a normal member of the male species. And God made your body this way. It’s biochemistry, and you are designed to respond a certain way. It is not carnality.

“It’s what you *do* with these desires that reflects whether you are carnal or spiritual. And the spiritual man, just because he feels promptings within his body, doesn’t necessarily run out to satisfy his every need. A spiritual man learns to keep his body under subjection. He’s not dominated and controlled by his physical urges. He actually praises God. And you ought to be praising God that you’re normal!”

What matters is the mind. And why does the Holy Spirit make contact with the mind? The Bible says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:5, KJV

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:2. It’s the mind that is renewed! When you move into belief, and you confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Holy Spirit comes again for that day and renews your mind.

God gives you new thoughts. You might have hated someone your whole life, and God will give you a new feeling toward that person. Compassion will be there. Suddenly you are confronted with a new standard in your life—the life of Christ.

## University of the Mind

Our mind is like a university. It has all these faculties. There's the area of reason—there's the area of appetite. Some people think that if they're born again, they should never have a temptation of appetite again. There's an area that has all the senses in it—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching. And the sexual area of our lives is controlled by a faculty of the mind. There's the area of the will. And of course, the area of emotions.

So what are we receiving new when Christ's mind is in us? New thoughts, feelings, and motives. That's what God is putting into your mind when He puts the mind of Christ in you. You don't have to try finding good motives. God will give you the right motives if you put on the mind of Christ. You don't have to work at changing your feelings. God will give you new feelings. And He'll give you new thoughts. He'll take you to a much higher level than you've been to before.

Think of the area concerning sexual motivation. To the young man I mentioned as this chapter began, I said, "As you seek the mind of Christ, the area that controls sexual activity in your brain is going to see that this is a gift from God that is to be used in such a way, when you enter into marriage, that it will bring about a unity resembling the relationship between the members of the Trinity. This will be a thought that will have never entered into your mind until now. It will be the mind of Christ in you."

This particular faculty will now be aroused to action in totally different ways. It doesn't matter what Hollywood says, or what all the glossy magazines say, God will be putting His ideal within you now.

What about appetite? Suddenly, those who are making food their God, or those who are using it as a means of salvation, will find that the faculty that controls appetite is going to show them a totally new perspective on appetite. They're going to see the importance of health, but it's not going to become the means of their salvation. It's now going to be in the context of their total development, to the glory of God. Those who've been overindulging appetite will now be shown that self-control is possible in the area of appetite. They will no longer be dominated by the thought, "I can't do anything about it"—because that faculty will now be aroused to action in new lines.

So you are not given new faculties. The faculty of appetite doesn't just suddenly change so that all you want now is perfect use of your appetite. It doesn't happen. But the faculties are sanctified.

In a sudden moment, it came clear to me: "Oh, I see—sanctification takes place in the mind. *Sanctification takes place in the mind!*"

If a faculty of my mind is aroused to action in new lines and my will is strengthened by Christ being in me, what if I then choose to act upon that new line of action? And what if I choose to act upon it regularly in my life? What will obviously happen in the faculty? It will be ennobled and sanctified, so that ultimately it is my natural inclination. It will become habitual in my life. This is the miracle of God's grace.

Notice again this beautiful statement from *The Desire of Ages*, page 668:

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.

Think about that. If you permit, Christ will so identify with your mind that in just doing what comes naturally now, you'll be doing His will! That's a beautiful thought, isn't it?

Even in thinking your own thoughts, you're thinking Christ's. This is the process of sanctification. And I want to tell you, it comes about by habitually responding to what the Holy Spirit has placed in your mind.

Now I have a question for you. What happens in the lives of true, spiritual believers after conversion? What kind of feelings do they have? What kind of temptations do they have? What is their attitude? On the other hand, what are the experiences, the characteristics of a person who claims to be a believer in Christ, but is still carnal?

### **One or the Other—But Not Both**

The Good News is, you cannot be both carnal and spiritual. You can only be one or the other. As we take a closer look here, we're going to find that a truly spiritual person has some rather interesting characteristics. And some of us may be tempted to confuse those with being carnal.

It's like that young man that came to me. He wasn't carnal at all. He was quite spiritual, but he thought he was carnal.

Romans 5 through 8 are the only chapters in scripture, really, that bring this out in any depth. And particularly, the passage between Romans 7:21 and Romans 8:8 helps everything else Paul is saying to fall into place. Here are those verses (NASB):

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus

Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

This is not an easy passage—especially chapter 7. But if you hear what Paul is saying, suddenly reality will strike you. It took me twenty-five years to understand this passage, but it doesn't need to take that long!

Focus now on Romans 7:25, NASB:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Please note that this verse is not suggesting that Paul is doing both of these things simultaneously. You need to read what precedes verse 25 and what immediately follows it. If you're thinking that he's saying he's doing these two things at the same time, you haven't heard what he has said before it or what comes immediately after it. And this is where most people run afoul in this passage. They think, "Well, how can you be serving both at the same time?"

You cannot! And you must allow verse 25 to be interpreted by what comes before it and what comes immediately after it. If you carefully study the context, you'll know exactly what Paul is trying to tell you. The key is in those verses.

Something very interesting comes out of Romans 7—the most misunderstood chapter Paul ever wrote. It's been the source of contention between theologians for almost 2,000 years and continues to be so to the present day. When I was at seminary, the professors were divided. One professor told us all that in Romans 7:25, Paul was in an unconverted state. The next professor told us that this was Paul in a

converted state. And we were left hanging. They would not commit themselves.

I want you to notice now some rather interesting facts. I'm going back to verses 16 to 18 in chapter 7:

But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. NASB.

I hope you saw these words: "I know that nothing good dwells in me." The words of what kind of man? You'll never hear a carnal man acknowledge that. Of course, you won't. These are the words of a spiritual man.

One of the "big ideas" we spent time discussing earlier in this book concerned our basic condition: helpless, powerless, sinful. And I want to tell you, the recognition and affirmation of that condition is the first step in the life of a person who turns to Jesus Christ. Such people become convicted of their true condition.

"I know that nothing good dwells in me."

That's a point of enlightenment that the vast majority of the human race never reach. No good thing. So very important.

And the first thing we notice in our passage of Romans 7 is that Paul is making a profound acknowledgement about himself. He's well aware of what sin has done to his human nature.

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." Verse 18, NASB.

If someone says the desire is present within him, what is he acknowledging? "The mind set on the flesh [the carnal mind] is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." Romans 8:7, NASB. But here we have a man who is wishing to do right. On one hand, he's acknowledging the truth of his own sinfulness, and on the other hand, acknowledging that he really wants to do right. But he's struggling! He is struggling to do right. Sound familiar to most of you?

Oh, yes, he's struggling to do it. There's no way that we're talking about a man here who's not spiritual. He's acknowledging his true condition and the fact that, even as a believer—a spiritual person and a true believer—there is a struggle going on within himself.

So what's new? I never had a struggle until I became a believer. I used to just enjoy sin. I didn't even know it was sin! I just thought it was life. But then I became a believer, and oh, how things changed!

There is a struggle within spiritual believers. We have to acknowledge it. And it's important for us to identify the two sides of this struggle that go on within the life of a true believer.

It's time now to zero in closely on the context in Romans and allow Paul himself to give us the correct understanding of chapter 7, verse 25, where he describes the struggle he is having with the "law of God" and the "law of sin."

Let's first look, before verse 25, at chapter 7, verses 21-23:

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. NASB.

So here we have, on one hand, the law of my mind—or the law of God in the inner man. And on the other hand, we have the law of sin in the members of my body.

And now here's chapter 8, verse 2, coming after chapter 7:25: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." NASB.

So now we can see that Paul is equating the "law of sin" in chapter 7, verse 25, with "the law in the members of my body" and the "law of sin and of death."

And Paul's description of the "law of God"? It's "the law of God in the inner man," "the law of my mind," and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

Once you understand what Paul is really saying here about these two conflicting laws, it will revolutionize your life—because there *is* a struggle! Yes, there is! In fact, this kind of struggle—dare I suggest it—is *only* present in the experience of a truly spiritual person, a converted individual, someone who's born again into the kingdom of God. This is the only category of person on this earth that experiences this kind of struggle. This is also the reason that same category of person is in the gravest danger of becoming unstable. Because if you don't resolve this struggle, you remain like a house divided for the rest of your life, and you can de-stabilize yourself.

It took me years to realize that people become unstable when they're convicted one way—but they act differently. That sets up confusion in the human mind.

Does Paul resolve this struggle here? Yes, he does! There is a very real struggle going on in the experience of the true spiritual believer. And it is interesting what the struggle is. It's a struggle between the "law of my mind" and the "law in the members of my body." It's a struggle between the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (in my mind)—and the "law of sin and of death" (in the members of my body).

Now, Paul is endeavoring to teach us something very powerful here: that the struggle in the life of the believer is a struggle between the mind, which is now the mind of Christ, and the members of our bodies, which could bring us under the "law of sin and of death."

In our next and final chapter, we will explore more fully Paul's teaching about the carnal man—and the spiritual man.

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So what are we receiving new when Christ’s mind is in us? New thoughts, feelings, and motives. That’s what God is putting into your mind when He puts the mind of Christ in you. You don’t have to try finding good motives. God will give you the right motives if you put on the mind of Christ. You don’t have to work at changing your feelings. God will give you new feelings. And He’ll give you new thoughts. He’ll take you to a much higher level than you’ve been to before.

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