

101. The Book of Romans 12:2

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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(9-10-25)

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As we come to Chapter 12 in our study of the Book of Romans—we move into the practical portion of the book.

Romans Chapters 1-11 dealt with *doctrine*; and now Chapters 12-15 will focus on *duty*. The order is significant—*doctrine* must always precede *duty* because Christian *living* depends on Christian *learning*.

VI. Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1–15:13)

Romans 12:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2 is one of the most important verses in the Bible when it comes to spiritual warfare. It is important because it puts the spotlight on how spiritual warfare is waged and won in the Christian life—let me explain.

Spiritual warfare is primarily a battle for control of our thinking. In fact, the Bible teaches that the mind is actually the main battlefield in our war with the devil where most spiritual warfare is fought. Satan knows if he can control your thinking, he can control *you*—even as Solomon said in the Book of Proverbs, “*as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*” (Proverbs 23:7)

That's why the New Testament has so much to say about our *minds* as Christians—

Colossians 3:2 (NKJV)

² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

Mark 12:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

Philippians 2:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

The Bible says that Satan has “*blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ...should shine on them.*” (2 Corinthians 4:4)

This doesn't mean they're helpless victims—Satan has blinded them because as Jesus said, “*They loved darkness rather than light wanting to do evil.*” (John 3:19)

Romans 1:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

Romans 8:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Colossians 1:21 (NKJV)

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled

That's why salvation begins with a *change of mind*—

Acts 17:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

The Bible says that salvation requires a person to first of all repent. The Greek word for repent/repentance is 'metanoia' which means—*"to have a change of mind."* Once a person repents and receives Jesus as their Lord and Savior—at that point, Paul's command in Romans 12:2 kicks in:

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

² **And do not be conformed to this world** ['to this world's way of thinking'], **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

This transformation by the renewing of your mind will only take place if you continually fill your mind with the Word of God (His truth)—

John 8:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide [*'remain'*] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Now as you fill your mind with God's Word you begin to think like God thinks, which means—you stop thinking like the world thinks. The result will be that you will be transformed in your life from the inside out by the Holy Spirit—as Jesus said, *"Cleanse the inside of the cup and it will overflow and cleanse the outside also."* (Matthew 23:26)

Again, God's Word teaches us that godly living always flows from godly thinking—which is only possible by the renewing of your mind through the Word of God.

As I've already said many times in the past—I am absolutely convinced that the reason so many Christians are still living carnal lives is because they're still thinking carnal thoughts! Their minds are still *conformed* to this world's way of thinking, and they have not allowed them to be transformed by the renewing that comes from God's Word.

That doesn't necessarily mean that they aren't reading the Bible or even going to Bible study (although I doubt they are on a regular basis)—it simply means they're not serious about putting into *practice* what they're learning. (James 1:22)

If you come to church and hear the Word of God taught but you basically let it go in one ear and out the other without any real desire to obey it—then, although *‘living and powerful’* it will be rendered lifeless and powerless to change *your* life.

And so, a godly life starts with the way you think about God’s Word and your willingness to *feed* on it every day and *hide* it in your heart and obey all that it says—then and only then will it transform your life!

Now, the opposite of a *spiritual* Christian is a *carnal* Christian.

To understand this, we need to understand what Paul had to say on this subject in 1Corinthians 2:14-3:1, when he divided the whole human race into 3 categories:

- *The natural man*
- *The spiritual man*
- *The carnal man*

The **natural man** is a term that speaks of someone born into this world *physically* through the *natural* process—but not born-again *spiritually* through the Holy Spirit. (John 3)

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him;

The word “**natural**” in verse 14 is *psuchikos*, and speaks of a person who lives to satisfy the body’s appetites—just like an animal (hunger, thirst, sex etc.)—a two-dimensional *creature*.

The natural man is contrasted by Paul with the “**spiritual man**” (*pneumatikos*) in 1 Corinthians 2:15.

The **spiritual man** is someone who is born of the Spirit (‘born-again’)—someone who is *spiritually minded*, whose mind is dominated with the Word of God, the will of God and the work of God.

This is what Paul calls—“*Having the mind of Christ*” in 1 Corinthians 2:16. This person lives on an entirely different level of existence than does the natural man (Explain the difference between a *2-dimensional creature* as opposed to a *3-dimensional being*).

And then in 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul talks about the “**carnal man**” which refers to a ‘*carnal Christian*’.

Many believe that so-called “**carnal Christians**” are really not Christians at all—but Paul addresses them as “*brethren*” and calls them “*babies in Christ*”. The word “**carnal**” is the Greek word *sarkikos* and means, “*to be dominated by the inclinations of the old fallen nature*”—saved but not walking in the Spirit.

One author said,

“There is a great danger to having a carnal mind. How then do you recognize it?... There are warning signs of a carnally-minded Christian but sometimes they can be missed or even difficult to diagnose.”

Let’s see if we can pinpoint the characteristics of carnal Christianity. First of all, let’s define basically what it means to be a carnal Christian.

A "carnal Christian" is a believer who, despite having faith in Christ, is primarily controlled by sinful desires rather than the Holy Spirit—according to the Apostle Paul in *1 Corinthians 3* and *Galatians 5*.

These individuals are considered "*spiritual infants*" whose lives are dominated by the "*works of the flesh*" instead of the "*fruit of the Spirit*." The carnal Christian basically loves the world more than they love the Lord—

1 John 2:15–16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Once again, a carnal Christian is a believer who is still dominated by their old sinful, fleshly nature instead of their new spiritual, holy nature in Christ.

What are the characteristics of a carnal Christian?

- 1) Reliance on spiritual "milk":** A carnal Christian remains spiritually stunted and stuck on the basic teachings of the faith and is either unwilling or unable to understand the deeper truths of God's Word:

Hebrews 5:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

- 2) Self-centeredness:** The carnal Christian is preoccupied with themselves—with their own desires and needs and seldom if ever consider the needs of others—just like the rich man Jesus spoke of in Luke 16.

Luke 16:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰ But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹ desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table...

One pastor put it well—

"We are living in a day and age where me, myself, and I have become the throne that we worship at. Everything in our society is pushing towards the promotion and love of self. With the onslaught of social media outlets, it has never been easier to promote yourself. We have even coined the phrase "selfie" which some have taken to new heights and levels. How do you know if this is creeping into your heart? One of the places to check which many may not think about is your prayer life. What do you spend most of your time praying about? If it is just about you and your needs, then this selfishness may be creeping in. When you look at the model of prayer Jesus gave us praying for your needs was part of it, not all of it. If every part of your prayer revolves around you all the time be careful you might be drifting towards a carnal mind."

- 3) Unwillingness to forgive:** Carnal Christians tend to have difficulty forgiving others who have wronged them.

Most of the time, because they're so preoccupied with their own hurt in the matter, they won't even consider forgiving those who have hurt them—often to the point of seeking revenge against them.

- 4) An obsession with always wanting more:** Carnal Christians are obsessed with material things rather than spiritual things.

That leads to greed and with laying up for themselves treasures on earth instead of treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

One author elaborated on the dangers of greed—

“Greed is not just wanting more it is also the feeling of never having enough or never being content with what you have. The Bible equates greed with idolatry. When greed sets in it is very easy to become carnal because your soul desire becomes the pursuit of more. When you are never satisfied or feel like you have to get more, then even God himself is not enough. Greed also shows up when you begin to desire the blessings of God more than God himself. If you are following God because of what you can get from him then the lust of the flesh has set in. This is a carnal mindset.”

- 5) Pride:** Carnal Christians often have an inflated view of themselves—Paul in Romans 12:3 commanded Christians *“not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think.”*

Pride is a big warning sign of a carnally-minded Christian—although they seldom see it for what it is and actually think of themselves as humble and not proud.

One commentator—

“Most people who are prideful are never willing to admit it. Pride can take many forms and you have to be very careful because it is very easy to slip from humility to pride. If you ever start thinking you are indispensable or this can’t happen without you, then be careful pride is slipping in. Many people mistakenly believe that there is something special about them or there is some great thing they have or do that makes God want to use them. This is simply not true. What I have discovered in life is that God uses people in spite of who they are not because of who they are. If you think of yourself more highly than you should then you are becoming carnally minded.”

- 6) Adopting worldly values:** Carnal Christians conform more to cultural norms and values rather than the values of God laid out in His Word.

In other words, they tend to support soft on crime policies seeing criminals as victims, they’re more sympathetic to LGBTQ rights (Pride Month) and Transgender issues (men in women’s sports), social justice, CRT and DEI policies etc.

Carnal Christians are ‘*cultural Christians*’ who tend to ‘*go-along*’ to ‘*get-along*’—which makes them ‘*wishy-washy*’ in their faith.

It’s important for them to be accepted and liked by others so they don’t want to seem too radical in their faith lest someone call them a ‘*fanatic*’ or a ‘*Bible-thumper*’ and they be ostracized by their friends—many of whom are unsaved.

- 7) They lack spiritual discernment:** Because carnal Christians are not in the Word very much or attend Bible studies very often—they tend to lack spiritual discernment:

Hebrews 5:12–14 (NKJV)

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

- 8) They lack the Spirit’s fruit:** Carnal Christians are characterized by the *works of the flesh* rather than the *fruit of the Spirit*.

This would include: sexual immorality and impurity, idolatry, fits of anger, rivalry, and drunkenness—just to name a few (Galatians 5:19-21). They don't love with God's agape love (completely unselfish, and selfless) and instead they tend to love themselves more than anyone else.

But also they're prone to be jealous, envious, and factional—even as Paul said in 1Corinthians 3:

1 Corinthians 3:1–4 (NKJV)

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

One author—

"While all Christians struggle with sin (Romans 7), a true battle against sin and a genuine desire for holiness are signs of spiritual life. The key difference is that a carnal Christian's life is consistently and unrepentantly characterized by the works of the flesh. The state is not meant to be permanent, and scripture calls for believers to repent and grow toward maturity."

Let me finish by saying that, being carnally minded is abhorrent to God and contrary to being a redeemed child of God—

Romans 8:6–10 (NKJV)

⁶ For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. ⁷ Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸ So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰ And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness.

Even though, in Romans 8, Paul has *believers* in mind when he talks about those who are '**spiritually minded**', and *unbelievers* in mind when he talks about those who are '**carnally minded**'—Christians can still be carnally minded which God abhors.

He abhors it because we are His representatives, and we misrepresent Him when we are carnally minded and walk in the flesh. But secondly, He hates when we're carnally minded because it gives place to the devil who has captured our thinking and—*'as a man thinks in his heart so is he.'*

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

² **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

Phillips paraphrases it: "*Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.*"

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