

PETE BUMGARNER MINISTRIES

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THE WICKEDNESS OF CARNALITY

STUDY GUIDE



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SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 8:1-14

Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Because the law of the Spirit, which is life in Christ Jesus, has liberated us from the law of sin, even death. For what the law could not do because of the weakness of the flesh, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sacrifice for sin, God condemned sin in the flesh so that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the flesh put their attention on the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit put their attention on the Spirit. Carnal thinking results in death, but spiritual thinking results in life and peace. The carnal mind is hostile toward God. It will not subject itself to God because it is not able to do so. Consequently, those who live according to the flesh cannot please God. But if the Spirit of God dwells in us, we are in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. If Christ is in us, then the body (of selfish desires) is truly dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us, the Spirit that raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies. Therefore, we are not obligated to live according to the flesh. We do not owe the flesh anything. If we live according to the flesh, we will die, but if we, through the Spirit, subdue the deeds of the body, we will live. All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

THEME

It is imperative that the flesh be exposed for what it is—evil in nature. We must not allow flesh to continue to dominate the lives of the believers. Unless flesh is confronted, it will continue to practice its evil schemes, often disguised in religious garb. The wickedness of carnality is not all gross sins; it is also prevalent in religious mindsets. The wickedness of carnality operating through the religious elite crucified Jesus. We must not allow this carnality to continue in its deception. As born-again believers, we must reckon the old man dead and walk in the newness of life that has been given to us.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Wickedness can be defined as bad, evil, or sinful. Bad, evil, and sinful refer to violating God's standard in any way, whether with evil intent or through deception.

- B. The Greek word *sarkikos* (sar-kee-kos'), which means "pertaining to flesh," was translated as carnal nine times and fleshly two times in the King James Version of the Bible.
- C. Carnality always pertains to fleshly desires—that which appeals to the natural man.
- D. The phrase "wickedness of carnality" refers to the evil or sin that issues forth from natural inclinations.
- E. Sin is missing the mark, which simply means saying or doing something that does not agree with God. Not only can one sin with his actions, he can also sin with his mouth. (Job 2:10; James 4:17)
- F. Sin operates through the physical being; therefore, wickedness manifests through the natural, physical man.
- G. The body of sin is carnality—flesh carrying out its sinful desires through the physical body. (Romans 6:11-19)
- H. The sin principle is present to work in anyone who puts attention on the carnal nature, which is the nature of the natural man.
 - 1. In this study, the word principle is defined as "a fundamental truth that serves as the foundation for a system of behavior."
 - 2. Sin is missing the mark, or acting in a way that is displeasing to God.
 - 3. A person who is not led by the spirit will be led by the flesh where the sinful nature is sure to manifest and displease God.
 - 4. The sin principle can be described as a sinful behavior looking for an opportunity to manifest in the body of a yielding person.
- I. Everything that is not in harmony with God's Word, Spirit, character, and ways can be categorized as wicked.
- J. The wickedness of carnality can refer to gross sins of the flesh or to religious substitutions for the will and ways of God.
- K. Believers are warned and encouraged to walk according to the spirit so that they will not succumb to the evil ways of the flesh.

- L. Homes have been divided, churches have split, and nations have been destroyed because of the wickedness of carnality.
- M. If believers will walk in the spirit, their lives will be dramatically changed for the better.
- N. We are the light of the world. We must not let flesh (carnality) obscure or quench the light. (Matthew 5:14-16)
- O. Following the practices of the world will hinder one's walk with the Lord.
- P. Feeding the flesh will have a detrimental affect on one's spiritual walk.
- Q. The third chapter of Colossians gives explicit instructions concerning the flesh. These instructions must be followed; otherwise, the flesh will continue to dominate the lives of believers.

II. FLESH IS THE GOD OF THIS WORLD (II Corinthians 4:4)

- A. Flesh takes the judge's bench and rules what is right and wrong from its own perspective. It perceives itself as god, even though it may not state it with words.
- B. The serpent persuaded the first man and woman to place their attention on the flesh. (Genesis 3:1-7)
 - 1. He used three areas that appeal to people: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. (I John 2:16)
 - 2. Ultimately, he told the woman that she would be like God; she would be able to discern between good and evil.
 - 3. From the time of the first man and woman's disobedience until now, people have been making their own decisions based on what they perceive to be right or wrong.
 - 4. When people make decisions independent of God, they take the role of God—flesh rules.
- C. The world worships and serves the flesh, not the devil.
- D. The devil is defeated; the flesh is not. It has to be crucified, considered to be dead, and rendered inoperative. (Romans 6:1-14)

- E. If the flesh is not crucified, it will usurp the authority of God.
- F. Israel pursued God in accordance with the flesh; consequently, they rejected Jesus.
- G. Because the Jews were proud of who they were according to the flesh, they rejected the Messiah, Who came by the Spirit (promise).
- H. Preconceived ideas of the flesh blinds people to spiritual truth, which results in the rejection of spiritual things.

III. FLESH IS LIKE A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

- A. Flesh blinds people to spiritual truths. It talks about God, but it serves itself.
- B. Flesh desires dominance and control; therefore, it will not submit to the Spirit.
- C. Carnality refers to things that pertain to the flesh. Carnality is an enemy of God. (Romans 8:1-14)
- D. Carnality is focusing on things that please the flesh, the natural man. These things can be pleasant or grotesque.
- E. Satan's objective and strategy is to get and to keep humanity's attention focused on the flesh. This objective can be obtained through gross sin, pleasure, or even religious works. (Ephesians 2:2-3)
- F. Religion appears to be good, but it focuses on the natural while talking about the spiritual. Religious people walk according to the flesh.
- G. Beware of those who emphasize fleshly things—things that pertain to the natural man, such as prosperity, promotion, prestige, etc.
- H. Abraham, who is an example for the believers, placed his attention on God, not himself. (Romans 4:1-3; Hebrews 11:8-10; James 2:21)
 - 1. God blessed him, but he never pursued the blessing; he pursued God.

2. Abraham was justified by faith that produced works, not works in and of themselves. Spirit, not flesh brought about his justification and God's approval.
3. People who have been justified by faith should be in pursuit of God, not things.

IV. FLESH IS EVIL IN NATURE

- A. The evil nature of the flesh causes people to commit all types of sins and atrocities, some in the name of God.
- B. According to Genesis 6:5, the thoughts and intentions of man's heart were continually evil.
- C. According to Jeremiah 17:9, the heart is deceitful and feeble. This statement refers to the unregenerate heart, which is governed by carnality.
- D. Flesh is the greatest deceiver of all. It blinds and deafens people to truth.
- E. Carnality is cruel and demanding. It wants what it wants at any cost.
- F. Carnality is a driving force that causes one to please self, regardless of who it hurts.
- G. When flesh is revealed for what it is, one will realize that it is hideous in both nature and deed.

V. THE BATTLE BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT

- A. The seventh chapter of Romans reveals the battle between flesh and spirit—carnality versus the divine nature of God.
- B. Every human being has an inward and outward man. (II Corinthians 4:16)
 1. The inward man is spiritual—eternal; the outward man is natural—temporary.
 2. The inward man follows the inclinations of its nature; the outward man follows the inclinations of its body (flesh).
 3. When the nature and flesh agree, there is no turmoil. (Romans 7:9)

4. When a person is born again, his nature changes. The new birth does not change the outward man; consequently, the inward and outward man are no longer in agreement.
 5. The outward man has to be governed by the new nature of the inward man. This task is accomplished by reprogramming the mind to agree with its new nature. (Romans 12:2)
- C. Flesh and spirit have two different mindsets. The flesh wants to satisfy itself (the physical man); the reborn spirit man wants to satisfy God, thus the war.
- D. The born-again spirit wants to do right; the flesh (carnality) does not agree with the spirit because it will be deprived.
- E. Those who walk carnally (according to the flesh) suppress the desires of the spirit, which keeps a person who knows to do right in turmoil.
- F. The answer to this dilemma is to put carnality to death. (II Corinthians 4:10-11; Galatians 2:20)
- G. Flesh (outward man) is governed by the law of sin. The spirit (inward man) is governed by the law of God, which is spiritual.
1. According to Romans 7:14, the law is spiritual, but the non-spiritual man (natural) is carnal—a slave to sin.
 2. Romans 7:21-25 reveals the dilemma of a person who is not led by the spirit.
 3. The inward man knows to do good, but the person who places his attention on the flesh will not yield to the spirit, even though he knows it is right.
 4. The physical body of a human being has desires that it wants fulfilled. Unless one places his attention on Jesus, he will not overcome these fleshly desires.
 5. Paul summed up this dilemma by saying, “I am a miserable man! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24)
 6. He gives the solution to the problem in Romans 8:1-2 and Galatians 5:16. The new birth gives one the ability to be led by the spirit; however, one must choose to be led by the spirit (the inward man).

7. One who is born again is liberated from sin through the death of carnality, but attention on the flesh instead of the spirit (the inward man) will bring one back into bondage.

VI. FLESH HAS TO DIE

- A. After Adam's disobedience, the true nature of the flesh was revealed.
- B. Jealousy caused Adam's son Cain to kill his other son Abel.
- C. Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, mocked Isaac, who was born after the Spirit (promise).
- D. Esau planned to kill his brother Jacob, who had taken advantage of him and had also deceived their father Isaac.
- E. Jealousy motivated King Saul to try to kill David.
- F. Vindication caused Moses to kill an Egyptian.
- G. Many prophets were killed when they confronted fleshly practices.
- H. Jesus was beaten and crucified when He confronted the flesh of religion.
- I. Jesus' disciples were also killed because they, too, confronted the flesh of religion.
- J. Because of the wickedness, or sinfulness, of the flesh, God chose the most cruel means imaginable as the punishment for sin—a brutal beating and crucifixion. The punishment had to be commensurate to the crime.
- K. Acting as the substitute for humanity, Jesus died in the flesh. His resurrected body was unlike His physical body that was placed in the tomb. He died in a natural body, but He was raised in a spiritual body. (I Corinthians 15:44)
- L. Flesh has to die so that the Spirit can manifest in the lives of the believers.
- M. Born-again believers must die to the flesh (carnal nature—practices of the flesh) so that the life of Jesus can be lived through them.

- N. As long as the flesh (carnality) is alive and active, one cannot walk in the Spirit.
- O. Carnality should be dead to one who is truly born again. If carnality is dead, how can one continue in sin? (Romans 6:6-11)

VII. IDENTIFYING FLESH

- A. Flesh is identified by its works. The Scriptures identify the following as works of the flesh: adultery, fornication, impurity, lack of moral discipline, idolatry, witchcraft (use of drugs or spells), hostility, rivalry (contention), jealousy, fierce anger, strife (bitter disagreements), divisions, opinions (self-willed), envy, murder, drunkenness, and carousal (drinking parties).
- B. Flesh can also be identified as self-seeking, self-centered, self-righteous, self-gratifying, self-justifying, opinionated, controlling, domineering, unyielding, inconsiderate, prideful, boastful, sarcastic, and disrespectful.
- C. According to James 4:1, wars and fights are products of the flesh.
- D. Contention, which is a work of the flesh, caused Paul and Barnabas to go separate ways. These two men of God allowed carnality to separate what God had put together. (Acts 15:39)
- E. The world embraces only those who walk in the flesh; consequently, those who are friends of the world are enemies of God because they are dominated by the flesh. (II Corinthians 6:14-18; James 4:4)
- F. We must not be deceived by words and facades; we must learn to recognize flesh in all its disguises and avoid its dominance. The friends of the world are not your friends. Beware!

VIII. CHRISTIANS AFTER THE FLESH

- A. Christians after the flesh profess to know God, but they do not let the power of God totally transform their lives. They continue to live carnally.
 - 1. This statement does not mean that they do not have eternal life. It means they put more emphasis on the flesh than the spirit.

2. The Corinthian believers are an excellent example of this practice. Paul called them carnal, not unbelievers. (I Corinthians 3:1-3)
 - a. In I Corinthians 1:7, Paul commended these believers for excelling in spiritual gifts.
 - b. Carnal Christians can operate in the gifts of the Spirit, yet not be led by the Spirit in their daily living.
 - c. Never judge spiritual maturity by spiritual gifts. Carnal Christians have deceived and set a bad example for many.
- B. Many, if not most, professing Christians live their lives according to the flesh, and they do not even know it.
- C. These people serve God in the flesh, not the Spirit. They do good things, but they do not become the disciples God has ordained them to be. (Luke 14:26-27)
- D. Not all believers in Jesus are disciplined followers of Jesus.
- E. Going to church, reading and studying the Bible, living good moral lives, etc. are not synonymous with walking in the Spirit. Being led by the Spirit is giving no consideration to the flesh.
- F. Many preachers, teachers, and church leaders are carnal Christians. They walk after the flesh, not the spirit. They may yield to the Holy Spirit in a church service but violate Him after the service.
- G. Religion focuses on the flesh, not the spirit. Religious people may talk about the spirit while they walk according to the flesh.
- H. Many of the messages preached and taught are from the perspective of the flesh, not the spirit, yet spiritual things may be mentioned or accomplished.
- I. Christian books, literature, music, movies, etc. are saturated with flesh, yet viewed to be spiritual by many.
- J. Christians after the flesh rationalize and justify their pursuit of these fleshly things, because they do not discern or distinguish between flesh and spirit.
 1. Rationalizing leads to opinion, which is a view or judgment about something. Opinion is of the flesh, not the spirit.

2. One who is opinionated places himself in the role of judge.
 3. One who is led by the Spirit of God discerns instead of rationalizing.
- K. Ministering by the Spirit and walking according to the flesh is a horrible combination.

IX. GRACE AND FLESH

- A. Grace was given to humanity, not to the flesh. The flesh (carnality) must be crucified.
- B. According to Romans 13:14, we are to make no provision for the flesh.
- C. Salvation is for the spirit, not the flesh (carnality). (I Corinthians 5:4-5; I Peter 1:3-9).
 1. We must not confuse resurrected bodies with flesh. They are spiritual bodies.
 2. The body sown in death is corruptible and mortal. The resurrected body is incorruptible and immortal. (I Corinthians 15:42-44; I Corinthians 15:51-54)
 3. Carnality will never be saved; it has to be put to death.
 4. The testing of one's faith targets the physical man that is why it is so important to be led by the spirit.
- D. Romans 8:1-14 clearly reveals that flesh is unacceptable to God. Carnality is God's enemy.
- E. I Corinthians 15:42-54 distinguishes between the natural and the spiritual. God is Spirit, and so is His family.
- F. Flesh has a death sentence on it. We must not try to preserve it. (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27)
- G. Christians who walk according to the flesh often use grace as an excuse to indulge the flesh, but the Scriptures teach that we are to consider ourselves dead to sin, which operates in the flesh. (Romans 6:1-15)
- H. Flesh is a master at justifying its actions and deceiving many. Even good deeds of the flesh are still flesh. They cannot be accepted as a substitute for obedience. (I Samuel 15:10-23)

- I. Some people do not want to let go of the flesh. They hold on to it like a security blanket. Their identity is wrapped up in flesh that grace will not save.
 - 1. When one is born again, he is to take on a new identity. This identity comes from the spirit, not the flesh.
 - 2. We must forget the past and give no place for the devil to operate. (Ephesians 4:22-27)
 - 3. Reliving the fleshly past is not conducive to spiritual growth.
- J. Grace saves us from the flesh, not for the flesh. The feats and accolades of the past must be abandoned and counted as rubbish. (Philippians 3:8; Philippians 3:13)
- K. Indulging the flesh is a path of destruction. It will lead one away from grace.
- L. Grace does not need law to govern it—carnality does.
 - 1. The law is not for the righteous. (I Timothy 1:9)
 - 2. The law still exists for the unrighteous.

X. SUMMARY

- A. Flesh (carnality) is the god of this world. It must be put to death.
- B. Flesh is like a wolf in sheep's clothing. It deceives and devours many.
- C. Flesh is evil in nature.
- D. There is an ongoing battle between flesh and spirit; therefore, we must keep our attention on the spirit man.
- E. Flesh has to die because it cannot be saved.
- F. Flesh can be identified by its works.
- G. Christians after the flesh profess to know God, but they do not let the power of God transform their lives. They continue to live carnally.
- H. Grace was given to humanity, not to the flesh. The flesh (carnality) must be crucified.

XI. CONCLUSION

- A. We must distinguish between flesh as the physical body and flesh as carnality.
 - 1. We need our physical bodies to execute the will of God on earth.
 - 2. The desires of the physical bodies, which is carnality, must be put to death.
 - 3. The body that we need to perform the will of God on earth is the same body that will rebel against doing the will of God on earth if it is not governed by the spirit.
 - 4. These mortal, corruptible bodies are destined to die; however, they can and should be used to glorify God while they exist.
- B. When Paul referred to flesh in the book of Romans, he was predominately referring to carnality.
- C. In reality, carnality is serving the flesh—giving it what it desires.
- D. We are to make no provisions for the flesh. We are to subdue the deeds of the body. (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5)
- E. According to Romans 8:14, the children of God are led by the Spirit of God. The children of the world are led by the flesh.
- F. We must recognize the wickedness of carnality (walking according to the dictates of the flesh) and abandon fleshly pursuits.
- G. Salvation is the most expensive thing ever purchased; it cost Jesus His physical life. The very offspring of God died in a fleshly body to pay the penalty for the sin (wickedness) of carnality.
- H. We must not neglect this great salvation that provides deliverance from the control and power of the flesh.
- I. The wickedness of flesh is overcome by the righteousness of God, which is available only through Jesus Christ the Son of God.
 - 1. It is not enough to make a profession of faith; we must be led by the Spirit of God.

2. There is more to salvation than making a confession. Deliverance from carnality requires one to walk according to the spirit.
 3. According to James 1:21, it is the implanted Word of God that saves our souls.
 4. Romans 12:1-2 instructs us to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice and to renew our minds, which is accomplished by exposing it to the Word of God.
- J. Wickedness is anything ungodly. Ungodly is anything unlike God. The Word and Spirit reveal what is like God.
- K. Walking according to the flesh is wickedness; therefore, we must be led by the Spirit of God.
- L. Born-again believers must get their attention off the natural and focus on the spiritual.
- M. Wickedness of carnality or righteousness of the Spirit, which will it be? The choice is ours.
- N. Those who walk according to the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:8; Hebrews 11:6)
- O. Our physical bodies are to be activated by the Spirit of Christ, not by the flesh.
- P. The kingdom of God will manifest on earth when we render the flesh inoperative.
- Q. One who is led by the Spirit of God will recognize flesh and shun its influence.
- R. Carnality is wicked; therefore, we must not entertain it in any way. We must guard our hearts with all diligence. (Proverbs 4:23)
- S. In II Timothy 4:3, Paul told what was going to happen during the end times: "For the time will come when those who have believed in Jesus will not tolerate sound doctrine. Following their own desires, they will gather teachers who will tell them what they want to hear."
- T. We are in the last days, and many people have and are turning away from sound doctrine.

- U. Satan is still using the same tactic that he used in the Garden of Eden. He is influencing people to get their eyes on flesh (self).
- V. The wickedness of carnality is becoming more and more prevalent in churches today. The seeker-friendly churches are encouraging people to follow the flesh instead of being led by the Spirit of God.
- W. We must place our attention on the Word and Spirit of God, so that we do not get deceived into fulfilling the desires of the flesh.
- X. We must be like Paul, who said to the Corinthian believers, "But I subdue my body and bring it under control, to avoid the risk of becoming disqualified after I have preached to others." (I Corinthians 9:27)
- Y. The wickedness of carnality is, in reality, sinning against God.
- Z. In order to properly represent Jesus on earth, carnality must be abandoned.
- AA. We must not equate spiritual manifestations with walking in the Spirit.
 - 1. Balaam accurately prophesied concerning Israel, but he was not a follower of the true and living God. (Numbers 23 & 24)
 - 2. King Saul prophesied when he was in pursuit of David to kill him, but Saul had rejected God. (I Samuel 19:19-24)
 - 3. Because of his position as High Priest, Caiaphas had a spiritual moment and prophesied, but he was against Jesus and the things of the Spirit. (John 11:49-52)
 - 4. Having a spiritual moment is not the same as walking in the Spirit.
- BB. God may use a position or a physical body to convey His message, but that does not mean that He approves of the person's lifestyle.
- CC. Carnality is wicked in every aspect; therefore, we must not entertain carnal thinking, which is certain to produce carnal actions.

- DD. If we are truly sons of God, we should be led by the Spirit, not carnality.
- EE. Carnality is wicked; therefore, it has no place among the righteous.

