What is a Carnal Christian?

I Corinthians 3:1-4
2-26-2023

Intro: (v.1)

** Are You a Carnal Christian?*

...To find out, take this test.
Note the 4 basic characteristics of a carnal believer:

I. A Carnal Christian can EAT ONLY "BABY FOOD" (v.2)
(His DIET of Milk)

II. A Carnal Christian CAN'T GET ALONG with OTHER BELIEVERS (v.3)
(His DIVISIVE Behavior)

III. A Carnal Christian LIVES LIKE THE WORLD (v.3b)
(His DOUBLE Life)

IV. A Carnal Christian PLEDGES ALLEGIANCE TO HUMAN PERSONALITIES
***(His DEVOTION to Man)* (v.4)**

How to gain victory over carnality; how to become a spiritual Christian:
Listen to the Spirit (Rev. 2:29)
Invest in the Spirit (Gal. 6:8)
Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25)

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"There are only two kinds of people in the world: saved and lost, born once and born twice, those on the way to heaven and those on the way to hell." (DeHaan, p. 33)

Christians have two natures, the old man and the new, the flesh and the spirit.

There are two kinds of Christians, those who feed the old nature and those who feed the new; those who give in to the old carnal nature, and those who give in to the new spiritual nature. (carnal or spiritual)

V. 1

"Brethren" - spiritual "brothers"

[Paul was not genetically related to the Corinthians, most of whom were Greek by nationality, but he was spiritually related to them via their common relationship *"in Christ"* (v. 3b).]

He is writing to "Christians." Saved, regenerate believers. People who had received God's sanctifying work (1:2), God's grace (1:4), God's spiritual knowledge (1:5); God's gifts (1:7), God's eternal security (1:8), God's fellowship (1:9).

"Could not speak" = i.e. by means of earlier communication and by this epistle, Paul could not speak to them with the words and concepts that only spiritual believers could understand
(The book of I Corinthians is very helpful to carnal Christians.)

"Spiritual" - Paul is not implying that they did not have the Spirit, but that they were not being controlled by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

You can have the Holy Spirit and still not be spiritual.

"Carnal" - *(sarkinois)* = the opposite of being spiritual: the word refers to the "flesh" (i.e. the self-centered, sinful old nature we were born with).

"Carnality" describes a man who functions solely based on what his five senses dictate to him. A carnal man/woman is one whose eye is solely focused on the glitter, glamour, and glee of this world; whose ear is solely in tune with the messages, philosophies, goals, and ambitions of this world; the fragrance of this world, the taste of this world, the touch of this world so grips and controls the heart, mind, and will of this person that he lives as if God didn't exist at all (self-sufficiently independent of God).

"Babes" - *(nepiois)* infants; newborn babies

It is very difficult to express truth of any depth to a child (they lack the capacity to comprehend anything but "DaDa, MaMa, BaBa," etc.

V. 1b

"A baby who acts like a baby is a joy; but an adult who acts like a baby is a tragedy" (MacArthur, p. 72).

Spiritual retardation is a shame.

"They had come through the door of faith, but had gone on no further." (MacArthur, p. 70).

** Are You a Carnal Christian?*

...To find out, take this test.

Note the 4 basic characteristics of a carnal believer:

I. A Carnal Christian can EAT ONLY "BABY FOOD" (v.2) *(His DIET of Milk)*

The first way to test immature carnality is to see what we eat.

God's Word is referred to as necessary food (Job 23:12), milk (I Pet. 2:2), bread (Mt. 4:4), meat (Heb. 5:11-14), and honey (Ps. 119:103).

"As children grow, they learn to eat different food. they graduate (to use Paul's words) from milk to meat" (Wiersbe, p. 578).

"I have fed you" - A baby needs to be fed. The word ***"fed"*** means to "give to drink" and here it has the idea of holding a bottle of milk for a baby to suck on.

A maturing believer will not depend on "bottle feedings," but will be able to get out a fork and knife and feed himself with spiritual steak dinners.

Having someone serve you a dinner (e.g. like a pastor giving a message; Eph. 4:11-12) is not the same has having to be "spoon fed." (ILLUS: Terri prepares and serves supper for me, but she doesn't have to spoon the food into my mouth!)

"Milk" - It goes down smoothly, does not require chewing, and digests easily.

Nothing is wrong with a "formula" or breast-fed diet, but something is seriously wrong when a person stays at the nursing stage.

"Meat" = Solid food. Food that requires the capability of teeth to chew on it, a throat to swallow it without choking it, and a stomach to digest it without requiring "Tums" or "Rolaids."

"Ye were not...neither yet now" - Both in their past and up to the present, they remained babies. Their diet never changed, because their ability to consume, digest, and utilize God's truth never changed.

God expects us to grow, not remain stagnant with time.

"Are ye able" - to swallow the deeper things of God's Word now. As time passes, does your ability to hear and heed God's Word increase, decrease, or stay the same? (SEE: Hebrews 5:11 - 6:1).

Paul is not discussing the status of new converts, but the status of those who should be rock-solid sages of Christianity.

Far too many believers live off of "Bible stories" and not Bible doctrines (Wiersbe, p. 578).

Christian entertainment and not Christian edification, shallow sermonettes and not deep expositions, skim the surface "devotions" rather than submerging into the depths of personal Bible reading.

"Their problem was not low I.Q. or lack of teaching. . . The cause was not mental but spiritual" (MacArthur, p. 71).

"For a Christian preacher or teacher to give only milk week after week, year after year, is a crime against the Word of God and the Holy Spirit!" (MacArthur, p. 72).

Your level of spirituality can be measured by your <u>interest</u> in God's Word, your <u>alertness</u> to God's Word (not sleeping), and your <u>obedience</u> to God's Word.

II. A Carnal Christian CAN'T GET ALONG with OTHER BELIEVERS (v.3) *(His DIVISIVE Behavior)*

A second way to test immature carnality is to see how we get alone with each other.

Children like to fight and fuss for their own self-interests.

"Yet carnal" - still; up to this point, the Corinthians remain an infantile church though they had been saved for some time [at least six years, based on the date Paul planted the church (A.D. 50) on his second missionary journey (Acts 18), and on the date he now writes (A.D. 56) from Ephesus (16:8).]

"Envying" - To be jealous over what others are or have (to have a "zeal" to be better or to have more than others).

At Corinth, the believers were jealous of each other's gifts and abilities (v. 12-14).

No doubt such jealousy resulted in:

--"put-downs" so as to lift self up

--spreading gossip rather than the gospel

--having an evil eye looking to get, rather than a good eye looking to give.

"Among you" - In your midst (of believers). It is understandable that an unbeliever would cause hardship and trouble for a believer, but it is inexcusable and should be unthinkable for believers not to get along with fellow believers.

"Strife" - the outward result of the internal envy.

This word was used of the self-serving, dirty tactics used by a person running for political office.

"Strife" depicts people fighting for their own interests, competing to win something over someone else, stepping on top of others as one climbed the ladder of success.

Don't ever forget where true promotion comes from (Ps. 75:6-7 - *"For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another."*)

SEE: James 3:13-18

"Divisions" (KJV) - the outcome of the strife.

Where there is envy, there will be strife, and where there is strife, there will inevitably come division (disunity, a party, fractional, schismatic spirit).

One of the actions most hated by God is that done by the person who sows *"discord among brethren"* (Prov. 6:19).

Unity is spiritual (Eph. 4:3).

Unity is good and pleasant (Ps. 133:1).

Unity was the last recorded request of Jesus for His people (Jn. 17:11, 22).

In the Body of Christ -

--We need a cooperative spirit not a competitive spirit;

--We need selfless motivation not selfish motivation;

--We need a servant's heart not a sensual heart (looking out for self-pleasure)

In Christianity. . .

--We must learn to agree to disagree

--We must remember we are playing on the same team

--We are fighting the same enemy

A spiritually mature Christian uses his gifts as tools to build with, while a carnal immature Christian uses his gifts as toys to play with or fight with (Wiersbe, p. 578).

III. A Carnal Christian LIVES LIKE THE WORLD (v.3b)
(His DOUBLE Life)

A third way to test immature carnality is to see who we act like.

The lost world functions based on envy, strife, and division.

Envy is a prime motive that will wake this city up to go out to the rat race tomorrow.

"Walk as men" - To conduct one's life as a mere unsaved "natural" man (with nothing different, nothing distinctive, nothing supernatural, etc.).

We ought to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

We ought to walk as Christ did (I Jn. 2:6).

We ought to walk in the light (I Jn. 1:7).

We ought to walk in the truth (III Jn. 4).

We ought to walk in good works (Eph. 2:10).

We ought to walk in love (Eph. 5:2).

We ought to walk in wisdom (Col. 4:5).

*We ought to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).
(Only as we yield to the Spirit will we avoid walking *"as men"*)

Is there a moral uniqueness about your life?

--Our actions and reactions should be different than the world.

--Our incentives and motives should be uniquely different than the world.

--Our goals and ambitions should be uniquely different than the world.

If today a law was passed to imprison all Christians, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you??

IV. A Carnal Christian PLEDGES ALLEGIANCE TO HUMAN PERSONALITIES *(His DEVOTION to Man)* (v.4)

A fourth way to test immature carnality is to see who we identify with.

"Children identify with heroes, whether sports heroes or Hollywood heroes. . . [The church at Corinth] sounded like children on the playground: 'My father can fight better than your father! My father makes more money than your father!'." (Wiersbe, p. 578).

"I am of Paul. . . of Apollos"- I am a product of Paul. . . and I am a loyalist to Paul. . . which is like saying, "I pledge my allegiance to Paul... Apollos."

Carnality thrives on undivided allegiance to a human personality.

The fleshly life puts its trust in fleshly man.

Whenever a people divide over a person and form a party split, they have become cultic!

One distinguishing mark of a cult is that a cult will surround itself around a human personality and be loyal to that person no matter what.

Who do cults pledge allegiance to?
--To the Jonestown cult -Jim Jones
--To the Jehovah's Witnesses cult -Joseph B. Rutherford and the Elite officers of the Watchtower Society
--To the Mormon cult -Joseph Smith and his successor Brigham Young
--To the Unification cult - Sung Yung Moon
--To the 7th Day Adventist cult - Ellen G. White
--To the Waco, Texas cult - David Koresh
--To the Christian Science cult - Mary Baker Eddy
--To the Muslim cult - Muhammad
--To the Roman Catholic cult - the Pope of the Vatican

There exists the danger of "personality cults" within Christianity today. Preachers with a certain charisma or dogmatic personality on large TV ministries or radio networks are (if they are not humble) in positions of danger - the danger of drawing *"away disciples after them"* (Acts 20:30).

Those who pride themselves on being superior to others often unknowingly attribute such superiority to the guru they follow. They (with "ultra-separatistic," contentious attitudes) divide themselves into sects, groups, or cliques.

Paul goes on to show how absurd it was for people to be Paulites or Apollosites, by referring to himself as a mere servant (***minister -*** *v. 5), who* **planted** the seed of God's Word (v. 6); but it was God who gave the increase (v. 7)

(God gave the seed its fertile soil to soak into (Acts 16:14), He caused it to

germinate, to sprout, to grow, and bear fruit).

Conclusion:

How to gain victory over carnality; how to become a spiritual Christian:

Listen to the Spirit (Rev. 2:29 - *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.")*.

Invest in the Spirit (Gal. 6:8 - *"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.";* Rom. 13:14 - *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.")*

Walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25 - *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. . . If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."*

SEE: Gal. 5:16-26 (flesh vs. the spirit).