

## FROM CARNAL TO SPIRITUAL

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

Paul did not want the Corinthians to remain or rest in the carnal state. He wanted them to pass from carnal to spiritual. That is what we need also. How are we to get from the one to the other?

### **Four principal steps to overcome the carnal state to become spiritual:**

#### 1. The believer must be convicted, and brought to the confession of his being in the carnal state.

You know that before a sinner can be converted he must be convicted of sin; he must know and confess his transgressions, and admit his lost estate. Likewise, carnal believers must see that they are in an improper state in God's sight, and before they can get into the spiritual life they must be brought under the conviction, shame, and evil of this carnal state. There is a great difference between conviction that brings one to initial salvation and conviction of a carnal condition before God. Prior to salvation that which principally occupied the mind was the thought, "I am lost, I am under condemnation." The predominant idea was the greatness of our transgressions, and the desire to have them pardoned. There was no conviction, however, of (1) how utterly sinful one's nature is; and (2) how many hidden heart sins have not been exposed, dredged up, and dealt with by God.

God brings a believer through two processes in their life: (1) sanctification by the Spirit to bring them to initial salvation (1 Peter 1:3), and (2) sanctification, transformation, and conformation through the Spirit's work within each son of God (Romans 8:28-30; 12:1-2). So, after our initial salvation, in other words, once we receive the life of God into us, it is most necessary that a believer be fully convicted of two things: (1) the utter impotence of the flesh to do any good or please God in any way (Romans 7:18; 8:6-8), and (2) the need of God's cultivating work to expose the inner aspects of the old man and replace them with the life and nature of Christ as the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24).

First, we must realize that the mighty power of the flesh is to work evil. The flesh has ruled us since birth and has constituted our being with anything except God. We have the Spirit of God within, but there is the battle between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). For instance, why do we still yield to the flesh when the Spirit is within us? Paul pointed this struggle out in Romans 7:15-24: "I am struggling to do right (in God's sight), but I cannot." When a man is convicted (by the Spirit) of the utter impotence of the flesh to accomplish anything good for God, he will understand why he lost his temper, why pride rears its ugly head and dominates, and why he speaks unloving, unkind, and improper words even when trying not to. The flesh takes him captive; the law of sin in him binds him hand and foot (Romans 8:2-8).

Then, secondly, comes the great hidden sins that the world barely acknowledges, which are also works of the flesh. Ephesians 4:22 says to put off as regards your former manner of life, the old man, indicating that the flesh has made a living in us. It is a kind of person operating within us. So, the Holy Spirit exposes the flesh constantly. The Spirit convicts us of pride as we hold ourselves above others and consider ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:3 1 Corinthians 8:2). He convicts us of unloving thoughts toward our wife, child, or servant manifested in a lack of kindness, meekness, and gentleness towards the ones closest to us (Ephesians 5:23-6:9; 1 Peter 3:1-9). The Spirit also convicts us of trying to please men or justifying our self before God and man as if we have any ground to do so (Ephesians 6:6; Romans 3:9-20). Therefore, a believer needs an entire deliverance and reconstitution beyond the initial conversion experience.

When we accepted Christ into our hearts, we were delivered from the curse of sin, but for the rest of our lives in Christ we need deliverance from the power of sin that has held us captive since our physical birth. We were saved “out of the world” but now the things of the world (self, natural man, Satan, flesh) must be extracted out of our being since it was wrought into us for so long. Those who are enlightened in the church of Christ cry, "**Woe is me, O wretched man that I am, in my flesh dwells no good thing**" (Romans 7:24, 18). Apart from Christ the Vine, we can do nothing against the power that the flesh has over us (John 15:4-5). That power leads us into sin, and we must find deliverance. Deliverance only comes by becoming an entire, spiritual man.

## 2. A person must be made to see and believe that the spiritual life is a possibility.

A great many people recite and quote creeds or theology with confidence and assurance. One such belief is the Person of the Holy Spirit. They claim without doubt the existence of the Holy Spirit, and that He is the Third Person of the Blessed God-Head. They are orthodox and convinced on all these points. However, it is merely an intellectual belief. In practice, they do not believe in what the Holy Spirit can do in a believer every day of his life. A man must be brought to see that there is a spiritual life within his reach; that he needs this spiritual life and should claim it; and that this spiritual life is his duty to live out. It is imperative that believers distinguish initial salvation from a life in the Spirit, from a spiritual life.

Romans 8:1-16 mentions the Spirit 13 times, showing that God wants his children to be spiritual. God cannot bear to leave us carnal. Therefore, expressions such as "**Walk in the Spirit,**" "**Live in the Spirit,**" "**Led by the Spirit,**" and "**By the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body**" are repeated throughout the New Testament. Neither will God allow us to remain carnal. Hebrews 12:25-29 shows the extent God is willing to go, even to turn our world upside down (shake it) in order to gain us. God commands us to be spiritual and by the grace of God, just as certainly as Christ's blood flowed for our sins, so Christ's Spirit can lead us into the place of absolute helplessness (in the flesh) so He can live in us in His Divine power, and renew our whole nature to become spiritual.

In simple faith obey God's call. Say, "O God, a spiritual life is possible, I can become a spiritual man." Let us begin and believe that the God who gave the Holy Spirit delights in nothing more than to give the Holy Spirit within each of us to live this life. When we are convicted of our carnal life and believe in the possibility of a spiritual life, we are ready to grow into the third step.

### 3. A believer must be willing to give up everything to lay hold of the spiritual life. (Philippians 3:12)

Now comes the time of struggling, the need to pay whatever price is necessary to gain the greatest possession. A great many Christians delight or force themselves to read about the spiritual life, but that is not enough. I must pay a price for it. Revelation 3:18 shows the need to buy gold refined by fire in order to have the true riches, to buy white garments as our new clothing to cover our nakedness, and to buy eye salve for our blind eyes. What is the price we must pay? How do we buy gold, white garments, and eye salve? We must give up everything and pay all. Matthew 13:44-46 is a parable showing the need to sell all we have to purchase the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great worth. On one hand, Christ sold all to purchase us through His redemption. On the other hand, we also as his sons must sell all to buy the pearl of great price.

How do we pay the price when Christ is all and in all? We come forward to God in the blood of Christ with every sin and every folly, with all temper, malice, and every negative thing; we bring everything we love, even our whole life, and place it at the feet of Jesus so it becomes His possession. We pay the price of willingness for God to give us the grace to die to everything and be fully surrendered to God without regret, without compromise, and without negotiation. We diligently present our bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) to allow the Lord to fully cleanse us, making us a useful vessel in which the Holy Spirit can do His work (2 Timothy 2:21). The carnal, worldly Christian always asks the question "Will my sacrifice be worth it? Will giving up all profit?" Like Peter asked, "What's in it for me?" (Matthew 19:27) Even in the world, some men will undertake anything and pay any price for a profit. Many sacrifice family, companionship, security, and much more for a particular goal or prize. God told Peter that whoever pays the price to follow Him will receive a hundredfold in the present age and to receive eternal life in the age to come (Mark 10:28-30). So, if there is one thing that will profit it is to give up everything for God — everything of the flesh — to become a truly spiritual man.

### 4. A believer must come in faith and claim the spiritual life.

Our spiritual life begins in faith and continues in faith (Romans 5:1-5). It is faith from beginning to end. When a man gives up all, he must look up at the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 12:2) to whom the Father has given the Holy Spirit, claim the promise, and believe that he receives it. Bow before God, the Holy One, in deep humility and submission; with faith in His promise, in His power, and in His great love. God is a spirit Who gives the Spirit in fellowship with Himself to make each son a spiritual man. May God in

His mercy open the eyes of all His people to discern the two states: carnal versus spiritual. May He bring all who are yet in the carnal state to full conviction and confession. And through them may He bring many to accept the full spiritual life He has provided in Christ Jesus.