

## Carnal Versus Spiritual

(Adapted from Andrew Murray: *The Spiritual Life*)

### NOT SPIRITUAL BUT CARNAL (Recognizing the Self)

**"You are not spiritual but carnal"** (1 Corinthians 3:1). We need to examine ourselves and answer the question, "Am I still carnal, or am I by the grace of God spiritual?" You know a doctor cannot do you any good unless there is first a thorough diagnosis of the case. He asks a number of questions, examines your lungs and heart, finds out what is wrong and prescribes the needful remedy. Until you find out what is wrong all the preaching of the most heavenly truths will do you NO good. People must realize their carnal state before the knowledge of the spiritual life can be any real benefit.

Consider the following **four principal marks of the carnal state**:

#### 1. A state of prolonged infancy

Imagine a beautiful six-month old child with its chubby hands and feet. One would say "What a perfect child!" However, if after three years we found that the child had not grown an inch we should conclude that something was wrong. If in another three years we again found no growth, we should at once say there is some terrible disease in that child that prevents its growth; for where there is health there is growth. That is now what Paul says to the Corinthians (3:1-3). You are young Christians, babes in Christ.

A brand-new believer in Jesus will be carnal for he/she is young and does not know what sin is and has not had opportunity for the process of salvation to take root and produce a "son of God" in life and nature. However, when a person has been a believer for some time, say six months, a year, three years, or even ten years, and has little to no growth, or remains at the same stage of life where he started from as a babe, there is something the matter; there is some terrible disease. The disease is the carnal (fleshly) mind. A Christian under the power of the flesh is in a state of prolonged infancy.

Hebrews 5:11-14 exposes Christians who have supposedly known the Lord for a period of time and ought to be teachers helping others, yet they still need to be fed with milk and are not able to take the meat of the full-grown man. This indicates a state of prolonged infancy and unfortunately represents the greater part of the Christian church. There are too many who testify that the best time in their Christian experience was either their initial conversion experience or an isolated time of revival; and after that they began to go back; they lost their joy, and they have never had such joy since then. They have lost their first love. Initially,

they used to conquer sin, but now sin has the mastery. Initially, they sought out the Lord's freshness and presence much more than of late, giving into apathy, reticence, and self-justification.

What are the marks of a babe? A babe cannot do the normal human things by himself; he has got to be helped by others. He cannot directly help anyone else due to immaturity. Any baby needs a mother figure or nurse to take care of him, always needing to be helped and cared for. That is the tragic state of many Christians. They go to church, to prayer meetings, and to conferences, ever seeking help FROM others, while not being able to offer any real significant help TO others by their spiritual experience. Dear friends do we recognize or admit this first mark of the carnal (fleshly) state? We must examine and test ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:3-5; Galatians 6:4; 1 John 3:20-21; Matthew 7:5). If there is little to no healthy growth after 6 months or longer in Christ, we must bow before God in shame, confess our carnal state, and repent.

## 2. A continual state of sin and failure with no lasting victory over sin.

Paul writing to the Corinthians (3:2) says, "**There is envying, and strife, and divisions among you.**" These things are the work of the flesh (self) and this was the great reason that he had to write chapter 13: because of their quarrelling. Some exalted Paul, others thought Apollos was the more eloquent; and others thought that Peter was the greatest to follow since he had been with the Lord the most. They were divided into religious parties. They were just squabbling among themselves and got excited, and had strife, envy, and division. In Galatians 5:19-21, the manifestation of the flesh includes jealousy, enmity, outbursts of anger, envy, strife, division, factions, idolatry, and uncleanness. It is common to find Christians who in some respects have a good measure of the grace of God and yet have never really conquered their temper, and so when another says a sharp thing to them they give a sharp reply in response rather than possessing a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 2:21-23, 3:4). Other Christians avoid confrontation, conflict, and the status quo in order to enjoy life at whatever level they are at; all the while ignoring the Lord's promptings to progress and advance in their faith. Many Christians have never learned to love as God wants them to love, meaning to love the unlovable, to love those who do not return our love, and to love even our enemies who mistreat us. This indicates that they are still in the carnal state in which the flesh has more power than the Spirit.

Friends, until we confess with shame, "I am carnal, fleshly," we will not grow into the life of the spiritual man. May God search us, and reveal our true state. We need to ask the Lord what it is that hinders the overcoming nature of the divine life in us? God will answer and intervene. Two powers are striving for mastery over you, Spirit versus flesh (Galatians 5:17); and if the Spirit is not ruling you it is because the flesh is ruling. This is why a man gives way to pride, self-conceit, worldliness, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. It is simply because he is still in the carnal (fleshly) state.

We generally characterize or name things based on the most prominent trait or feature. A spiritual man is called spiritual because he allows the Spirit to triumph and rule his life, even though there may still be some visible things of the flesh. True fellowship with Christ in the Spirit means that the Spirit is leading, guiding and controlling us. One is called spiritual because spirituality is his chief characteristic. The Corinthians, however, were characterized by envy, hatred, favoritism, preference, and other selfish virtues. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "**Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in you**" (1 Corinthians 3:16). There was somewhat of the Spirit in them, but they had allowed the flesh to rule. So, the question comes to us, as a voice from heaven, "**Are we not carnal?**" Worldliness, unfaithfulness, neglect of God's word, arguing, provoking one another and envying one another are all signs of one thing — carnal people who have not surrendered themselves fully to live the spiritual life.

### 3. Along with the carnal state there may be found a great deal of spiritual gift.

This is a very solemn thought as illustrated in the case of the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul says, "**I thank God that in everything you are enriched by him in all utterance and in all knowledge.**" There were spiritual gifts among the Corinthians: gifts of prophecy, understanding mysteries and knowledge, speaking in tongues, and many other remarkable gifts. Indeed, the gift of tongues was so remarkable that Paul had to check and warn them to be careful in their use of this gift (1 Corinthians 14). And yet Paul writes the whole epistle to address their carnality: that they were full of quarrelling, pride, selfishness, jealousy, strife, envy, division, etc. All too often, a man may have a spiritual gift of preaching or be able to speak with power, and yet his private life may be filled with pride. Even those in the world can see it and they proclaim: "we don't believe in that man." Where is his humility? A man may be an evangelist and lead hundreds to Christ and yet others describe him as full of self with little care for others. The world exclaims, "I don't believe in that man because he is too full of himself." Can it be that a man who is powerful in the service of God can be carnal? Absolutely! It can be. Likewise, a man may claim the baptism of the Holy Spirit and possess a Spirit of power and a Spirit of zeal, and yet that man may be terribly lacking in the graces and attributes of a holy life — humility, gentleness, tenderness, kindness before God and man. A person filled in Spirit will live out the meekness of the Lamb of God, which is the chief grace of the Christian life.

Look at the Corinthians; they had spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, knowledge, faith, service, etc., yet they were unwilling to be subject to one another, and there was strife as to who should be the greatest; even who would speak first in their gatherings! Don't think that the carnal state is the state of a man in whom there is no good. A man may be a preacher, evangelist, Sunday school teacher, organizer, and yet, God will say to that man, "Are you not carnal?" He would continue to ask, "Does your life manifest Christ in the end?" The answer is "no." These so-called spiritual leaders do help others in the Christian life but the Christian life he helps them into is a mixed one; one that is feeble, unable to overcome life's trials, and one that will not stand the test (Matthew

7:24-27). On the contrary, the man whose inner life is under the rule of the Spirit, who is himself spiritual, will beget spiritual children. He will impart to them the life of God in power (2 Corinthians 4:2; Hebrews 13:7).

We must be clear that the ability to exercise spiritual gifts is not necessarily proof that we are spiritual. It is possible to remain carnal.

#### 4. The carnal state brings an incapacity for receiving spiritual truth.

Paul distinctly calls out the Corinthian believers on this account: their inability to receive deeper spiritual truth and their incapacity to contain it in their lives. Paul spoke about himself in 1 Corinthians 1-2, Christ having sent him to preach the cross, not with human wisdom but in the power of the Spirit. Then in the third chapter he speaks about the condition of the church, the condition of the Corinthians believers. He turns to them and says, I have received the mystery of God and desire to pass it along to you, but I cannot. Why not? Were the Corinthians stupid? No, they were great seekers after wisdom, even priding themselves upon their knowledge. Paul said that they were "enriched in all knowledge." They were a cultured, thoughtful people. The problem was that the Corinthians cherished the wisdom of the world. So, Paul told them that all their wisdom was in vain. He knew that if he spoke profound spiritual truth to them, they would understand it according to their carnal mind and intellect, and this would actually harm them in the long run. By 1 Corinthians 8, Paul told them that their knowledge had puffed them up and that they needed love to build each other up. Eventually, Paul dedicated an entire passage to describe the kind of love that God is (1 Corinthians 13). Paul says, before I can write to them I must settle it in my mind that they are carnal people. I must let them know that they are carnal and bring them to the point of realizing that they are carnal.

How often in the church of Christ we preach to people who are carnal, who lack deep spiritual truths; we even clothe our thoughts in beautiful words and illustrations. People may say "What a beautiful sermon" and practically it does them very little good. Was not the sermon true? Was not the truth of the Bible in it? Yes, but you preached spiritual truth to carnal people. We must discern between spiritual truth and outward teaching or doctrine. Spiritual truth is always manifested in one's life by their conduct and attitudes. Doctrine and outward teaching leave a person unchanged. Friends, as long as the Christian is carnal don't give him spiritual truth. You must bring him to the point where he recognizes that he is carnal. The carnal state is incapable of receiving spiritual truth Matthew 7:6).