

I Am Carnal [Romans 7:14]

The dictionary says carnality is "relating to the physical." This definition is misleading because not everything physical is carnality (though it is carnal). There is such a thing as a carnal or physical need which is *not* carnality. Since the word refers to the flesh or the physical Paul could employ it to reference legitimate and wholesome physical needs which were often met by collections and the deacon's ministry [Romans 15:27]. And the writer to the Hebrews [7:16] could use it in discussing Melchizedek as not satisfying the physical requirement [NASB95] of being a descendent of Aaron to qualify as a priest [Hebrews 7:11-12].

"Carnal" is the biblical word for the "flesh" which speaks to a whole hierarchy of physical and emotional needs that cry out for immediate attention. But Christ now is in charge of our lives [Galatians 2:20]. In New Testament Greek there is a different word for a carnality that defines the "old" nature, and a carnality which describes a Christian not living the new life in Christ. Carnality, therefore, shows a lack of spiritual maturity [1 Corinthians 3:1]. In Romans 8:4 Paul contrasted being governed by "the flesh" (letting our physical drives and our own wants come first) instead of allowing God's Spirit to lead us. Carnality is always sinful [1 Corinthians 3:3-4].

Carnality is living for self and not for The Lord.

A Servant of Christ must represent the heart of Christ [Romans 5:7-8; Ephesians 5:25]. This is the opposite of "self." Colossians 3:5 speaks of "... lust, evil desires and greed," This in Biblical parlance is: "wanting more, getting more, having more, wanting more, getting more, having more, wanting more, (you get the picture). This is put in stark relief from God's *grace*, which speaks of *giving*: unmerited, unearned, unconditionally, unreservedly, unreciprocated,, unsolicited, unlimited, unendingly, and without favoritism. The basic distinction is the contrast between a giving heart and a greedy one [Ephesians 5:1-3, 5]. Carnality is another word for self love [2 Timothy 3:2-4]. A servant or slave of Christ *gives* everything they have and are for Him (He is first) whereas "self" takes.

But there is a simpler way to look at this by contrasting two ideas: What I *want* contrasted with what I *need*. Carnality is taking what one wants instead of receiving from God what one needs [Philippians 4:19]. In the Biblical world of Christian love, *needs* are recognized and met by the *allelous* principle, where God calls one to minister to another. [the Greek word, *allelous*, translates "one another" and represents a mutual and reciprocal giving in relation and is always plural] Christian community and heaven is based on this principle.

Carnality is a want "taken" and not a need "met."

In Luke 11:39 the word "greed" in the RSV reads: "extortion;" it is a "snatch and run." It is specifically *NOT* like Christ [Philippians 2:6 "not robbery"]. Greed takes; it does not wait to receive. Greed is a "want" never a "need" [Philippians 4:18]. "Want" always focuses on the "self" [what *I* want] whereas "need" is a legitimate (and I might add: divinely appointed) deficit that should be met by another [eg. Genesis 2:18]. *Wants* are selfish interests whereas *needs* are intended to be the recipients of some caring relationship.

Carnality takes for the emphasis is on one's "self."

The word "take" in the Bible is only a reflexive which puts the emphasis on the subject as acting somehow upon or for itself, and thus, "to take for one's self." There is a Greek phrase "if you might take it" [εαν αρεισθη] which colloquially means "if you like [or want] it" Other words associated with "to take" are "to choose" and "to prefer." See Philippians 1:22 and the word "choose." [The word "take" meaning "forgiveness" is a different word "to carry" away as in 1 John 3:5]. "Taking" is not "receiving." "To receive" in Scripture is *relational* emphasizing the recipient. to accept or welcome. The word is often associated with: friendship and hospitality [Matthew 10:40-41]. Before Christ, before we were Spirit-led, we followed "the self" which blurred the line between personal wants and needs, between taking and receiving, between a selfless love or one that objectified the person we claimed to love.

We might get motives jumbled but the distinction is clear between the old person we were and the new person we now are in Christ [Ephesians 4:24].

In heaven our "needs" will be met by Christ and in Christian community and there will be no selfishness, no greed, no taking, because we will want for nothing [Psalm 23:1].

The "One another" Principal of Scripture.

LOVE: John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (15:12) "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

COUNSEL: Colossians 3:16 "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

ACCEPTANCE: Romans 14:13 "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister."

FELLOWSHIP: Romans 15:5 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,"

SUPPORT: Romans 15:14 "I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another."

COMPASSION: 1 Corinthians 12:25 "so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."

FORGIVENESS: Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

HONESTY: Ephesians 4:25 "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."

RECONCILIATION: Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

SERVICE: Ephesians 5:19 "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,"

SUBMISSION: Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

I am carnal is a way of saying, "I am human." And this is not a bad thing unless we abuse the privilege of being human or, said another way, misuse the gift of our humanity which the Creator blessed us with. That misuse is carnality. We are biological beings, as science discovered, but we also have a soul and spirit. We are, by design, capable of social interaction and relationships with other humans and with God. Everything is not hormones, neurotransmissions, and genetic coding. These are simply the computer and keyboard; we are still typing out the history of our own actions.

Theologically speaking, if we did not have "free will" the entire Bible story of redemption collapses in on itself because we would be, animal like, limited to whatever behavior defined us. But we are capable of inspiration and invention, a limited gift of genius from God and the dynamics of a growing relationship with Him and one another that defies the very idea of a deterministic design for man.

An empty stomach might signal the brain to alert us to eat something but it doesn't have to be a family size bag of chips! Learning to appreciate a good, well balanced, meal might be tricky if our teen years were all Pepsi and popcorn—or as with me: bologna sandwiches. But, physiologically speaking, it is possible to eat a satisfying meal! We may even learn to hate chips because in the process we discover that chips don't satisfy—and satisfy is the operable word!

God intended that physiological needs be satisfied and not gratified. Physiological urges need to be under the tutelage of a wise conscience. Gratification is an addictive approach to life in which one seeks a more emotional high than before, whether we are talking about food or eros—or other, less noteworthy needs, as: a BM or urination. I should apologize for such "talk" but constipations or "stones" are never welcoming experiences, and these may reflect a life style that is inappropriate, or even, bodily abusive.

But getting back to eros, we now live in a culture that seeks gratification and not satisfaction or fulfillment. We are in a world, that, for the most part, does not want to discover God's reason for making us the way we are, but instead mocks and scorns His creative genius. God had a reason for assigning Eve as Adam's "helper" and for not wanting multiple Eves—as if Adam needed a number of women to "satisfy" him. Today's adults seek happiness in the form of self-gratification and employ psychological and medical knowledge to enhance the experience, instead of discovering the pure happiness [pure fulfillment] in the Divine design of a one man-one woman monogamy. A monogamous union can be a "well balanced" relationship that satisfies life-long instead of the temporary sexual high that comes through multiple partners—whether spread out over many divorces or just through open relationships.

Socially speaking, we have been a few generations on the way now discrediting God's idea and trying to perfect our own by pavlovian-like experimenting with cultural practices that have become proclivities that we now call natural—when there is nothing "natural" about them. Instead of giving the Word of God credit for God's knowledge of what we are, we try to remake ourselves in the image of a "Playboy" story line or worse.

We spoke already about "greed" which is a psychological gratification patterned after the same misguided search for meaning and happiness. The Bible correctly notes that carnality, a humanity outside the creative purpose of God, is at war with God, Himself.

Perhaps, now you can see the meaning of Romans 7:14: Living outside God's design and purpose for life puts us in bondage to a way of life that can never bring lasting meaning and happiness because it cannot "satisfy." We are trapped in a circular reasoning that is ever searching for that gratifying experience, that mountain top of human existence, where we seek to plant our flag and say, "I found the meaning to life!" But we can never reach it because God created us for the peaceful valley in which we would find ourselves if we only would look around and see it.

Yes, our minds need to be transformed, Paul concluded [Romans 12:2] and only the Savior can make this happen [Romans 7:25].

In Him

On distant shores 'cross beckoning seas
Where lies all youthful dreams,
Travelers set their vision's course
But nothing's what it seems.
While seeking exploration's prize,
Possessed with driven zeal
Excited for desired things,
They boldly set the keel.

Yet distant shores seemed in retreat,
Though gentle breezes blew,
Uncharted worlds of greater things
Just never came in view.
And finally, they came to rest
Upon an unmapped shore
And life reduced to mundane tasks,
Alas and nothing more.

Utopian dreams of endless bliss
In some far distant land
Will never prove far better than
What God has put at hand.
Why endless searches far and wide
To where you've never been?
While treasures of a worthy life
Are only found "in Him."