

## Scriptures and Doctrine :: What is the Carnal Mind?

### What is the Carnal Mind?, on: 2009/11/9 0:36

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Romans 8:7

This passage would be completely without meaning or understanding if we do not define what the carnal mind is. Many have taken the liberty to define the carnal mind on their own but good hermeneutics says that we must allow the Bible to interpret itself, context gives us great insight. This verse is very commonly taken by itself when it was never meant to be. The two previous verses say: “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” Romans 8:5-6

The word “mind” in verse 5 and 6 is “phroneo” and according to Strong's means “intensively to interest oneself in (with concern or obedience): - set the affection on.”<sup>1</sup> The word “mind” in verse 7 is “phronema” and it means “to purpose.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore the carnal mind is when a person is choosing to interest themselves in carnality, to set their affections on their flesh, when they purpose to live for the gratification of themselves. It is when a sinner chooses to “mind the things of the flesh”, that is, when they choose to serve themselves and their own pleasures rather than serving God. The carnal mind is nothing more than a selfish state of mind.

The carnal mind is not a passive state but an active state. It is not a state that we are passively born into. It is a state that men choose to be in. The word “enmity” is “echthra” and means hostility or opposition.<sup>3</sup> Hostility or opposition is an active state. The carnal mind is a mind that is in active hostility or opposition to God. It is when an individual is purposely and intentionally minding the things of the flesh. That is, they are living to please themselves instead of living to please God.

Albert Barnes commented, “it means that the minding of the things of the flesh, giving to them supreme attention, is hostility against God.”<sup>4</sup> Charles Finney said, “The proper translation of this text is, the minding of the flesh is enmity against God. It is a voluntary state of mind. It is that state of supreme selfishness, in which all men are, previous to their conversion to God. It is a state of mind; in which, probably, they are not born, but into which they appear to fall, very early after their birth. The gratification of their appetites, is made by them, the supreme object of desire and pursuit, and becomes the law of their lives; or that law in their members, that wars against the law of their minds, which the apostle speaks. They conform their lives, and all of their actions to this rule of action, which they have established for themselves, which is nothing more nor less, than voluntary selfishness or a controlling and abiding preference of self-gratification, above the commandments, authority, and glory of God. It should be well understood, and always remembered, that the carnal mind, as used by the apostle, is not the mind itself but is a voluntary action of the mind. In other words, it is not any part of the mind, or body, but a choice or preference of the mind. It is a minding of the flesh. It is preferring self-gratification, before obedience to God.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Thayer's definitions, “echthra” could mean the “cause of opposition.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the carnal mind is the cause of a sinner's opposition to God. It is with the mind that choices are made. The will is a faculty of the mind. Because a sinner is choosing to serve his flesh, to “mind the things of the flesh”, he is in opposition to God, who commands him to deny himself (Matthew 16:24) and serve God (Exodus 20:3; 1 Corinthians 10:31). The cause of his enmity with God is his carnal mind, his choice to serve himself, his choice to be selfish. A sinner is in opposition to God and is in a state of hostility towards God's law, because he is choosing to be selfish, he is minding the things of his flesh.

While a person is in this selfish state of mind, they cannot please God and they cannot obey the law. That is because God is not pleased with selfishness (Psalms 5:4) and the law requires benevolent motives, not selfish motives (Luke 10:27; Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14). Therefore those who are carnally minded cannot please God and they cannot obey the law. As long as they are in this selfish state of mind, they cannot be pleasing to God, nor can they be in submission to the law.

It is impossible for a person, who has a carnal mind, to be pleasing to God or to be in submission to God, while they are in such a state of mind. They need to repent. Repent is “metanoeo” and it means to change your mind. To repent of your sin means that you change your mind about sinning, you make up your mind to obey the law of God. True repentance

It is when a person goes from being in a selfish state of mind (carnally minded) of choosing to serve himself (to live for self-gratification), to a loving state of mind of choosing to serve God supremely and love his neighbor equally. As long as a man is carnally minded, he cannot please God and he cannot obey the law. But if he changes his mind (repent), so that he is no longer choosing to live for himself but chooses to live for God, then he can be pleasing to God and he can obey the law. When the cause of his hostility towards God and His law is removed (the carnal mind), then He can be pleasing to God and in submission to His law. But if the cause of his hostility is not removed, he can do neither. As long as the will (a faculty of the mind) is in opposition to God, the will cannot be in submission to God. As long as the will of man is selfish, that man cannot be pleasing to God, because God cannot be pleased with selfishness.

This verse does not deal with the question of whether or not the carnally minded can change their mind, or whether they have the natural ability to repent. This verse simply says that while a person is in such a state of mind of carnality and selfishness, they cannot please God and they cannot truly obey the law. It would be equivalent to saying, "Those who have disobedient hearts cannot please God and they cannot obey the law." That is, while their heart is disobedient, they cannot do such things. But if they change their heart, then they can. Such a statement does not say that they cannot change their heart, but it says that while their heart is in such a state, they cannot do such things. Likewise the statement about the carnally minded does not say that they cannot change their mind, it simply says that while their mind is in such a state, they cannot do such things.

I was pleased after writing the above to find that Albert Barnes and Charles Finney said that precise same thing. It is always a great relief to find out that you are not alone in your interpretation and understanding of the word of God. Charles Finney said, "The apostle does not affirm, that a sinner cannot love God, but that a carnal mind cannot love God; for, to affirm that a carnal mind can love God, is the same as to affirm that enmity itself can be love."7 Albert Barnes said in his commentary, "But the affirmation does not mean that the heart of the sinner might not be subject to God; or that his soul is so physically depraved that he cannot obey, or that he might not obey the law. On that, the apostle here expresses no opinion. That is not the subject of the discussion. It is simply that the supreme regard to the flesh, to the minding of that, is utterly irreconcilable with the Law of God. They are different things, and can never be made to harmonize; just as adultery cannot be chastity; falsehood cannot be truth; dishonesty cannot be honesty; hatred cannot be love. This passage, therefore, should not be adduced to prove the doctrine of man's inability to love God, for it does not refer to that, but it proves merely that a supreme regard to the things of the flesh is utterly inconsistent with the Law of God; can never be reconciled with it; and involves the sinner in hostility with his Creator."8

Every call to repentance in the Bible which is directed towards man implies that man has the ability to change his mind. If the call to repentance does not imply that man can repent, then what in the entire Bible could ever imply that men could repent? Nothing could imply the ability to repent more than the command to repent. Why command men to do something if it is impossible? If men were incapable of repentance, God would have no reason to command them to repent. If God is good, why command repentance and punish impenitence, if repentance is impossible for some and impenitence is unavoidable for some? If God commands men to do something, He gives them the ability to do it. God calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31), which means that all men everywhere have the ability to change their mind. None need to change their mind but the carnally minded. Those who are spiritually minded do not need to change their mind, therefore God does not call the spiritually minded to repentance. It is only the carnally minded that God calls to repentance. Every call to repentance is directed to, and only to, the carnally minded. Therefore the carnally minded have the ability to change their mind.

Here is a logical syllogism:

- The command to repent implies the ability to repent (change your mind)
- The carnally minded are commanded to change their mind (repent)
- Therefore the carnally minded have the ability to change their mind (repent)

Men are commanded in the Bible to change their hearts, which implies that they have the ability to change their hearts. God, being a loving Ruler, does not command the impossible at the threat of severe punishment. The command of the ruler, without the ability of the subject, is tyranny. The command, if it comes from a good, just and reasonable Ruler, presupposes the power of choice. God commands men in the Bible to change their hearts, which implies that they have the ability to do so. "Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved" (Jeremiah 4:14). "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:8). "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die...?" (Ezekiel 18:31). If men are incapable of obeying these commands, why give these commands at all? If these commands cannot be obeyed, they are useless, and God must never have even intended on them being

g obeyed at all. If God never intended on these commands being obeyed, then God does not really want them to be obeyed. And if God does not really want them to be obeyed, He is insincere in commanding them. If God wants these commands to be obeyed, and if He is sincere in His command, then these commands must be possible for men to obey.

The Bible also says, "Set your affections as things above, not on the things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). "Set your affections" is the same Greek word used for "mind" in Romans 8:5-7. Men have the choice of minding the flesh or of minding the spirit, of setting our affections on things above or things beneath. It is within our natural ability to choose who we will serve (Joshua 24:15), whether we will serve ourselves or serve God. We have the natural ability to choose what we will set our affections on, either on the flesh or on the Spirit.

Charles Finney said, "Some one may ask, Can the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, change itself? I have already said that this text in the original reads, 'the minding of the flesh is enmity against God.' This minding of the flesh, then, is the choice or preference to gratify the flesh. Now it is indeed absurd to say, that a choice can change itself; but it is not absurd to say, that the agent who exercises this choice, can change it. The sinner that minds the flesh, can change his mind, and mind God." 9

1. Strong's Definitions
2. Strong's Definitions
3. Strong's Definitions
4. Albert Barnes (Commentary on Romans 8:7)
5. Charles Finney (Sermons on Important Subjects, Total Depravity)
6. Thayer's Definitions
7. Charles Finney (Lectures on Important Subjects, Total Depravity).
8. Albert Barnes (Commentary on Romans 8:7)
9. Charles Finney (Sermons on Important Subjects, Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts)

**Re: What is the Carnal Mind?, on: 2009/11/9 2:34**

There have been so many definitions to "carnal mind" which are eisegesis instead of exegesis. For example I just read today that somebody interpreted "carnal mind" as the "old Adamic nature". But in context to be carnally minded simply means that you are minding the things of the flesh, in other words it is a selfish state of mind, it is the choice of the mind to live for self-gratification.

To repent means to change your mind. A sinner repents when he decides to no longer live for his own selfish gratification, but will now live for the glory of God and the well-being of his neighbor. Sin is the choice to be selfish. To repent of your sin means you turn from selfishness to benevolence, and love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Re: The Mind set upon our old, sinful natures., on: 2009/11/9 8:00**

3. 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,

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

sermonindex: "Shall we for a moment boast in that flesh which He condemned by the Cross?" - Samuel Ridout

**Re: - posted by NSCalvinist, on: 2009/11/9 15:36**

That makes sense. Good explanation.