

Carnal Is Not Always Evil

When you hear or read the word “*carnal*,” what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Many will think what Paul said, “...*but I am carnal, sold under sin.*” Of course Paul is making a contrast of a person’s condition as a sinner before making a commitment to Christ and obeying His commandments.

The modern assumption is that the word *carnal* has to do with being exclusively sinful. But the Scripture has a much broader meaning of the word. The use of the word *carnal* may range from anything that is *natural* to *sensual*, but it is not necessarily sinful.

The word *carnal* is used at least five times where it does not indicate anything sinful or depraved.

1. “Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and **carnal ordinances**, imposed on them until the time of reformation.” Heb. 9:10 (Carnal ordinances sinful?)
2. “Who is made, not after the law of a **carnal commandment**, but after the power of an endless life.” (Carnal commandment sinful?)
3. “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your **carnal things**?” 1 Cor. 9:11 (*Carnal things* would include things like clothing, housing, and food and are not sinful.)
4. “It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in ***carnal things***.” Rom. 15:27 (Paul is speaking about supporting those who were preaching the gospel who needed the assistance of the saints...housing, food, etc.)
5. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the **weapons of our warfare are not carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)” 2 Cor. 10:3-4 (Paul is talking about resources as in material weapons. Our weapons are not carnal.)

All of us were created carnal. Adam was carnal. All earthly mammals are carnal. Jesus was carnal. Jesus had carnal body, ate carnal food, used carnal money, was a guest in carnal homes, fed carnal people with carnal food, and healed their carnal bodies.

Something that is natural is not sinful. All material things are not sinful. But more importantly, the body of flesh is not sinful in itself. Sin is not a substance; it is a violation of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Jesus had a carnal body – flesh (Luke 24:39, John 1:14, 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Jn. 4:3, 2 Jn. 1:7). Jesus had the same type of flesh that we have (Heb. 2:14; Heb. 2:17). The word “flesh” at times is synonymous with men (Gen. 6:12, Matt. 16:17). God is the author of our flesh (Exodus 4:11, Isaiah 44:2, Jer. 1:5).

Carnal can be used to describe one's orientation, but to be carnal in composition is not sinful, it is just natural – fleshly.

However, to be “*carnally minded*” is sinful. Scripture says, “...*to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*” (Rom. 8:6) People who are carnally minded are those who are more concerned with the affairs of this life – who are obsessed with worldly things like money, possessions, sex, reputation, all to satisfy themselves. They do the **works** of the flesh – adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.

Doing the *works* of the “*flesh*” is not the mystical thought that we are fighting some inner force that is striving for supremacy. Flesh is nothing but an inanimate conglomerate of biological tissue and has no moral quality. It has to do with what a person's “heart” is set upon – his own lusts (James 1:14).

Jesus said what a person does reflects what is **in his heart**. He didn't say a person's heart reflects their *sinful nature* they are supposedly born with. No one is born with a sinful nature, they come into this world upright (Ecc. 7:29) and then corrupt themselves (Genesis 6:5-7, 11-12; Exodus 32:7-8; Deut. 31:29; Deuteronomy 32:5-6, 18; Ecclesiastes 7:29), not born that way.

Until we get our glorified body, we will always have a carnal body. Every believer has a carnal body, but all believers should not be carnally minded. Jesus had a carnal body, but he was not carnally minded.



And concerning carnal things. Jesus never said it was wrong to have things. There is nothing wrong in owning a home, a car, having material possessions, having a successful career or raising a family, loving them and providing for them. We need carnal things to survive and enjoy. There are many people in the Bible who enjoyed wealth like Abraham, Job, David, Joseph of Arimathea. There are people who know what it's like to have much and have very little. Paul himself had abounded in prosperity and at times with almost nothing.

“I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.” Phil. 4:12

God is not a joy destroyer. It is not sinful to have a carnal body, which is natural, nor sinful to have carnal things. We have need of many carnal things, but when we let those things become more important than God, when we become possessed with our possessions (like the young rich ruler), then it is wrong.