



Carnal Believer.

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BIG IDEA – Carnal believers live like everyone else, but the Spirit calls us beyond a Christian costume to real transformation. **Carnal believers want Jesus and their idols. These are believers that want dual operating systems and choose to go back and forth as they please.**

Scripture Focus – Romans 8:5–9

Take out your phones and hold them up for a moment!

Who makes the hardware and software we use?

Who makes the hardware, the physical product and who makes the software, the operating system that is loaded and updated on the hardware?

Whether we are talking about a desktop, laptop, tablet or phone. Someone makes hardware, but then there's the software which is loaded on it.

Hardware: Intel, AMD, Apple, Google

Software: Windows, iOS, Android.

Who makes the hardware of our body?

Who's operating system is loaded into our soul?

Object lesson: Hardware vs OS

- **Hardware (brain/body):** the God-made capacity—powerful, limited, and trainable.
- **OS (core allegiance):** who sits on the throne—**Flesh OS (self-rules)** or **Spirit OS (Christ rules)**.
- **Apps (habits/behaviors):** what shows up daily—words, reactions, patterns.
- **Drivers (inputs/formation):** what trains the system—media diet, relationships, practices, prayer, Scripture.

We all have the same hardware, but we can have different outcomes. And it appears that carnality is the default installed operating system software.

The main processor is the hardware — powerful, but it doesn't choose or run your life. The operating system does. What goes in our brain and out of our heart in behaviors!

Our series is “Not That Kind of Christian,” and we kicked it off last week talking about Baby Believers. Today we are talking about Carnal Believers.

Paul basically says: you can run your life on Self OS or Spirit OS. Same brain, same body... totally different output. The apps we run are like our habits, reactions, words. These apps or programs reveal what OS is in control.

Temptation and sin is like a pre-installed shortcut.

If we don't want to click it, we've got to stop keeping it on the desktop.

We can't swap our hardware, but we can install and update a new OS, like the Spirit operating software.

For those who want to run two different operating systems and choose between which one to “boot” into... the Apostle Paul would say, “Stop doing that!”

Because as a believer, **God has created a new OS and doesn't want us reverting back and forth between our Self OS and the Spirit OS.**

We don't normally use the word “carnal.”

FLESH IS FLESH

In the New Testament, the word flesh, means exactly what it sounds like, our human body – skin and bones.

Flesh, to Paul, means our weakness, frailness and perishability. The flesh also has an ethical, even theological sense of a human operating in an old, sin-filled, sin-influenced, sin-weakened state.

Think of the flesh or carnality as an operating system loaded onto the hardware of our brains.

Our human nature has desires all on its own.



DIG DEEPER: Where does the “Human State” Lead us?

In our human state, we are driven by things like self, selfishness, autonomy, power and control.

- What’s wrong with those things?
- What’s wrong with me being my “true” self, discovering myself and actualizing all that I am supposed to be?
- What’s wrong with me caring for myself first?
- What is wrong with me wanting and having my own way?
- What is wrong with power and control over myself and others?

See how the Apostle Paul would answer those questions below!

The Apostle Paul can help us **not just understand the word**, but even better, **understand the battle that goes on in every single follower of Jesus Christ**.



Paul’s perspective on the flesh

Paul defines the mind set or the OS operating in our lives. Paul says there is **mind set on the flesh** vs. **mind set on the Spirit**.

Paul’s phrase, “according to the flesh,” or the “the things of the flesh,” is used in several of his letters to first century Churches.

- “Those who **live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires**; but those **who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires**. Romans 8:5 NIV



Paul gives us the end results of those who's mind is set on the flesh; living according to the flesh verses those who's mind is set on the Spirit; living according to the Spirit.

- **The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.** The **mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God**; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh **cannot please God. Romans 8:6-8 NIV**
- **You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.** And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. **Romans 8:9-11 NIV**
- Therefore, brothers and sisters, **we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.** For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. **Romans 8:12-13 NIV**
 - **Paul uses the word, “opheiletés” – we are not in debt to the flesh because the Spirit of God killed the deeds, the works, of the body. “If we do not kill sin, it will kill us.” Since we have no way of doing that, we must let the Spirit of God do that in us and for us!**



Paul writes, “don’t give any room for the flesh,” the carnal, the base nature of our default operating system.

- Romans 13:14 — **“make no provision for the flesh”**
 - But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make **no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. Romans 13:14 ESV**

In letters to the Churches in Rome, Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae and Philippi, Paul goes into great detail about this idea of the things of the flesh verses the things of the Spirit.

We’ll be looking at several verses out of five letters from Paul about being carnal.



Here is the way Paul threads together his Spirit-led thoughts on “the flesh,” and what a carnal believer looks like.

- **Desires & works of the flesh — Galatians 5:16–17, 19–21**
 - So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not **gratify the desires of the flesh**. For **the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit**, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. **They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. Galatians 5:16-17 NIV**
 - Gratify “[teleó](#),” complete, finish, fulfill.
 - Desires “[epithumia](#),” lust, longing.
 - **The acts of the flesh are obvious:** sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. **Galatians 5:19-21 NIV**
 - Acts “[ergon](#),” work, deed.
 - Obvious “[phaneros](#),” evident, clear, visible.
- **Sowing & reaping to “the flesh” vs “the Spirit” — Galatians 6:8**
 - Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. **Galatians 6:8 NIV**
- **Cravings of the flesh — Ephesians 2:3**
 - All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. **Ephesians 2:3 NIV**
 - Cravings “[theléma](#),” willed, desired, purposed.
- **Indulgence of the flesh — Colossians 2:23**
 - These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. **Colossians 2:23 ESV**
 - Self-made, “[ethelothrésquia](#),” defined by the desires of the human will.
 - Severity to the body, “[apheidia](#),” severe treatment, neglecting the body.
 - Indulgence of, “[plésmoné](#),” gratification, satisfying.
- **Confidence in the flesh — Philippians 3:3–4**
 - For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else

thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more... **Philippians 3:3-4 NIV**

- Confidence, "**peithó**," persuaded of what is trustworthy.



How the Flesh OS operates

The “things” of the flesh are a pipeline, a process to get what we want. The Flesh OS is:

- A **mindset** – **becomes a fixation** or attention, turning “normal” into necessary.
- A **desire** – **becomes an appetite**, want turns into need.
- A **work** – appetites **become an action**, a behavior – shaping our character.
- A **sowing** – repeated behavior **become investments** – planting seeds that forces a harvest.
- An **indulgence** – instead of fighting, we feed it, **becoming a habit**, even using religious behavior to give us a cover to hide behind.
- A **confidence** – our trust in our ability, image, pedigree or control **becomes devoid of God**.
- An **opening** (provision) – We no longer “fall” or are “enticed” into temptation, now we look for it and plan for it – **becoming our entire life**.

The flesh won’t stop until it consumes our life, silencing the Spirit of God.

Carnality is a shortcut to get what we want, when we want it!

The flesh, our carnality, persuades us: the flesh promises quick relief, instant control, and zero waiting. It offers a shortcut around faith—

- Handle it yourself.
- satisfy it now.
- keep it going; and
- protect yourself, so that we can continue.

These are the patterns Paul warns us about being a Carnal Believer!

**FAITH persuades us: to turn towards God, not away from him.
To reveal ourselves, not to hide.**

JESUS SAYS:

- Give it to me.

- Deny yourself.
- Turn around.
- Surrender and trust me.

Jesus Story – The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17–22)

- Moral, religious, respectful—until Jesus touches the idol.

Carnal believers want Jesus and their idols. Believers that want dual operating systems and choose to go back and forth as they please.

“Not That Kind of Christian” Contrast

- “You’ve seen Christians who talk spiritual but live for self-first.
- But Jesus forms disciples that let Him **purge their idols, change their priorities**, and wholly **pursue God.**”

Our flesh whispers:

- “Center yourself” (mindset) as opposed to being “In Christ.”
- “Serve yourself” (desire) as opposed to yielding our desires.
- “Express yourself” (works) as opposed to practicing Spirit fruitfulness.
- “Secure yourself” (sowing/provision) as opposed to sowing faith not safety.
- “Trust yourself” (confidence) as opposed to dependency on Christ.

It’s a matter of who is in the center of our world, our thinking, our desires: Is it ME or is it CHRIST?

What OS will we choose to run our soul - Flesh OS (self-rules) or Spirit OS (Christ rules).

APPLICATION

“Not That Kind of Christian,” Carnal Believer

Carnal believers want a tweak; Jesus demands a trade.

- One OS will lead us to death, the other life.
- Choosing to live a dualistic operating system will keep us weak and ineffective in being discipled and making disciples.
- Give the Holy Spirit permission to seek out the shortcuts and viruses in our life and let him remove them!
- Replace the shortcuts on our desktop with apps that run the Spirit-filled life!

Prayer for those who want to live a Spirit filled life, making no provision, no opportunities for the flesh!

SCRIPTURES

Romans 8:5 NIV

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Romans 8:6-8 NIV

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Romans 8:12-13 NIV

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Romans 13:14 ESV

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Galatians 5:16-17 NIV

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Galatians 6:8 NIV

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Ephesians 2:3 NIV

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Colossians 2:23 ESV

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Phillipians 3:3-4 NIV

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more...



DIG DEEPER NOTES



Where does the “Human State” Lead us?

In our human state, we are driven by things like self, selfishness, autonomy, power and control.

What’s wrong with those things? In and of themselves, they may seem normal and **definitely not dangerous**.

What’s wrong with me being my “true” self, discovering myself and actualizing all that I am supposed to be?

Paul might say, “Your “truest self” isn’t discovered by looking inward; it’s revealed by belonging to Christ.

- The core issue **isn’t self-awareness; it’s self-rule**. In Paul’s terms, “true self” apart from Christ is still “old self.” (Ephesians 4:22–24; Colossians 3:9–10)
- For Paul, **identity is not self-made; it’s received: “in Christ.”** (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)

- Actualization without transformation becomes noise —**you become more intensely you, not necessarily more holy, loving, or free.** (Romans 12:1–2)

What's wrong with me caring for myself first? Doesn't the Bible say, "love thy neighbor as thyself," meaning I cannot love anyone before I learn to love myself and in extension, I can't care for anyone until I have cared for myself?

Paul might answer, **"I assume you already care for yourself; the command is to stop making yourself the priority.**

- Paul explicitly says **nobody hates their own body; we naturally feed and care for it.** (Ephesians 5:29)
- "Love your neighbor as yourself" **doesn't command self-first; it uses self-care** as the **measuring stick** for neighbor-care. (Galatians 5:14)
- Paul's model **isn't self-neglect; it's self-giving:** **"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."** (Philippians 2:3–4)
- **Legitimate self-care is stewardship. "Self-first" is flesh**—it crowns the self. (Philippians 2:21)

What is wrong with me wanting and having my own way? If I don't know who I am, someone else will define me and take advantage of me!

Paul would probably tell you, **"The flesh sells "my way" as safety, but it produces slavery. The Spirit gives identity that is absolutely secure and cannot be stolen.**

- **"My way" is often just fear in a nicer outfit**—control to avoid being hurt.
- Paul says **the path to real freedom is not self-definition, but Spirit-led sonship. Identity: Who's you are becomes who you are.** (Romans 8:14–16)
- **Boundaries and wisdom aren't carnal; but insisting on my way is the opposite of love.** (1 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Corinthians 10:23–24)
- Paul's posture: "Not that I have already obtained... but I press on." **Paul was not self-constructed; he's Christ-directed.** Paul had lived the religious life filled with self-righteousness, control, power, anger and hate. **Where did it get him? Why would Paul resurrect the life that led him away from Jesus and towards death?** (Philippians 3:12–14)

What is wrong with power and control over myself and others? Isn't that how we get things done, advance in life, make ourselves known and do good in the world around me?

Paul made it clear, **Power without crucifixion becomes domination. The gospel trades control for love**—and that's where real authority comes from.

- **Paul rejected "power over" leadership:** not domineering, not self-promoting. He points to Christ's downward way. (Philippians 2:5–11)

- **He distinguished strength from self-exaltation.** He boasted in weakness because it kept him dependent on God, not intoxicated with control. (2 Corinthians 12:9–10)
- **Paul's ministry was driven by obedience and "getting things done," but his method was never coercion; it was service, sacrifice, and truth.** (2 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:6–8)

Paul wants us to know these ideals, these "human rights" are actually dangerous when in opposition to what God has designed us to be and wants us to become (like Christ).

So, the physical body is **NOT** evil, as many have accused Paul of saying. Paul believed and taught very positively about our physical body when it is presented and submitted to God (Romans 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Corinthians 15). But when we yield or allow ourselves to give into these human-driven, disordered desires, they become **corrupted and rebellious**, only leading to death.