

Carnal or Spiritual?

by Wayne Goff

The apostle Paul stresses in Romans 8 that those who are “*in Christ Jesus*” should “*not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*” (v. 1). Every Christian would give lip service to the concept, but perhaps a little self-reflection would be worthwhile for all of us!

“The Things Of The Flesh”

“*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on things of the flesh...*” (Rom. 8:5).

Robertson L. Whiteside had this to say on the subject:

“To mind the things of the flesh is to give our time and attention to the things of this life. To do so is to leave God and our eternal welfare out of consideration. We need to be careful, for it is easy for us in our struggles to make a living to forget God and look only to our material interests...” [Commentary on Romans, pp. 171-172].

You see from his comment that one can mind “*the things of the flesh*” to the neglect of his spiritual well-being, and that constitutes a “*carnal person*”! I’m afraid that we too often think of someone who is committing those terrible sins of fornication, adultery, drug addiction, etc. as being the carnal ones. In fact, a person who **seems to be very good** in the eyes of the world, and sometimes in our eyes, could be **very carnal**!

Remember the parable of a certain rich man in Luke 12:16-21? He was rich, a successful farmer, with a bountiful crop, who wisely(?) chose to store his additional crops in bigger barns and then take his ease and eat, drink and be merry. Do you see anything wrong with this picture? Jesus did and said as much. God took his life that very night and his “soul would be required” of him — ***then whose will those things be?*** Jesus warning to us: “*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (v. 21)! This is the “*carnal man*” of Romans 8! He is not a bad person in the eyes of the world, but he is spiritually destitute while he takes care of the things of this life only. Americans should take note of this because it is our besetting sin.

“The Things Of The Spirit”

“*...But those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:5). Whiteside went on to say this:

“...To mind the things of the spirit is to look to the things that fit the spirit for acceptable service to God in this life and that will prepare it for the joys of the next life.”

So those who live according to the spirit mind the things that pertain to the Spirit’s instructions in God’s Word, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians that no man knows the things of God except the Spirit of God, Who was given to the apostles for the revelation of the mind of God! Those who “*live according to the Spirit*” read, study, understand, and follow these things! Paul even warned in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that “*the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” The “*natural man*” of this passage is the same as the “*carnal*” (worldly) man of Romans 8!

“Spiritually-Discerned”?

Yes, “*spiritually-discerned*” means a disciple of Christ has taken the time to develop a taste and ability to understand God’s Word. He begins as a babe in Christ who drinks spiritual “*milk*” (1 Pet. 2:2). As he matures, he eats the meatier things of the Word (Heb. 5:12-14). The Christian who thinks he is “*spiritual*” should ask himself exactly how much he studies, understands and practices God’s Word? I’m afraid there are too many malnourished believers who have not even considered whether or not they are “*spiritual*” according to Romans 8. Let this brief article be an “eye-opener” for you.

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