

A Brief Note on the Word "Carnal"

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Editor's Note: Below are some excerpts from a personal communication by A. L. Moore dealing with my paper entitled, "The Human Nature of Christ in View of Rom 8:3 and 1 Cor 15:45" (above). I hope to quote Moore at greater length on this subject in No. 22/Apr 90.

By way of background, Moore's position on Dan 8:3 is that it is impossible to avoid an Augustinian bias when interpreting Paul's words *sarkos hamartia* in the sense of "sinful man," as translated in NIV. What the term means instead is "sinful nature." For Moore "sinful nature" is a technical term, discussed at length in his published doctoral dissertation (*Theology in Crisis: Ellen G. White's Concept of Righteousness by Faith as It Relates to Contemporary SDA Issues* [Life Seminars: Corpus Christi: TX, 1979]).

The common treatment of "carnal nature" and "sinful nature" as synonyms both reflects and produces the confusion regarding Paul's meaning which you seek to correct. But it also forces either denial of the orthodoxy of Ellen White or defense of her use of "sinful nature" on grounds that she did not really mean what she said.

I contend that Ellen White meant exactly what she said and she stated correctly just what she meant. "Sinful nature" refers to natural man as impacted by the hereditary results of sin. But it never implies independence from the Holy Spirit. As you indicate, nature (flesh) itself can neither rebel against God or respond to Him.

"Carnal nature," however, means the "sinful nature" as activated by a "sinful mind" in a rebellion that separates itself from God so that it excludes the spiritual dimension. Thus though "carnal" means flesh, which in its neutral sense refers to human nature, "carnal nature" is never neutral but always means "sinful mind"--which is "enmity against God" (Rom 8:7).

Though not aware of others doing so, I am forced to make this distinction by Paul's frequent, nonneutral use of "carnal" in light of that pejorative, theological usage which [many] perceive Ellen White as consistently reflecting. Thus I never use "carnal" in a neutral sense even when unattached to "nature."

In summary: "Sinful nature" never in any way suggests guilt of sin. I always refer to a hereditary (biochemical) inclination in contrast to moral (rational-volitional) inclination to sin in response to imbalanced but morally neutral, biochemical nature. "Carnal nature" *always* reflects a carnal mind. "Sinful nature" *never* does. (See *Theology in Crisis*, pp. 68-125; 245 ff.)