

THE CONCEPT OF CARNALITY AS IT RELATES  
TO PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

by

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Contemporary evangelical society has tended toward an era of "easy believism" whereby the emphasis seems to fall upon an initial conversion experience rather than the subsequent life of holiness and conformity to God's standards. As a consequence, many professing believers are dangerously assuming "carnality" actions which, if consistent, betray a lack of regeneration at all.

The term σάρξ from which the adjectives σαρκικός and σάρκινος are derived does not indicate that the flesh itself is sinful, but that it is that frail vessel by which sin so easily manifests itself. The adjectives, therefore, indicate that the one described is susceptible to the failings of sin. Neither the distinction between the adjectival suffixes nor the adjectives themselves are so inflexible so as to make them technical terms.

Paul himself took the label of "carnal" in its deprecatory ethical sense, not because he was rebellious or unyielding to the Holy Spirit, but because he was acutely aware of the sinful tendencies which he possessed and against which he always had to guard. For him, Romans 7:14-25 was part of the normal Christian experience.

The often cited carnality of the Corinthians was not flagrant sin (humanly speaking) in 1 Corinthians 3, but rather poor attitudes and complacency. Furthermore, the inference there is not that all professing believers whose lives are characterized by sin are assumed to be carnal. In fact, elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul exhorts the practice of spiritual self-examination.

The Bible is clear in its standards of Christian conduct and the fact that progressive spiritual growth is the norm for the believer. Where this norm is absent, carnality and the subsequent need for discipline is not impossible; however, consistency of sin in a professing believer's life may signal the more serious consequence of lack of genuine regeneration.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, <u>Greek-English Lexicon of the NT</u>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <u>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</u>
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, <u>A Greek Grammar of the NT</u>
<u>ExpTim</u>	Expository Times
HNTC	Harper's NT Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
MNTC	Moffatt NT Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<u>TDNT</u>	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <u>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</u>
<u>TZ</u>	<u>Theologische Zeitschrift</u>

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Need of the Study

Christianity in contemporary society has fallen prey to an alarming shallowness with regard to practical holiness. So-called "victorious life" books, pamphlets, and seminars flood the Christian "marketplaces." No doubt, some of these certainly have value; however, frustration or fruitlessness is often the result of the believer's attempt to follow someone's "easy steps" to a joyful Christian existence.

The conviction of this writer is that such a mentality may be attributed at least partially to misconceptions with regard to the nature of carnality and the necessity of practical holiness. Misdirected emphases on matters such as a rigid categorization of classes of Christians can lead to confusion and bewilderment: "What type of Christian am I?" Fervor in following Paul's example to conform to the image of Christ may be laid aside for the easy "one-two-three" of a "successful life" conference. Certainly not all such organizations or books are harmful; yet, the apparent deficiency of some of these must be corrected with a balanced view taken from the text of Scripture itself.

### The Purpose of the Study

The desire of the writer is to make a contribution to the proper understanding of the biblical text regarding Christian conduct. With this in mind, the purpose of the study is to determine properly balanced emphases in the areas of carnality and progressive sanctification.

### The Procedure of the Study

The procedure of the study will follow four primary lines of thought.

First, the NT Greek terminology behind the concept of carnality will be discussed. This will entail an examination of the OT term behind the NT σάρξ, "flesh." The biblical concept of "flesh" will be surveyed and its foundational significance determined. From this will come an examination of the two adjectives used in the NT to convey the concept of "carnal." The terminology will be in its grammatical and contextual background.

Second, one of two key passages will be studied as to its bearing on the concept of carnality in the NT. The passage is Romans 7:14-25. Special attention will be given to the identification of the subject of the Romans 7 experience and to the meaning of Paul's "ἐγὼ δὲ σαρκινός εἰμι" in verse 14.

Third, the second passage, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 will be considered. The primary emphasis here will be to determine the validity of rigidly categorizing carnality into classes.

Fourth, pertinent passages will be surveyed as to their contribution of an understanding of progressive sanctification. Special attention will be given to the nature of proper Christian conduct and its expected consistency in the life of the believer, and what the noticeable lack of practical sanctification may indicate.

## CHAPTER II

### AN EXAMINATION OF σάρκινος AND σαρκινός

The English word "carnal" is found in the KJV twelve times. In 1 Corinthians 3:4, it is translated from ἄνθρωποι. Romans 8:6, 7 and Hebrews 9:10 have the term σαρμός. The two adjectives with which this study deals are found in the other passages. σάρκινος is rendered "carnal" in Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1, and Hebrews 7:16. Romans 15:27, 1 Corinthians 3:3 (twice), 9:11, and 2 Corinthians 10:4 use σαρκινός. σαρκινός is also found in 2 Corinthians 1:12 and 1 Peter 2:11 where the KJV translates the word as "fleshly." σάρκινος in 2 Corinthians 3:3 is rendered "fleshy." This chapter will examine these adjectives and propose a balanced view of their use in NT contexts.

#### A Survey of σάρξ<sup>1</sup>

This term as used in the NT and particularly in Pauline literature is an extensive study in itself. Yet, at least a survey of its usage and an understanding of its meaning is imperative before discussing the adjectives

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent treatise on the use of σάρξ in the NT, see George Zemek, "Σάρξ in the New Testament with Special Emphases on its Background and its Occurrences in Hamartiological Contexts" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977).

derived from the noun. The OT equivalent will be presented first with a discussion of σάρξ in the NT following.

### בָּשָׂר in the OT

The Hebrew בָּשָׂר is the primary OT equivalent for σάρξ and is used about 266 times in OT literature.<sup>1</sup> Lexicographers differ greatly as to the categorization of the Scriptural usages of בָּשָׂר,<sup>2</sup> but the following divisions<sup>3</sup> develop the thought behind בָּשָׂר quite adequately for this study.

#### Denoting the substance comprising man and animal

At its simplest level, בָּשָׂר denotes the actual tissue and muscle, that is, the "flesh," of which man and animals are made. Depending upon the context, the term may denote animal flesh as food (1 Sam 2:13, 15) or the human flesh (Gen 40:19; Dan 1:15).

Though some make the euphemistic use of בָּשָׂר a separate category, it will suffice here to mention that the term is also used as a designation for the penis or foreskin (Exod 28:42; Lev 12:3).

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<sup>1</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Flesh," by A. C. Thiselton, p. 672. The term בָּשָׂר is also translated "flesh" and is found 17 times in the OT. It denotes "flesh to eat . . .; human flesh . . .; a blood relation . . ." (Thiselton, "Flesh," p. 673).

<sup>2</sup>See Zemek, "Σάρξ," p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>These divisions are adapted from TDNT, s.v. "σάρξ, σαρκικός, σάρκιος," by Eduard Schweizer, Friedrich Baumgartel, and Rudolph Meyer, 7:105-8; Thiselton, "Flesh," 1:672-74; and BDB, p. 142.



### Denoting the entire body

בָּשָׂר is also used to indicate the bone and blood of the body along with the actual flesh. First Kings 21:27 relates that Ahab "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted." Exodus 30:32 and Leviticus 16:4 also illustrate this use of בָּשָׂר as indicative of the body as an entity.

Thiselton asserts that "the flesh is . . . not merely the body but the whole, man as a person."<sup>1</sup> Zemek refers to this usage of בָּשָׂר as synecdochical.<sup>2</sup> Both these writers refer to Psalm 63:2 (63:1, English) as a classic example. "My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee" (NASB). Obviously, literal flesh is devoid of emotion; consequently, בָּשָׂר denotes "man's own self,"<sup>3</sup> using the part to represent the whole.

### Denoting blood relations

This Hebrew term is also used to indicate one's kindred. Speaking of his brother Joseph, Judah said, "Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; for he is our brother, our own flesh" (Gen 37:27, NASB). This usage is well attested to in the OT (cf. Jud 9:2; 1 Chr 11:1; Neh 5:5).

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<sup>1</sup>Thiselton, "Flesh," 1:672.

<sup>2</sup>Zemek, "Σάρξ," p. 35.

<sup>3</sup>Thiselton, "Flesh," 1:672.

A more specialized application of this category is in regard to the marital relationship. Genesis 2:23, 24 exemplifies this point.

#### Denoting mankind in general

Here the idiom  $\text{בשר}-\text{לכל}$  is employed. Not only can it apply to mankind (cf. Ezek 21:4, 5), but also to animals in particular (Gen 7:15) and all living things in general (Gen 6:17).

#### Denoting man's frailty

$\text{בשר}$  can be found to indicate "man over against God as frail."<sup>1</sup> As Thiselton asserts, "In the OT the flesh denotes man in his transitoriness as one who suffers sickness, death, fright, etc."<sup>2</sup> Luering makes an important distinction in his discussion of the phrase "flesh and blood": "The expression does not convey, as some have supposed, the idea of inherent sinfulness of the flesh (a doctrine borrowed by gnostic teachers from oriental sources), but merely the idea of ignorance and frailty in comparison with the possibilities of spiritual nature."<sup>3</sup> This frailty or transitoriness intrinsic to this use of  $\text{בשר}$  is noted in Isaiah 40:6-8 which says, in part, "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup>Thiselton, "Flesh," 1:673.

<sup>3</sup>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. "Flesh," by H. L. E. Luering, 2:1119.

withereth, the flower fadeth." The distinction between the weakness of בָּשָׂר and the power of God is drawn sharply in 2 Chronicles 32:8 where it says, "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord, our God."

A key observation is that the use of בָּשָׂר in the OT, while indicating weakness in some contexts, does not carry with it the indication of sinfulness. In other words, to say that man is "of flesh" is not equivalent to saying that he is "of sin." To be sure, the "flesh" may be the agent of sinful actions, but it is not in and of itself sinful. One scholar's remarks substantiate and summarize the use of בָּשָׂר in the OT:

In the Old Testament "flesh" denotes not only man's body as contrasted with his spirit, but in many cases the whole man as contrasted with God--a mode of conception springing naturally from the fact that the body is the obvious mark of the distinction of man from God, and carrying with it special reference to man's weakness and frailty, but not definitely in any passage of the Old Testament to his sinfulness. St. Paul follows both forms of this Old Testament use. He employs σάρξ sometimes to denote the body in no other sense than that of σῶμα, sometimes to denote the whole man under the aspect of human weakness confronting divine power, but without any necessary association with the term of a reference to sin and guilt going beyond the limits of sure Old Testament precedent.<sup>1</sup>

#### Σάρξ in the NT

For the scope of this study, the discussion here must necessarily be limited sharply. Yet, the survey will be sufficient to view σάρξ in its non-ethical and ethical

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<sup>1</sup>William P. Dickson, St. Paul's Use of the Terms Flesh and Spirit (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1883), pp. 43-44.

NT usage. In this section, the usages of σάρξ will be categorized following essentially the organization of Arndt and Gingrich.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to observe how these categories parallel those of בָּשָׂר.

Denoting "the material that covers the bones  
of a . . . body"<sup>2</sup>

First Corinthians 15:39 illustrates this use: "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another flesh of fish, and another flesh of birds." Passages referring to the act of physical circumcision are also illustrative (cf. Rom 2:28).

Denoting the entire body

Here σάρξ denotes the body with its bone and blood as well as flesh. Speaking of Christ, Peter asserted that when he was resurrected "his flesh did [not] see corruption" (Acts 2:31). It would appear that Peter is speaking generally of bodily decay. Paul also uses σάρξ as synecdoche for the whole body. One instance is in Galatians 4:13 where he speaks of an illness as being "infirmity of the flesh." Using the part to represent the whole is not insignificant.

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<sup>1</sup>BAGD, pp. 743-44. See Zemek, "Σάρξ," pp. 60-61 for a compilation of several approaches to categorizing the usages of σάρξ in NT literature.

<sup>2</sup>BAGD, p. 743.

Thiselton uses 2 Corinthians 7:5 to illustrate that the use of σάρξ in a synecdochical sense extends beyond the physical body in some contexts to denote "man generally."<sup>1</sup> He notes that the personal pronoun "we" could take the place of "our flesh" in the verse.<sup>2</sup> In cases such as this, σάρξ denotes man as an individual, a person (cf. John 6:51; Jas 5:3).

#### Denoting blood relations

As with בשר, σάρξ is sometimes used to indicate kinship. Included here may be references to national relationships and natural descent (Rom 9:8; 11:4) and marital relationships (Matt 19:5).

#### Denoting physical limitations and weaknesses

In this usage, σάρξ is used to connote "creaturely weakness,"<sup>3</sup> or, as Thayer puts it, "generally with a suggestion of weakness, frailty, mortality."<sup>4</sup> The implication may be understood best when contrasted with the power of the Creator. "Flesh" here is limited and finite whereas God, who is spirit, is unlimited and infinite.

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<sup>1</sup>Thiselton, "Flesh," 1:675.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 675. Cf. Zemek, "Σάρξ," p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Zemek, "Σάρξ," p. 66.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 570.

It is important to note that this use of σάρξ is not synonymous with sinfulness. Hendriksen's comments on John 1:14 are pertinent:

The term flesh (σάρξ) has various meanings in the New Testament. In our passage it has reference to human nature, considered not as sinful (8:46), yet for a while with the curse due to sin resting upon it, so that until the ransom had been paid it is subject to weariness, pain, misery, death. . . .<sup>1</sup>

#### Denoting a depreciatory ethical sense

To this point, "flesh" as found in the OT parallels usages of the term/concept in the NT. At this juncture, however, an idea is given to σάρξ which is not explicit in נֶפֶשׁ. Involved here is the idea of σάρξ in an ethical, not essentially physical sense; yet the physical cannot be divorced from this concept.

As has been mentioned, both OT and NT literature see the נֶפֶשׁ/σάρξ phenomenon as encompassing, by extension, the "whole man" in some contexts. This concept could logically be extended further so that, since sin affects the whole man, a reference to man in a morally depreciatory sense may not unexpectedly use that term which denotes both frailty and man as a whole. The comments of Trench elucidate:

It is quite true that σάρξ is often used in the N.T. as covering that entire domain of our nature fallen and made subject to vanity. . . . Thus the ἔργα τῆς σαρκός (Gal. v. 19-21) are not merely those sinful works that

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to John (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 84.

are wrought in and through the body, but those which move in the sphere and region of the mind as well.<sup>1</sup>

When considering this use of σάρξ, it is important to stress that nowhere is the σάρξ itself said to be sinful. Rather, the principle of instrumentality is the key. Gundry comments on Romans 7:4-8:3:

Sin dwells within the flesh and the flesh weakly submits to it. On both counts the flesh as a physical entity with "members" is distinguishable from sin. But because of the tyranny of sin over the flesh, in 8:4-13 flesh comes to stand for the sin which has so completely dominated the concrete physical life of the person as to become practically one with it.<sup>2</sup>

Several scholars have given their understanding of σάρξ in a depreciatory ethical sense:

Sinful human nature: the human nature viewed as the seat and vehicle of sinful desire. . . .<sup>3</sup>

[σάρξ covers] at times the whole region of that in man which is alienated from God and from the life in God.<sup>4</sup>

The flesh is the willing instrument of sin, and is subject to sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the σάρξ.<sup>5</sup>

"Flesh" in this ethically depreciatory sense means "human nature as controlled and directed by sin."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (London: n.p., 1880; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 269-70.

<sup>2</sup>Robert H. Gundry, Soma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>William Hendriksen, Romans: Chapters 1-8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 217.

<sup>4</sup>Trench, Synonyms, p. 270. <sup>5</sup>BAGD, p. 744.

<sup>6</sup>John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), p. 244.

Σάρξ, then, brings to hamartiological passages both the extended concept of viewing the whole man and the clear implication of limited, weak, and transitory nature by which sin may (and does) readily manifest itself. It is this concept of σάρξ which is foundational to "carnality" and to the passages considered in this study.

### Conclusion

Having surveyed σάρξ and its implications, certain points have been made which have bearing on the depreciatory ethical sense of the term and should be reiterated here. First, nowhere is σάρξ itself proclaimed to be sinful. Second, this term is often used as synecdoche for the whole man as an individual. Third, σάρξ characterizes man as frail, weak, and transitory. Fourth, σάρξ is that vehicle or instrument by which sin readily manifests itself. Fifth, context is of utmost importance and is indispensable to the proper understanding of σάρξ and its cognates.

### The Significance of -ικός and -ινος

As with any language, Greek possesses prefixes and suffixes which alter to varying degrees the connotation of the words to which they have been appended. The adjectival endings in question modify the root meaning of σάρξ and it is this modification which is to be evaluated here.

Metzger contrasts the distinction between the suffixes quite sharply:



Adjectives expressing the idea belonging to, pertaining to, with the characteristics of, are formed by adding the suffix -ικός to a noun stem. . . . Adjectives which express the material from which anything is made are formed with the suffix -ινος.<sup>1</sup>

He sees σαρκικός, then, as "fleshly, carnal" and σάρκινος as "of the flesh."

Another grammarian states that "the distinction in meaning between adjectives in -ικός and those in -ινος is generally maintained, the former connoting . . . -like, and the latter made of. . . ."<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this latter statement is a bit more cautious than the first in that it maintains that the distinction is "generally" held.

The preceding quotations reflect the accepted distinction between -ικός and -ινος. The distinction may be clarified by scriptural example. The adjective βασιλικός illustrates the idea of "characterized by." "Royal" is the meaning from "pertaining to a king" (cf. John 4:46; Acts 12:21).<sup>3</sup> The KJV "all thyine wood" in Revelation 18:12 is "πᾶν ξύλον θύϊνον (-ινος suffix) which, put in a literal sense, is "made of" thyine."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek (Princeton: By the author, 1976), pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup>James Hope Moulton and Wilbert Francis Howard, Accidence and Word-Formation, in A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), p. 378.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Trench, Synonyms, p. 272.

### Σάρξ with the -ικός/-ινος Suffixes

The distinctions given in the preceding section are not so clearly delineated with reference to σάρξ in its depreciatory ethical sense. Grammarians and commentators differ within a rather wide spectrum as to the proper emphasis of the suffixes and the amount of distinction between σαρκικός and σάρκινος.

Some prefer to maintain a clear contrast between the two adjectives. S. Lewis Johnson comments on 1 Corinthians 3:1-3:

An important word change must be noted. Carnal here is not sarkinos, but sarkikos, which means, literally, characterized by the flesh, being the equivalent of after the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Trench maintains that "when indeed St. Paul says of the Corinthians (I Cor. iii. 1) that they were σάρκινοι, he finds serious fault indeed with them; but the accusation is far less grave than if he had written σαρκικοί instead."<sup>2</sup> Another writes: "[σάρκινος] is chosen deliberately, and it expresses a shade of meaning different from σαρκικός, placing the state of the Corinthians under a distinct aspect."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 1234.

<sup>2</sup>Trench, Synonyms, p. 273.

<sup>3</sup>Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 52.

On the other hand, there is significant weight in favor of seeing little or no difference between the two adjectives. Usage within contexts plays the primary role. This is indispensable in determining the true import of scriptural terminology. Obviously, the grammar must be considered, but not to the point that contextual considerations are slighted or ignored. The following comments illustrate this concept.

Blass-Debrunner offers that, in certain contexts, namely, Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1, and Hebrews 7:16, "the best textual tradition favors -ινος, but the sense, because the contrast is with πνευματικός, favors -ικός."<sup>1</sup> Cranfield asserts that "in I Cor 3.1, where σάρκινος stands in contrast to πνευματικός, it is natural to understand it as equivalent to σαρκικός in v. 3."<sup>2</sup> Burton goes so far as to refer to the adjectives as "σαρκικός and its synonym σάρκινος."<sup>3</sup> Others concur with the view of these men,<sup>4</sup> as does this writer.

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<sup>1</sup>BDF, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1:357.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest De Witt Burton, Spirit, Soul, and Flesh (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), p. 204.

<sup>4</sup>See TDNT, s.v. "σάρξ," by Schweizer et al., 1:144; Myron James Houghton, "The Pauline Concept of Flesh" (Postgraduate seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1968), p. 7; Hendriksen, Romans, p. 231; F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 78.

### Conclusions

Certain conclusions may be drawn from the preceding study. First, by synecdoche, σάρξ, in hamartiological contexts, indicates the whole man as alienated from God and controlled by sin. Second, σάρξ in its depreciatory ethical sense does not indicate that "flesh" itself is sinful, but that it is the weak and frail instrument by which sin manifests itself. Third, the grammatical distinction between -ικός and -ινος, though legitimate, is not inflexible so as to make σαρκικός and σάρκινος almost technical terms. Fourth, context is of primary importance in determining the nuances of meaning behind the adjectives which are translated "carnal."

## CHAPTER III

### THE CARNALITY OF PAUL IN ROMANS 7

The seventh chapter of Romans has long been the subject of debate as to its intended interpretation. The passage has been the focal point of extensive study, particularly the last half of the chapter. The nature of this paper limits the extent of the treatment of Romans 7 to two general problems, namely, the identity of the person described in verses 14-25 and the essence of σάρκινος in verse 14.

The procedure of this chapter will be to provide a brief contextual analysis of Romans, to present the most prominent views as to the identity of Paul's subject in verses 14-25, to examine exegetical evidence for the view taken here, to determine the nature of carnality (σάρκινος) in verse 14, and to draw conclusions pertinent to this study.

#### Contextual Analysis

##### The City

The place of Rome in biblical and secular history is hardly an obscure subject. The capital of an extensive empire, Rome's influence has stretched beyond geographical and chronological boundaries. At the writing of the epistle

to the Romans, the empire was in the early years of Nero's reign and experiencing a period which was relatively peaceful and just.<sup>1</sup>

The city had a substantial population. One archaeological discovery indicates a census of 4,100,000.<sup>2</sup> The importance of this fact lies in the resulting multiplicity of ethnic, religious, economic, and social strata. "People from many lands thronged its streets, and with them came their religions."<sup>3</sup> Paul's missionary heart and vision had compassion with the spiritual need of Rome.

### The Church

The beginning of the church at Rome is lost in obscurity. It may have been established for quite some time prior to the writing of the epistle (Rom 15:23) and was probably "a church of considerable size."<sup>4</sup> Harrison offers a number of possibilities as to the initiation of the Christian witness in Rome.<sup>5</sup> In any case, Paul was familiar with the church by reputation and was anxious to communicate with the believers there.

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Edmund Hiebert, An Introduction to the Pauline Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Everett F. Harrison, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> Hiebert, Introduction, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, Introduction, pp. 300-2.

The congregation was probably a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Scholars are divided as to which group was pre-dominant at the Roman church.<sup>1</sup> In either case, Paul was writing to a mixed congregation and the matter of which group was predominant is not pertinent here.

### The Occasion

The occasion of the writing of the epistle to the Romans is generally agreed upon by conservative scholars, and Hiebert's comments are sufficient:

The occasion for the writing of Romans . . . was not due to any internal conditions in the Roman church but rather to the development of Paul's own plans. He has finished his missionary labors in the eastern provinces (15:23) and now feels free to inaugurate in the West the labors he has anticipated for some time (Acts 19:21). As soon as he has taken the collection to Jerusalem, he plans to stop at Rome to visit the church there on his way to Spain (15:24). . . . When he learned of the impending visit of Phoebe to Rome he determined to avail himself of the opportunity to communicate with the Roman church.<sup>2</sup>

### The Epistle

Opinions vary as to the purpose behind Paul's writing the type of epistle which he did.<sup>3</sup> In any case, "it is evident that the apostle is being divinely led to give to the Church of Christ this clear and comprehensive presentation of the doctrine of salvation by faith for all

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Hiebert, Introduction, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-181; also Harrison, Introduction, pp. 304-5.

subsequent generations."<sup>1</sup> The epistle has its theme in 1:16, 17.

Paul delineates a clear and logically arranged exposition of the gospel. The thought is divided generally into two broad areas: doctrine (1-11) and application (12-16). The first eleven chapters may be viewed as (1) demonstrating "that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, lack [God's] righteousness"<sup>2</sup> (1:18-3:20); (2) revealing that God in His grace has provided for the justification of men through faith in Christ (3:21-5:21); (3) providing a treatise on the character of life (i.e., sanctification) which belongs to the one who has been granted justification by faith (6:1-8:39); and (4) establishing God's faithfulness to His word despite human unbelief, particularly Israel's (9:1-11:36). Chapters 12-16 compose an exposition of what should be the practical manifestation of the foregoing doctrine in the life of the believer.

Since this study deals specifically with 7:14-25, a detailed synopsis of its immediate context is advisable. Bruce provides an adequate outline of chapters 6-8, the section dealing with the sanctification of the believer:

- IV. THE WAY OF HOLINESS (vi. 1-viii. 39).
  - a. Freedom from sin (vi. 1-23).
    - i. A supposed objection (vi. 1, 2).
    - ii. The meaning of baptism (vi. 3-14).
    - iii. The slave-market analogy (vi. 15-23).

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<sup>1</sup>Hiebert, Introduction, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>Harrison, Introduction, p. 307.



- b. Freedom from the law (vii. 1-25).
  - i. The marriage analogy (vii. 1-6).
  - ii. The dawn of conscience (vii. 7-13).
  - iii. The conflict within (vii. 14-25).
- c. Freedom from death (viii. 1-39).
  - i. Life in the Spirit (viii. 1-17).
  - ii. The glory to come (viii. 18-30).
  - iii. The triumph of faith (viii. 31-39).<sup>1</sup>

### Interpretations of Romans 7:14-25<sup>2</sup>

Logically, the passage must be dealing either with Paul or with someone else,<sup>3</sup> and must have its setting in either preconversion or post-conversion experience. These four options yield four combinations: Paul--preconversion, man--preconversion, Paul--post-conversion, and man--post-conversion. From these four combinations, four prominent<sup>4</sup> views have been developed over the years and involve the first three combinations in the preceding list.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup>An excellent treatment of the passage is done by J. D. G. Dunn, "Rom. 7, 14-25 in the Theology of Paul," TZ 31 (September/October 1975):257-73.

<sup>3</sup>I.e., man in general.

<sup>4</sup>Mitton has developed a unique view whereby the passage is not Paul's experience but "a description of a man who is trying to live the good life" and may be either pre- or post-conversion. See C. Leslie Mitton, "Romans vii. Reconsidered," ExpTim 65 (February 1954):132-35.

<sup>5</sup>Generally, "man--post-conversion" is considered an extension of "Paul--post-conversion" by those who adopt the latter view with either of its variations.

## Paul--Pre-conversion

This view with shades of variations is held by a number of scholars.<sup>1</sup> Denney voices his understanding of the passage: "The experience described is essentially that of his [Paul's] pre-Christian days. It is the unregenerate man's experience, surviving at least in memory into regenerate."<sup>2</sup> Those who hold to this view generally find an impetus in verse 24 and the supposedly "gloomy" atmosphere of the passage in general. They maintain that a regenerate man would not utter such a cry.<sup>3</sup>

## Man--Pre-conversion

Though variations exist, the two prominent points of this view are that the passage is not autobiographical and that it is not the picture of the state of affairs of a redeemed man.

Hendriksen offers a review and rebuttal of this "view that Rom. 7:14-25 portrays a man apart from Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> See H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans, trans. J. C. Moore and E. Johnson, in vol. 5 of Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament (n.c.: T. & T. Clark, 1883; reprint ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 292; C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, MNTC (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n.d.), pp. 106-8; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), pp. 184-86.

<sup>2</sup> James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in vol. 2 of Expositor's Greek New Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 641.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer, Romans, p. 285.

a person engaged in a desperate struggle under the law."<sup>1</sup>  
 He refers to the works of Kümmel and Ridderbos who maintain this view.

#### Paul--Post-conversion (Abnormal Experience)

McClain maintains that Romans 7 was written by a converted Paul and that it pictures "a saved man trying to be holy by keeping the law."<sup>2</sup> This view understands the last half of Romans 7 to pertain to the carnal man, and that "if we fail to yield ourselves to God--then there is nothing left for us but the dreary, depressing, desperate experience which we find in the seventh chapter."<sup>3</sup>

If this view is correct, then was Paul a carnal and unyielding Christian at the time of the writing of Romans 7? The extensive use of the first person and present tense in the passage strongly indicate that Paul's personal experience is the subject of the chapter, and, according to this view, the experience would be that of an unyielded Christian. McClain apparently allows this understanding.

Paul is not trying to shed responsibility here. He is only showing that sin has obtained a mastery in his life that he could not break. He is a slave. Isn't that the experience we have sometimes, when we lose sight of Jesus. We try "to be good" by keeping rules and laws?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, Romans, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace, ed. Herman A. Hoyt (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 156. See also Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Impotence of the Law: Toward a Fresh Understanding of Romans 7:14-25," in Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation, ed.

Such a view seems untenable. First, it has been established that σάρκις need not be automatically understood as a technical term denoting a way of life which is blatantly in contrast to mature Christian living. Context may allow the term to reflect the fact that any Christian is still far short of God's perfect standard. Paul, then, writes that he recognizes that he is still limited by the flesh regardless of how mature he is spiritually.

Second, the extensive use of the present tense in the passage strongly indicates that Paul is relating his lifestyle as it was at the time of the writing of Romans 7. It is difficult, therefore, to understand how Paul could be used by God to write Romans if he was not in full communion with Him at the time.

Third, the flow of the context of Romans is disrupted if 7:14-25 is viewed as the miserable experience of the unyielded Christian. In chapters six and seven, Paul has been talking about life in Christ and the matter of sanctification. He continues the subject in the last half of chapter seven by talking about the normal struggle of every Christian during the process of progressive sanctification. It is not a matter of despair, but a matter of simply recognizing that the flesh is still present with the Christian and that he must always be on guard against its

self-centered inclinations. This is part of the normal Christian experience.

The fourth prominent view is adopted by this writer and is discussed in the next section.

#### Paul--Post-conversion (Normal Experience)

The essence of this position is that Romans 7:14-25 is Paul's autobiographical account of his own post-conversion experience. It is generally agreed by those who hold this view that Paul is not unique in his experience, but is representative of the normal experience of every believer who is growing in grace. In the words of Hendriksen: "In 7:14-25 the regenerated individual, Paul, is describing his own condition and that of believers generally."<sup>1</sup> The following exegetical data substantiate this view.

#### Change of verb tense

An inescapable fact is the change of verb tense midway through the seventh chapter. Nygren observes "that Paul, after consistently writing in the past tense in verses 7-13, goes over to the present tense, beginning with verse 14, and continues to use it consistently to the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen, Romans, p. 228. See also Cranfield, Romans, 1:341ff.; Murray, Romans, 1:248ff.; Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1949), pp. 284ff.; H. P. Liddon, Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1961), p. 126. For a fully documented compilation of twenty-three scholars who espouse this view of Rom 7:14-25, see Hendriksen, Romans, pp. 229-30.

chapter."<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen asserts that "the most natural explanation is that there has been a radical change; that is, that the 'I' of the second passage is no longer the unregenerate of 7:5, 9a but is spiritually reborn."<sup>2</sup> Hence, the experience detailed in verses 14-25 must be contemporaneous with the writing of the passage.

#### Extensive use of first person singular

Though literary devices sometimes alter the normal sense of a language, this does not appear to be the case in this passage. Paul is certainly referring to himself and the extensive use of the first person emphasizes this. Dunn comments:

There is nothing in Rom. 7 which demands that the frequently repeated 'I'/'me' (about 20 times) be understood in a way which distances Paul from the experience he is describing. . . . The existential anguish and frustration of vv. 15ff. and 24 is too real, too poignant to permit any reduction of the 'I' to a mere figure of style. Whatever else this is, it is surely Paul speaking from the heart of his own experience.<sup>3</sup>

#### The immediate context

In the contextual analysis, chapter seven was seen to be in the middle of a section where Paul is writing about sanctification. Man has been seen as utterly sinful (1:18-3:20), justified by faith (3:21-5:21), and then involved in a life of holiness (6:1-8:39). To insist that Romans 7:14-25

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<sup>1</sup>Nygren, Romans, pp. 288-89.

<sup>2</sup>Hendriksen, Romans, p. 228.

<sup>3</sup>Dunn, "Rom. 7, 14-25," p. 260.

describes the unregenerate man is to totally disrupt the natural flow of this very logically developed epistle.

Nygren elucidates:

We must mention the context in which Paul makes the statements which are under discussion. Throughout chapters 5-8 the subject is the meaning of the Christian life. The question to which Paul is giving answer is what it means to 'live in Christ.' That answer is four-fold: it means to be free from Wrath, Sin, the Law, and Death. The passage now under discussion is the concluding part of the third affirmation, which speaks of the Christian's freedom from the law. We cannot help asking how Paul could suddenly turn, in that context, to a description of the anguished and discordant status of the soul of the man who is under the law.<sup>1</sup>

#### The description of the subject

The three preceding lines of proof are exceptionally weighty in the argumentation for this view. In addition, the description of the subject within the passage does not appear consistent with any other than a believer.

The person involved plainly hates sin and recognizes it for what it is (7:15, 16, 19). This is not characteristic of the unregenerate, as Paul made clear earlier in the epistle (1:18-25; 3:9-18).

Regarding the word of God, the Romans 7 man says, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" (7:22, NASB). One who is spiritually dead is incapable of such an attitude.

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<sup>1</sup>Nygren, Romans, pp. 287-88. Cf. Dunn, "Rom. 7, 14-25," p. 260.

Paul as Σάρκινος

The preceding argumentation has indicated that the "I" of Romans 7:14-25 is indeed Paul in his regenerate state, indeed, as a mature believer. The question must now be resolved as to what Paul means in verse 14 particularly. In what sense can Paul say, "ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινός εἰμι"?

A Variant Reading

It should be noted at the outset that, although the United Bible Societies text does not indicate it, some manuscripts read σαρκικός at verse 14 rather than σάρκινος. The former reading is supported by 8 LP and the mass of cursives. The latter is supported by 8 ABCDEFG and stands as the preferred reading.<sup>1</sup>

The Depreciatory Ethical Sense

It is to be remembered that, insofar as the adjectival suffix is concerned, σάρκινος would indicate primarily "made of flesh" without an ethical sense attached. But it must also be remembered that substantial evidence was given to regard this adjective as also possessing an ethical sense, especially in hamartiological contexts.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, σάρκινος may carry with it the depreciatory ethical sense in much the same way as σαρκικός.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Murray, Romans, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 15-16 above.

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Hodge, A Commentary on Romans (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 229.



## Qualifications of Σάρκινος in Verse 14

At least two points in the text support σάρκινος as indicative of a depreciatory sense.

Πεπραμένος ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν

Concerning this rather strong phrase, Meyer remarks that, along with the preceding phrase in verse 14, "these very predicates, as strong as possible, expressed without limitation, and in contrast to πνευματικός, should have precluded men from explaining it of the regenerate man."<sup>1</sup> This is no insignificant challenge.

Appeal has been made to the LXX use of the verb πωπράσκω in 1 Kings 21:20, 25 and 2 Kings 17:17 (in the LXX, 3 Kings and 4 Kings, respectively). In these passages, the subjects involved have "sold themselves" to do evil. This force is not as easily adopted for Romans 7 as some would infer, primarily in light of Paul's ensuing rhetoric concerning his hatred of evil and his yearning to be freed from it. It is quite acceptable to understand the perfect πεπράμενος as indicating a state of being "sold under the power of sin [and] subjected to a power that is alien to his own will."<sup>2</sup>

Cranfield summarizes:

When Christians fail to take account of the fact that they . . . are still πεπραμένοι ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, they

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer, Romans, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Murray, Romans, p. 261. Cf. Hendriksen, Romans, p. 231; Hodge, Romans, p. 230.

are specially dangerous to others and to themselves because they are self-deceived. The more seriously a Christian strives to live from grace and to submit to the disciplines of the gospel, the more sensitive he becomes to the fact of his continuing sinfulness.<sup>1</sup>

#### The dualism of 7:14-25

Paul does undeniably have in mind a certain duality in the Christian life. But he does not think of a divided will or a discord in the soul. He has in mind the tension which exists, in the Christian life, between the will and action, between intention and performance.<sup>2</sup>

So Nygren grasps the issue at hand. This ongoing struggle with sin adds impetus to the position that Paul's "ἐγὼ σάρκινός εἰμι" reflects not just a composition of flesh but a realization of the existence of a principle in his life which is contrary to both God's will and his.

This dualism which is the core of the passage is capsulized at verse 25. At that point "the elements of the antithesis are stated in the terms of the preceding context, the law of God (cf. vss. 14. 16. 22) versus the law of sin (cf. vs. 23) and the mind (cf. v. 23) versus the flesh (cf. vs. 18)."<sup>3</sup> This conclusion to the passage is a puzzle to some, but it should not be. Galatians 5:17 is clear in its reference to the believer, and it contains the same dualism as presented in Romans 7:14-25.

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, Romans, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> Nygren, Romans, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> Murray, Romans, p. 270.

### Conclusions

In developing this study of carnality, Romans 8 provides some pertinent information. First, the experience portrayed is the apostle Paul's and, by extension, is representative of the experience of all genuine believers. Second, Paul, obviously an exceptionally spiritual man, still labels himself as "carnal" (σάρκινος in a depreciatory ethical sense). Third, Paul was willing to take the label of "carnal" because he was acutely aware of the sinful tendencies which he possessed and against which he was always on guard. Finally, in light of the preceding, "carnal" need not be viewed as a sort of technical term applicable only to professing Christians with an unbiblical lifestyle, but may be legitimately applicable to all believers in varying degrees.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CARNALITY OF THE CORINTHIANS

#### IN 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-3

In any discussion of carnality, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 figures prominently. What is unfortunate is that it is often viewed essentially as the final word on the subject. For this writer, the concept of carnality in the Corinthian correspondence is better understood in light of the findings in the preceding chapters of study.

The study of this passage will involve a brief contextual analysis, a statement of the popular interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, a proposal of a modification of that view, and pertinent conclusions affecting the concept of carnality.

#### Contextual Analysis

##### The City

Corinth was noted as a center of commerce. Trade routes and waterways provided a constant stream of people of various backgrounds. The commercial status of Corinth also made it a wealthy city and noted metropolitan area. It is no surprise that a city of this nature and with its substantial population (approximately 700,000) acquired a reputation as a center of corruption. "This mixed population

together with the prosperity of the place, fostered a licentious spirit that was notorious even in Greece."<sup>1</sup>

### The Church

Paul was the founder of the church at Corinth (1 Cor 3:6, 10; 4:15; Acts 18:1-18). On his second missionary journey, the apostle labored with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth to establish a work which was to become essentially Gentile in composition.

The membership of the church was varied as to its ethnic background and was primarily from "the humbler stations in life (1 Cor. 1:26-31)."<sup>2</sup> The church reflected its cultural setting in that it had considerable exposure to surrounding pagan influences.

### The Occasion

Three messengers from the church at Corinth visited Paul at Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8, 17). They brought with them a letter from the congregation which was a collection of questions asking the apostle for advice on particular issues of church practice.<sup>3</sup>

In writing the epistle to the Corinthians, Paul not only answered their questions but took advantage of the situation to address himself to certain other problems in the church, which apparently were not lacking.

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, Introduction, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup>Hiebert, Introduction, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 111ff.

### The Epistle

First Corinthians is characterized by being thoroughly practical. The epistle "is an illustration of the truth that no area in the believer's life is exempt from the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. . . . It reveals the burning desire of the Apostle that the cross of Christ shall be applied to every problem in the Christian life."<sup>1</sup>

The content of the epistle is easily organized with reference to the problems discussed and answers given to the Corinthians' questions. Paul gives instruction concerning church factions (1:10-4:21), moral laxity in the church (5:1-6:20), marriage (7:1-40), meat offered to idols (8:1-11:1), disorders in public worship (11:2-14:40), the resurrection (15:1-58), and miscellaneous personal matters (16:1-24). The passage in question is found in Paul's discussion concerning the strife which was threatening church unity.

### A Popular Interpretation

Many who approach this Corinthian passage come away with a scheme of interpretation which seems artificial and imposed upon the text. This is not to say that it is entirely erroneous, but misdirected in its emphasis.

This interpretation involves seeing distinct classes of individuals in the passage. S. Lewis Johnson is one who is illustrative and is quoted here at length:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

Paul has described four types of men. The first, the natural man, is the man without the Spirit, who needs the new birth (cf. Jn 3:1-8). The second is the carnal-weak man (I Cor 3:1), the babe in Christ, who needs growth through reception of the milk of the Word. The third type is the carnal-willful man, the older, yet immature, Christian, who needs restoration to fellowship, or the healthy condition conducive to the taking of nourishment, by confession of his willfulness, or sin (cf. I Jn 1:9). The fourth is the spiritual or mature man, who has responded to the milk and grown into spiritual adulthood, so that he is strong and able to take the meat of the Word (I Cor 2:15; 3:2). This is the man God would have every Christian to be.<sup>1</sup>

It is admitted that the difference between the saved and unsaved is as distinct as life from death. It is beyond this where the question arises.

In the same vein, another writer adopts the view that 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 speaks of "the carnal one man" and "the carnal two man."<sup>2</sup> The position is built heavily upon the word change from σαρκίνους in verse 1 to σαρκικοί in verse 3.

#### An Examination of the "Classes" Interpretation

The weakness in the aforementioned view lies in its stress upon categorization. In an age when so much popular Christian literature emphasizes formulas and "steps" supposedly drawn from Scripture, such a position is easily propagated.

The danger of such an emphasis lies in the compartmentalized type of thinking it encourages. For example, it

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, "First Corinthians," Wycliffe, p. 1234.

<sup>2</sup>Dale W. Parker, "The New Testament Doctrine Pertaining to the Carnal Christian" (M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1978), pp. 27-29.

has been proposed in this paper that Paul conceived of himself as "carnal." If such a concept is viewed through the grid of the supposed categories of 1 Corinthians 3, then Paul becomes a less than favorable example to emulate. This, of course, is false and supports the idea that the 1 Corinthians passage may not be best understood in light of "carnal one" and "carnal two" compartments.

#### Exegetical Data

The following points lend credence to the de-emphasizing of the "classes" concept in the passage at hand.

#### Variant reading

It should be noted that there exists a variant reading in 1 Corinthians 3:1 for σαρκίνοις. In DEFGLP, σαρκινοῖς is found and is considered "an obvious correction."<sup>1</sup> The preferred reading of σαρκίνοις is supported by 8 ABC\*D\*33 and stands as correct.

#### Relation of σαρκίνοις to σαρκινοί

As was previously stated, stress is laid on the word change from verse 1 to verse 3 by those who prefer to categorize the members of the Corinthian church and, by extension, all believers. The following observations greatly

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<sup>1</sup>Moulton and Howard, Accidence, p. 378.



modify this over-emphasized distinction between the adjectives.<sup>1</sup>

First, the adjective πνευματικοῖς stands in contrast to σαρκίνοις in verse 1. In σάρκινος, the -ινος suffix generally indicates "made of" and certainly does not completely lose that idea here. But, because of its antithesis to πνευματικοῖς, σαρκίνοις apparently takes on the connotation of "characterized by" as its counterpart σαρκικός. Cranfield asserts that "in I Cor. 3.1, where σάρκινος stands in contrast to πνευματικός, it is natural to understand it as equivalent to σαρκικός in v. 3."<sup>2</sup> Grosheide remarks, "The difference between the two is not great."<sup>3</sup>

Second, Paul, after asserting that the Corinthians were σαρκίνοις, says, "ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοὶ ἐστέ." The use of ἔτι seems to indicate a continuance of a previous condition, just as does the English "yet." The Greek term is indicative of "a thing which continues at present."<sup>4</sup>

It would appear that if Paul intended a sharp distinction between the adjectives, he might have said, "νῦν γὰρ σαρκικοὶ ἐστέ." This would have been more suitable to indicate a change or transfer from one "class" of carnality to another.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. pp. 15-16 above.

<sup>2</sup>Cranfield, Romans, p. 357.

<sup>3</sup>Grosheide, First Corinthians, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>Thayer, Lexicon, p. 255.

### The character of Corinthian carnality

The term "carnal" generally conjures up images of a Christian living in flagrant sin. In light of this, the picture painted by Paul is worth noting.

First, the Corinthians were yet characterized by spiritual immaturity, as "νηπίους ἐν χριστῷ" (v. 1). They were yet taking in "the ABC's of the gospel, the 'Four Spiritual Laws,' which is frequently, erroneously, called 'gospel preaching.'"<sup>1</sup>

Second, the church at Corinth had "ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις" (v. 3) among them. "Rivalry, jealousy"<sup>2</sup> and "strife"<sup>3</sup> were evident in the church and threatening their unity. Munck proposes that there were not actual factions in the church as yet, but that it was a future threat (1 Cor 1:10) and that the real problem was strife (1:11) which, if unchecked, would result in divisions.<sup>4</sup> If this is legitimate, then the Corinthian carnality was recognizable not by visible divisions as such, but by the attitude of divisiveness and partisanship. In any case, Paul names this specifically as characteristic of Corinthian carnality.

Third, the church was further characterized by their humanistic standards rather than biblical standards. Paul accuses, "κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε" (v. 3). Even here, the

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<sup>1</sup>James L. Boyer, For A World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1971), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>Thayer, Lexicon, p. 271.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>4</sup>Harrison, Introduction, p. 289.

charge is qualified by the specific trait of strife which evidenced that they walked "according to the standard" of men.

#### A Modified Approach

First Corinthians 3 is clear that there are Christians who are not living as they ought. There is no argument there. But what may be a better way of viewing practical Christianity is that there are many levels of maturity among God's elect. Among these levels are included those like Paul who, though certainly mature in the Lord, regard themselves as "carnal," not in a sense of apathy or despair, but with the simple recognition that there is much in their finite imperfection which is short of God's standard and in need of God's grace for continued growth.

Rigid categorization of classes of Christians tends to promulgate a "Where do I fit in?" mentality which can lead a growing believer to discouragement or despair. Many reach the conclusion that, since they do not view themselves as spiritually mature, they must therefore be carnal. Without proper instruction in Christian living, such a self-image can lead to frustration. First Corinthians 3:1-3, then, does not seem to necessitate nor encourage a "categorization" mentality.

#### A Note on Self-examination

Perhaps due to the convenience of a carnal "niche" into which one may fit, one's regeneration, as long as the

individual had a "conversion experience," is not called into question although his lifestyle may be characterized by sin. He is, after all, only carnal.

Paul's approach is quite different. While much is made of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, little is popularized concerning Paul's counsel to the Corinthians regarding self-examination. ten Pas notes the pertinent passages in his study.<sup>1</sup> Among them: "Let no man deceive himself" (1 Cor 3:18); ". . . [the gospel] by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you" (1 Cor 15:2); and "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5).

### Conclusions

From this study of 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, certain conclusions may be drawn. First, while it is granted that the Corinthians were not living as they ought, there is nothing inherent in the text which demands a compartmentalization of Christians into different classes. Second, the character of the Corinthian carnality was not flagrant sin (humanly speaking), but rather sin pertaining to attitudes and a complacency with immaturity. Third, Paul does not infer that professing believers whose lives are characterized by sin are always merely "carnal." Fourth, Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians included more than one reference to spiritual self-examination.

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<sup>1</sup>Arend J. ten Pas, The Lordship of Christ (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978), p. 23.

CHAPTER V

PERSPECTIVES ON THE DOCTRINE OF  
PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

The two preceding chapters have given evidence that the carnal Christian as pictured in contemporary evangelical society is not necessarily drawn from biblical statements and inferences. The term "carnal" may encompass even Paul and need not be confined to describe a professing believer whose life is characterized by rebellion, unyieldedness, or apathy.

This chapter proposes to outline specific and clear biblical propositions with regard to the spiritual growth of the Christian. This growth, progressive sanctification, is the normal and expected mode of life for every genuine believer. As a child of God, the believer strives to conform to the standards of his Father.

Paul realized that even the best human effort falls short of perfect standards. With this realization, he admitted to being "carnal" although, from a human perspective, he was quite spiritually mature. The balance between carnality and spirituality is thus seen in his experience.

This balance is the subject of this paper and is pointed up in this chapter. If the following distinctives

are indeed among the proper evidences of regeneration, and if "carnality" may be legitimately understood as to include even the inability to conform to perfection, then many professing believers who are now seen as carnal may not genuinely have been regenerated at all. If there is no evidence of regeneration, then there is doubt as to the validity of the "conversion" experience.

### The Definition of Progressive Sanctification

Sanctification has at its foundation the idea of being "set apart" or "separated."<sup>1</sup> The doctrine itself is generally viewed in three aspects: positional, progressive, and future. The first involves separation from the "sinful world (positionally)" to "divine ownership"; the second, from a "sinful walk (practically)" to "divine character"; and the third, from "sinful nature (perfectly)" to "divine nature."<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, the second of these with which this study is concerned.

An adequate definition of the doctrine is provided by Berkhof who says that sanctification is "that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which he delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform

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<sup>1</sup>L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1941), p. 527.

<sup>2</sup>Alva J. McClain, "Christian Theology: Salvation and the Christian Life," rev. Charles R. Smith (Class syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 137.

good works."<sup>1</sup> This definition emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of justification, conformity to His image, and the necessary performance of good works by the believer.

The following section goes beyond a definition and develops more fully the nature of progressive sanctification.

### The Distinctives of Progressive Sanctification<sup>2</sup>

While this list is hardly exhaustive, it provides biblical insight into the expected behavior of the believer and the place of sanctification in his life.

#### "The Outcome and Inseparable Consequence of Regeneration"

When one who is spiritually dead is brought to redemption by the grace of God, he receives an impetus not previously known to glorify God with his life. Writing to those who have "obtained like precious faith with us" (2 Pet 1:1), Peter clearly informs them that they are to manifest virtues in their daily life which are not congruous with what they escaped, namely, "the corruption that is in the world" (2 Pet 1:4). Any habitual lack of these virtues (2 Pet 1:5-7) calls for scrutinizing one's "calling and election" (2 Pet 1:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 532.

<sup>2</sup> These six distinctives have been adapted from J. C. Ryle, A Call to Holiness (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 15-33, passim.

The aged and beloved apostle John was incisive in maintaining that the regenerated individual is no longer characterized by the practice of sin. "You know that every one also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29, NASB). "No one who is born of God practices sin" (1 John 3:9, NASB). "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them" (1 John 3:24, NIV).

"The Only Certain Evidence of that Indwelling  
of the Holy Spirit"

Paul, in the epistle to the churches of Galatia, lists nine characteristics which he calls "the fruit of the Spirit" and asserts that the one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit will possess them (Gal 5:22-26). Elsewhere, the apostle is definite that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom 8:9). The negative side to this point is that where no sanctification exists, there is no evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"A Thing which Admits of Growth and Degrees"

Ryle comments that "a man may climb from one step to another in holiness, and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another . . . because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged, and deepened."<sup>1</sup> The apostle Peter presents this concept to the

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, A Call to Holiness, p. 20.



readers of his second epistle: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). Paul's admonition to the Ephesian believers was that "we henceforth be no more children, . . . but, speaking the truth in love, grow up into him in all things" (Eph 4:14, 15).

While "sanctification is usually a lengthy process," it "never reaches perfection in this life."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, John bluntly affirms that "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8, NASB). Such is sanctification. It is a process through which believers experience progressive growth in striving, by God's grace, to conform to the image of Christ.

"A Thing which does not Prevent a Man  
having a Great Deal of Inward  
Spiritual Conflict"

The study of Romans 7:14-25 is supportive of this aspect of progressive sanctification. No more need be said at this point except to read the words of Ryle on the matter:

A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and proof that we are not dead, but alive.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> Ryle, A Call to Holiness, p. 21.

"A Thing which Depends Greatly on a Diligent  
Use of Scriptural Means"

What is meant here is faithful attention to the scripturally oriented privilege-duties of Bible study (2 Tim 3:14-17), prayer (1 Thess 5:17; Phil 4:6), consistency of observance of the assembly with fellow believers (Acts 11:26) and so forth. Woven into scripture is the necessity of faithfulness to these tasks. "No one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification."<sup>1</sup>

"Does not Consist in the Occasional  
Performance of Right Actions"

Christ said, "He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit" (John 15:5). Paul exhorted the Romans to "bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom 7:4). To the Thessalonians he said, "Brethren, be not weary in well-doing" (2 Thess 3:13). James wrote, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jas 1:22). Peter stressed the importance of good works in the believer's life (1 Pet 2:11-12). John affirmed with clarity that the individual whose life is characterized by the practice of sin "is of the devil," while "the one who practices righteousness is righteous" (1 John 3:7, 8, NASB). This scattering of references to the various NT authorities clearly demonstrates that it

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

is the habitual, not occasional, practice of righteousness which denotes a regenerated life. "[Sanctification] is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man's daily conduct, both in great things and small."<sup>1</sup>

### The Deficiency of Progressive Sanctification

Up to this point it has been established that the lucid teaching of Scripture is that the normal Christian life is one of growth and characterized by righteousness. The NT writers are unified and emphatic on the subject.

The next question concerns the matter of professing believers whose lives do not reflect what the Scriptures dictate as normal Christian living. To be sure, the absence of evidence of experiential sanctification is serious, especially if the situation persists over a lengthy period.

Ryrie defines "spirituality" as "a grownup relation to the Holy Spirit" with an emphasis in the definition on "the factors of Spirit-control over a period of time."<sup>2</sup> He then says, "A Christian of longer standing may not be spiritual not because he has had insufficient time but because during the years of his Christian life he has not allowed the Holy Spirit to control him" [emphasis added].<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Balancing the Christian Life (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

writer readily admits (as would Ryrie) that only God knows the genuine spiritual condition of a person with regard to salvation. But, as was demonstrated in the preceding section, sanctification is the expected and normal experience for the believer. If a professing believer "during the years of his Christian life . . . has not allowed the Holy Spirit to control him," is he merely unspiritual?

Elsewhere, Ryrie comments on the two capacities of the believer:

The unsaved man has only one capacity, but the Christian has two. This means that the unsaved person has only one course of action--to serve sin and self, or to leave God out of his life--while the believer has an option. He may serve God, and as long as he is in a human body he may choose to leave God out and live according to the old nature" [emphasis added].<sup>1</sup>

If Ryrie is merely recognizing the fact that believers can and do sin after conversion not as a habitual lifestyle but because of inherent human weakness to sin, then he is correct (cf. 1 John 1:8, 9). But if his statements suggest that a professing believer may live for years a life characterized by the omission of God from his life and an unyieldedness to the Spirit, and supposedly remain assured of his salvation essentially on the basis of a "conversion experience," then this writer would disagree and suggest another emphasis.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

### The Need of Discipline

Some may suggest that Christians cannot be carnal and will always manifest yieldedness to the Spirit (except for occasional failure due to human weakness to sinful impulses). Such an emphasis is as dangerous as the one suggesting that a profession or "conversion experience" is valid regardless of subsequent lifestyle.

As to the point in question, scriptures indicate that Christians certainly may become involved in practices contrary to God's standards. However, Paul (1 Cor 11:29, 30), John (1 John 5:16), and the writer of Hebrews (Heb 12:5-11) all are adamant that paternal discipline is the expected recourse in such matters. Paul (to the Corinthians, incidentally) and John even suggest that God finds it necessary to limit (humanly speaking) some believers' temporal existence because of involvement in fleshly activity. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews strongly maintains that an errant lifestyle which is not the recipient of discipline is a sign of spiritual illegitimacy (12:8).

### The Absence of Regeneration

As has been discussed, a professed believer may be genuinely saved and still demonstrate some unyieldedness to the Holy Spirit. If this is the case, that believer is subject to discipline. It cannot be ignored, however, that it is possible for a professed believer whose life is habitually unyielded to have never really experienced regeneration

at all. Furthermore, this emphasis is the biblical emphasis regarding the matter at hand.

The following points have all been discussed in this study and bring support to the conclusion that a professing believer whose lifestyle is characterized by sin and an unyielding attitude in spiritual matters should not assume unqualified assurance that he is spiritually alive. First, carnality as it is popularly conceived is not always of a proper emphasis. Often, too much is included under the umbrella of being "carnal." Second, the normal Christian lifestyle is characterized by a struggle against sin, not submission to it, and by the growth process of progressive sanctification.<sup>1</sup> Third, when one is genuinely a child of God, he will experience paternal discipline in response to an errant lifestyle, and the absence of that discipline indicates the absence of regeneration (Heb 12:8).

### Conclusions

In sharpening perspectives on progressive sanctification, certain conclusions have been reached. First, sanctification is in part that process by which the Holy Spirit works in the regenerated individual's life, bringing him along to spiritual maturity and developing a changed lifestyle characterized by good works. Second, progressive sanctification is the normal Christian experience. Third, some professed believers do not show evidence of a changed

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<sup>1</sup>See pp. 31, 44-45 above.

life, but rather are unyielding to the Spirit of God. Fourth, although the deficiency of sanctification may signal advanced carnality and, therefore, the need of paternal discipline, the biblical emphasis upon the normal Christian lifestyle as being characterized by righteousness indicates that "assurance [of salvation must] have subjective evidence (a changed life) as well as objective evidence (God's promises)."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, a professed believer whose lifestyle is characterized by sin must realize that "when a person lives and acts like the world, no one, including himself, can be sure that he is a converted man."<sup>2</sup>

Ryle's comments, written after a discussion on the marks of sanctification, are appropriate:

Such are the visible marks of a sanctified man. I do not say that they are all to be seen equally in all God's people. I freely admit that in the best they are not fully and perfectly exhibited. But I do say confidently, that the things of which I have been speaking are the Scriptural marks of sanctification, and that they who know nothing of them may well doubt whether they have any grace at all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ten Pas, The Lordship of Christ, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ryle, A Call to Holiness, p. 29.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The emphatic teaching of Scripture is that the normal and expected life of the believer is one of progressive sanctification. Since sanctification is a growth process, not all believers experience the same degree of maturity; nevertheless, all should be characterized by righteousness (1 Pet 1:13-16). This is not to say that believers are or can be sinless in this life, only that their lifestyle is to be habitually characterized by a desire to know and practice a life which conforms to God's standards.

When that normal Christian lifestyle is absent, many people assume carnality. But it has been demonstrated that, to one degree or another, all believers are carnal. In other words, all believers are still trapped by the weakness of the σάρξ which so easily bends to sin's impulse. Paul has given vivid testimony to that fact of Christian life. Also, the "carnal Corinthians" were not so characterized by sin that Paul could not praise them and still point to evidence in them of the work of the Spirit (1 Cor 1:4-7).

In light of this it is dangerous for a professing believer to assume regeneration when the evidence is overwhelmingly against it. Carnality is certainly not an



impossibility, but many have given testimony to having had a "conversion experience" which was, in fact, only emotion or formality. Assurance of salvation does indeed come by the objective promises of God, but it also comes by the subjective evidence of a changed life with God-honoring aims. The biblical picture of a Christian life is one which is more than an initiatory "experience," but is also a ministry to God, an edification to the fellow saints, and a testimony to the world of a Redeemer whose grace is all-sufficient.

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