

112. Paul, the Carnal Christian

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. [[Rom. 7:14](#) NKJV]

In this verse we see a contrast between the law and Paul himself. He contrasts the law as spiritual with himself as carnal. There have been those in evangelical Christianity who have set up a rigid distinction between “spir-

itual Christians” and “carnal Christians.” Is that a proper distinction? What we see in this verse should give us pause for thought.

Paul says, “I am carnal.” Remember that Paul writes this analysis of himself after his conversion—using the present tense. Thus, if anyone was ever a carnal Christian it was the apostle Paul. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul declares that he is—at the time he is writing this letter—carnal. That should warn us lest we think that some Christians today have transcended carnality beyond what Paul

himself achieved.

The word *carnal* here is a form of the Greek word *sarx*, which is usually translated “flesh” in the New Testament. Sometimes this word refers to our physical existence and is a synonym for the Greek word *soma*, meaning “body.” Sometimes, however, this word refers to our sin nature. It refers to the condition of the whole person prior to conversion.

The whole individual, body and mind, is “flesh” outside of Christ. In [Romans 7:14](#) Paul contrasts “flesh” and “spirit” and indicates that the moral sense of “flesh” is involved here. The word

Spirit should be capitalized, because the reference is to the Holy Spirit. The law is spiritual because it comes from the Spirit of God.

But haven't Christians been liberated from bondage to sin and from the flesh? What Paul means is that, even though he has been redeemed and made a new man, he is still afflicted with a principle of indwelling sin. He is still to some degree a creature of the flesh, sold under sin. It is not, nor can it be, however, characteristic of the Christian's entire life, nor can he or she be content in it.

Coram Deo

Timothy 1:16

Romans 7:14–25

describes the inner conflict of the believer. It seems confusing partly because what goes on inside the believer's heart is confusing and distressing. The more we come to know of God, the more we see our remaining corruption. Paul's attitude of grieving over sin and wrestling with it is that of the truly spiritual person. Where you have come to terms with certain sins stop compromising and reenter the battle for righteousness.

For further study: [Genesis](#)

[6:1–8](#); [2 Kings 17:1–23](#); [1](#)