

The Carnal Man (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

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There is a certain type of hummingbird, which is hatched and nurtured in the crater of an extinct volcano. These hummingbirds never fly up and get a view of the vast surrounding countryside, even when fully grown, but always stay in their own barren world. Since they never view the countryside, but only see the inside of the volcano, they live in what some have called the hummingbird horizon. In other words, these birds only see and experience life on the inside of the volcano, and without realizing it, they miss the openness, light, and freedom outside in the real world.

The same could be said about the carnal Christian. The carnal Christian lives in his own little, narrow, crater, or extinct volcano, and misses the vast spiritual blessings of the Christian life. The carnal Christian lives in a world that is lacking many beautiful blessings, which he could possess in his Christian life, such as joy, true satisfaction, victory, and spiritual stability in life, if he would fly out of his hole. Motivated primarily by his fleshly desires, the carnal Christian seems to be satisfied to exist within the limited confines of his own sinful pleasures. He possesses restricted spiritual vision and does not advance outside his carnal state. He lives in what we might term the hummingbird horizon.

In this study, we are going to investigate the life of a carnal man.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

Paul is contrasting the spiritual man from the carnal man for he says that he “could not speak unto you as unto spiritual” (vs. 1). This man is different from the first two men that Paul had spoken about in this section of Scripture (1 Cor. 2:14-15). The natural man is the unsaved man, who does not possess God’s life, and who is incapable of understanding the relevancy, importance, and application of Scripture to his own life. The spiritual man is the man who is born again and has the Spirit of God residing within his life. He is open to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and daily walks in the power and provision of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:25). The carnal man lives a life that is opposite of the spiritual man (“could not speak unto you as unto spiritual” - 1 Cor. 3:1) and one that is more similar to the natural man (“walk as men” – 1 Cor. 3:3).

These saints were “carnal,” which means they were primarily being controlled by their fallen flesh, or those sinful inclinations that are expressed through the old nature. This man possesses the life of God; however, as a carnal man, he lives his daily life suppressing the life of God within him, and does not allow God to change his overall lifestyle. Therefore, he thinks and lives like the unsaved man in many ways. He walks by the power of his old nature, instead of by God’s new nature, and neglects the assistance of the Holy Spirit, stifling His ministry within his life (1 Thess. 5:19).

There are three marks of a carnal Christian.

I. He is a saved man.

1 Corinthians 3:1

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ.”

You will note that this group of believers was called “brethren” by the apostle Paul. This is a designation for true believers. They were brothers and sisters in the family of God. Paul clearly recognized this group of people as being regenerated believers. They were referred to as being “babes in Christ.” This means the carnal man is actually a Christian. He is a person that has a position in Christ. This is the spiritual position or location that the Corinthians possessed, which refers to their spiritual acceptance before God’s presence, through the merits of Jesus Christ. These people were carnal, or fleshly in their approach to living, which means they were not mature in their Christian walk; however, these people were said to be “in Christ.” In fact, Paul greets these people in the same fashion and recognizes that they are part of the true body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

Even though these saints were considered carnal in their *practice* or walk in life (3:1), these people are saved because of their *position* in Christ. We must always make the distinction between a person’s practice and position. The overall practice (living) of these people was carnal; however, their position (location) in Christ was perfect (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ presented these saints before God’s presence as being justified and perfectly holy, through His own merits, even though they were not living a holy life as a Christian. We must always be careful to distinguish between a person’s standing and state. Our standing in Christ never changes but our state or manner of living does change. Our standing in Christ within the heavens is what saves us and this position or standing in Christ never changes (Rom. 8:33-34).

The Westminster Confession taught that the Holy Spirit's power always prevented apostasy or persistence in sin to the point of death. The Reformed tradition follows this confession and claims that all believers must endure or triumph in good living and good works, or they have not persevered in their Christian lives. If they do not persevere in their lives, then they are not truly saved. This is the historic Calvinistic teaching that is represented in the Westminster Confession.

Those who promote Reformed Theology, theology that stems from the time of the Reformation, want to dismiss what the Bible teaches regarding carnal Christians. They cannot accept the label "carnal Christian" since this person and teaching does not fit into their theological grid of Reformed Doctrine, which declares that believers will always persevere in faith, holiness, and good works. They call this teaching the perseverance of the saints. It's assumed that genuine believers cannot enter into a long period of time, where they live in defeat, and experience carnality, or fleshly living in their overall manner of living. Reformed Theology teaches that every true believer will persevere in holiness throughout his entire life and never remain in the cellar of defeat and carnality as a habit or way of life. According to Reformation Theology, overcoming victory and holy living is the only thing that verifies a person's salvation and provides them with the only assurance and hope of salvation.

I have some problems with Reformed Theology. First, there is a carnal Christian; the Bible teaches that believers can remain in an overall state of carnal living. Paul affirms that these saints were "in Christ" and yet they expressed carnality in their overall approach to living ("ye are yet carnal" - 1 Cor. 3:1). Most teachers, within Reformed Theology, actually deny the existence of carnal Christians, or those Christians who primarily live a fleshly life, instead of a spiritual or Spirit-directed life. However, it's interesting that even John Calvin, who is the leading figure of Reformation Theology, recognized the existence of carnal Christians, when he wrote: "But he (Paul) does not mean that they were completely carnal, without even a spark of the Spirit of God, but that they were still much too full of the mind of the flesh, so that the flesh prevailed over the Spirit, and, as it were, extinguished His light. Although they were not entirely without grace, yet they had more of the flesh than of the Spirit in their lives. And that is why he calls them carnal."

Second, we must conclude that a changed lifestyle does give evidence of a person's salvation (James 2:17; 1 John 2:3; 3:14) and also provides a secondary assurance that they are saved, as they witness God changing their lives (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10). However, we must be very careful we do not fall into the trap of basing our salvation on the manner of our sanctification. Do you know why? If you base your salvation on the manner in which you live and act, you will never have the assurance of salvation and eternal life. This is why those who teach full-blown Reformed Theology and Calvinism can never give a definite statement on assurance of salvation. Popular author, R. C. Sproul, says a Christian can

possess “an assurance but that is not to say that there will never be any questions of doubt.” These teachers will say that you must continually look at your life and base your salvation on performance instead of your profession of faith in Christ.

R. C. Sproul, when commenting on a carnal Christian, says this: “The second danger of the carnal teaching is that people begin to think that all that is required to be saved is a profession of faith.” These fellows talk in circles. What does Sproul mean by this statement? What is he implying? Is he implying that a person must work, or live in a certain manner in order to meet the requirements of salvation, instead of expressing faith alone in Christ for his salvation? The teachers of Reformation Theology say, “No, a man is saved by grace through faith.” And yet, in the same breath, they make strange statements like these, which confuse sincere readers and brethren, who want to have assurance of their salvation. The Reformed teaching on final salvation is no different from Arminian teaching, which says that salvation is not based upon mere faith in Christ; it is also based in some degree, or in some sense, upon the way that a person lives and acts. The Bible clearly teaches that absolute assurance is based upon the profession of our faith in Christ alone – not our performance (John 3:15-16; 36; 6:47).

Many conclusions about carnal Christians are manmade and not true to what the Scriptures teach about carnal Christians. The Bible definitely warns Christians about deep-seated carnality and failure in life. Saved or regenerate people can live in carnality. These warnings about carnality are a mockery unless they really are true.

John MacArthur is also wrong when he says:

“It is essential to understand that carnality is not an absolute state in which a believer exists but a behavior pattern he chooses one moment at a time.”

Of course, no Christian will live in an “absolute” state of sin, without bearing some fruit. However, the Bible says, “ye are yet carnal” (1 Cor. 3:3). This seems to suggest that there are carnal Christians and believers can live in a *state* of carnality throughout their lives. Even though God’s children are no longer positionally “in the flesh” (Rom. 8:8-9), the flesh is still in them (Rom. 7:15-18), and the old nature dominates the overall course and conduct of living in the carnal Christian. John MacArthur does not believe in the two natures (old and new nature) residing in the believer and makes many contradictory statements in his writings, as he seeks to defend Reformed Theology, which teaches that Christians cannot live in an ongoing state of defeat or carnality, since they possess God’s life, and in MacArthur’s teachings, do not possess an old nature. He writes: “I believe it is a serious misunderstanding to think of the believer as having both an old and new nature. Believers do not have dual personalities...there is no such thing as an old nature in the believer” (Freedom From Sin--ROMANS 6-7, Moody Press, pp. 31-32).

This is not true according to what the Bible teaches (Rom. 7:17, 20). The existence of carnal Christians prove that God's people do not always persevere in holiness, as the Reformed Doctrine of perseverance suggests. They can experience general carnality over a prolonged period of their lifetime and never truly live the victorious way of life. The Corinthians were deep-seated in their carnality ("ye are yet carnal" – 1 Cor. 3:3). Since this is true, we find the strict teaching of the perseverance of the saints to be unacceptable. Of course, it is true that all Christians will continue to persevere, or believe in key doctrinal truth (Heb. 3:6; 14), and bear some fruit (Matt. 13:23; Eph. 2:10; John 15:1-8; Rom. 6:22) and change in their Christian lives (1 John 2:3; 3:14). Since all Christians bear some fruit, they do live differently than the unsaved, *in some measure*, even though they may not always manifest this fruit in their daily lives, as they express carnality and other sins (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

Genuine believers will also break away from some of their former lives of rebellion (1 Cor. 1:6; 6:11; 1 Pet. 4:4). However, it's equally true that they do not always exhibit the kind of testimony they should, or persevere in their Christian conduct or living, as is evidenced by the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1-3), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), Lot (Genesis 13:10-13; 14:12 19:1,14,16), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:15-19), Solomon (1 Kings 1:1; Ecc. 1), etc. In fact, some of the Corinthians manifested such carnality at the communion table, that God became weary of it and took them out of this world prematurely.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 says:

"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

Some of the Corinthians were playing with fire for too long. They were using old wine, instead of new wine, at the love feast or meal. In fact, they were becoming drunk at their times of fellowship.

1 Corinthians 11:21

"For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken."

Since the Lord's Supper often followed on the heels of the love feast, they would still be drunk when they sat down to partake of the Lord's Supper. These carnal Christians actually were intoxicated while taking the Lord's Supper! This act brought God's severe chastisement upon their lives. God actually took the lives of those who were involved in these drunken episodes within the church. He prematurely took them home to Heaven (1 John 5:16) because they had been shaming God's name and disgracing His table. These people were in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1) and were regenerated people standing in all the merits of Jesus Christ, and yet, they had the black mark of carnality written upon their lives.

II. He is a sinful man.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1, the Greek word for “carnal” is “sarkinos” and in 3:3 it’s the word “sarkikos” which simply means pertaining to the flesh or made of flesh. These words come from the Greek word for flesh which is “sarx.” This explains what the life of the carnal man is all about. The carnal man is a man or individual who is controlled or dominated by the flesh or his base appetites.

The doctrinal term for flesh as used in Scripture refers to the sinful human nature within mankind, the seat of lust and sinful passions (Rom. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:17), the dynamic principle of sinfulness (Gal. 5:24; 6:8), which is essentially the sin nature that we have inherited from Adam (Rom. 5:12, 19; 7:17). The carnal man is the fleshly man; he is the man who acts under the influence and energy of the sin nature. He is controlled by the sin nature. This is the exact opposite of how the spiritual man operates his life (1 Cor. 2:15). The spiritual man operates his life under the influence and energy of the Holy Spirit. The difference between spirituality and carnality within the lives of believers is in the energizing force that is running their lives.

At this point of our study, I will develop an overall summary of a carnal Christian, which may be helpful.

The carnal Christian is that person who is not growing in his Christian walk (1 Cor. 3:2 – “babes”), and therefore, is disobedient to Christ and the Bible in his overall manner of living and conduct. He is that person who walks like the unsaved world in many ways (1 Cor. 3:3 – “walk as men”). He is the person who bears little fruit and dependence upon Christ for daily living (Rev. 3:16 – “have need of nothing”) and often does not realize that he is “wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17), and also “barren” and “unfruitful” (2 Pet. 1:8-9). He experiences more defeats than victories during some particular phase of his life (Rom. 7:14-17 – “I am carnal”). Selfishness and sin dictate his life (1 Cor. 3:3 – “envying, strife, divisions”) and the power of the flesh, or old nature, controls him in a large measure and consistent manner (“ye are yet carnal” – 1 Cor. 3:3).

The carnal Christian is not “in the flesh” (Rom. 8:8-9), or an absolute state of sinfulness, without God’s life, but he does walk by the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), instead of the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:25 - “walk in the Spirit) and lives predominately by the flesh (1 Cor. 3:3). He is the Christian who has developed a consistent pattern of rebellion (1 Sam. 15:23) and refuses to yield his total life to God for daily victory (Rom. 6:13-14; Judges 17:6). In summary, the carnal man lives a life that is opposite of the spiritual man (“could not speak unto you as unto spiritual” - 1 Cor. 3:1), and one that is more similar to the natural man (“walk as men” – 1 Cor. 3:3) in his manner and conduct of living.

Paul is not talking about occasional lapses of sin within these people's lives. The chapter is dealing with a developed pattern that was continually manifesting itself within the daily lives of these saints. Paul informs these people that they are "yet carnal" (1 Cor. 3:3) which means they are still persisting in this type of lifestyle. Their carnality had been a settled part of their life for a long period of time. Paul had taught in Corinth for a year and a half and was now sending a letter after three more years of absence. He is dealing with the lives of Christians who were persistent in their way of carnal living over a longer period of time. They had not grown in their Christian life; instead, they resorted to carnality and stayed in this position. Their lives were dominated by a pattern of sinful living or behavior.

When defining the carnal Christian, we must distinguish between specific individual acts of carnality and a consistent behavioral pattern of carnal living. We all commit carnal acts of sin within our Christian lives (1 John 1:7-10; 2:1). We are not without sin! There are no super saints; however, there are victorious and spiritual saints, who seek to "live in the Spirit" and "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) instead of the flesh. The normal struggle with sin does not necessarily qualify us as a carnal Christian. For instance, the Bible says that we are all constantly at war with the old nature. There is a battle raging within our lives as the Holy Spirit and the flesh seek to overthrow one another. This is the normal Christian life.

Galatians 5:17 says:

"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

The Bible teaches there is a constant war going on inside of us. This war is proof that the great work of sanctification or holiness is being worked out within our lives (Phil. 2:13). There is an internal warfare, or constant battle going on inside us, where the "flesh" and the "Spirit" are trying to gain control of our lives. They are both lusting or desiring to have control over our bodies. This verse tells us that we can never expect to rid ourselves of the old nature. Rather, we will constantly be counteracting what is on the inside of us the rest of our days on earth. This is the normal Christian life. We must deal with sin and not allow it to master our lives.

The word "contrary" means to be opposite and opposed to one another. "So that you cannot do the things that ye would" seems to suggest that both the flesh and the Holy Spirit keep a believer from doing what he otherwise would do, if left alone. In other words, the Holy Spirit blocks the evil cravings of the flesh from controlling our lives, when we as believers yield to the Spirit. This results in believers not doing the evil acts which otherwise they would do. On the other hand, the flesh blocks the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, when we, as believers, yield to the flesh. This results in the believer doing the things that he vowed not to do when the day got started.

Paul explains this frustration in Romans 7:15, as follows:

“For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.”

In other words, what Paul wanted to do, he found himself not doing, and what he did not want to do, he found himself doing. Do you ever find yourself in this same predicament? Sin is always knocking at the door of our lives. These people, who teach eradication of the sin nature, should step out of their fairytale books. They are living an “Alice in Wonderland” dream! Every believer will continue to struggle with the sin nature. It is the normal process of God’s sanctifying work within our lives. The Bible teaches that we will struggle with sin the rest of our days on earth.

Thomas Carlyle said:

“The deadliest sin is the consciousness of no sin.”

One elderly lady at our church overheard a young man telling a group of people that he never had a fight with his wife. After the discussion quieted down, she made the comment: “Will the next liar please stand up!” Some of the greatest men that God has used over the years have always admitted to their battle with sin. Billy Sunday, the baseball evangelist and reformer, once said: “I’m against sin,” he said. “I’ll kick it as long as I’ve got a foot, and I’ll fight it as long as I’ve got a fist. I’ll butt it as long as I’ve got a head. I’ll bite it as long as I’ve got a tooth. When I’m old and fistless and footless and toothless, I’ll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition.”

We must understand that certain individual carnal acts of sin and carnal defeats in the Christian life may not develop into a pattern of ongoing carnality and defeat. However, sin can verily easily start to overtake our lives and consistently rule us, if we are not careful. We can fall into the mold of carnal Christian living if we become negligent. We can find ourselves moving through life in a very defeated and unspiritual manner. We must all honestly examine and investigate our lives today. Paul taught that the Corinthians should examine their lives (“let a man examine himself” - 1 Cor. 11:28). If we are suffering many more defeats than victories within our Christian lives, if we are not walking by the Spirit’s victory and consistently neglecting God’s will for our lives, then we must be categorized as a carnal Christian.

Carnal Christians are people who establish a pattern of defeat and sin within their lives. The carnal believer develops a pattern of rebellion in his life by refusing to live in a manner that God wants him to live. Paul explains it this way in Romans 7:14: “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Some suggest that Paul was merely referring to the normal struggle that all Christians go through and was not pointing to a time of defeat and carnality in his personal life. In other words, Paul was referring to his general propensity to sin and his desire to someday be delivered from all of his sinful inclinations (Rom. 7:24). However, it’s more likely that Paul was confessing his

own weakness in relationship to living a committed spiritual life during some particular phase of his earthly existence. He was confessing that he was living in the defeat mode instead of the victorious mode, since he was trying to be sanctified by keeping the law (vv. 7-14). Although we all struggle with sin, we must be careful that we do not become “sold under sin” or overtaken by the flesh or old nature to the point that we live in defeat during some particular phase of our lives (“I am carnal” – vs. 14).

Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter seven is this; when we try and use law (an outward legal letter) as our means, or approach to sanctification, we will find ourselves “sold under sin” and defeated. It’s our union with Christ’s death and resurrection that is the key to victorious Christian living (Rom. 6:1-10). Without claiming this union with Christ, we will find ourselves living carnally instead of spiritually. In Romans chapter six, we have the *explanation* of our union with Christ that leads to victory, in Romans chapter 7, we have the *experiment* with the law that leads to carnality, and in Romans chapter 8, we have the *evidence* which promises liberty (“no condemnation”; “made me free from the law of sin and death”; “condemned sin in the flesh”; “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us”). God wants us to get out of Romans chapter 7 and into Romans chapter 8. There is no excuse to live carnally, when we have the explanation on victorious living, a debunked experiment that shows us defeat and carnality, and when we possess the evidence for living a life of freedom from sin’s power.

Now let’s give some practical explanation and application at this point. I am carnal, when I record more defeats than victories in my life. I am carnal, when I consistently choose to go my own way, instead of God’s way. I am carnal when I do not gain control over stubborn sins and are continually being defeated or overtaken by sinful habits. I am carnal, when I bear little fruit in my Christian life, and fail to consistently walk in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. I am carnal, when I stubbornly follow my own sinful patterns in life, and resist God’s call to change my life. I am carnal, when I am not surrendering my life to God’s plan and will. I am carnal, when I am indifferent to the Word of God. I am carnal, when I seek to live by a legal code, or set of standards, without trusting in Christ’s delivering power.

We must remember once again that not every Christian is carnal in his overall pattern of living. The Bible clearly teaches there are spiritual Christians and carnal Christians. Where do you classify yourself today as you investigate your life? Don’t be so quick to answer! Maybe some of you have crossed over the line and are living in a carnal or fleshly way. Perhaps you have developed a pattern or way of life that is dictated by the power of the old nature. You have been under the influence and energy of the old nature far too much in your daily routine of life and far too long in relationship to time, perhaps days, month, and years.

The story is told of Handley Page, a pioneer in aviation, who once landed in an isolated area during his travels. Unknown to him, a rat got aboard the plane there. On the next leg of the flight, Page heard the sickening sound of gnawing.

Suspecting it was a rodent, his heart began to pound, as he visualized the serious damage that could be done to the fragile mechanisms, which controlled his airplane, and the difficulty of repairs because of the lack of skilled labor and materials in the area.

What could he do? He remembered hearing that a rat cannot survive at high altitudes, so he pulled back on the stick. The airplane climbed higher and higher until Page found it difficult to breathe. He listened intently and finally sighed with relief. The gnawing had stopped. When he arrived at his destination, he found the rat lying dead behind the cockpit! Oftentimes we, as God's children, are plagued by sin, which gnaws away at our life, simply because we are living on a low spiritual level. We are flying too low. To experience the defeat of sin in our lives requires that we move up, away from the world, to a higher level, where the things of this world cannot survive.

Colossians 3:1 explains it like this:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

The Bible teaches that we are seated in Christ within the heavens. In view of our victorious union with Christ, we can rise way above the level of this old world, and claim our victory. Ephesians 2:6 says: "And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 1:20-21 adds: "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Christ is the Victor over all the powers of this world and universe. Christ's glorious position or location in Heaven declares this to be true. In view of our victorious union with Christ in Heaven, we can declare our victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil down here. Yes, there is victory in the Victor! The reason you have been so carnal in your daily living is because you have not gone high enough! You are still looking up, instead of looking down, in the victory that Christ possesses ("And hath put all things under his feet" - Eph. 1:22), which is a victory we share with Him in the heavens! You have not realized the level of your lofty position in Christ ("raised up from the dead" - Rom. 6:4), where no sin can gain victory and survive.

A man, who has traveled in Europe, says that while many of the old cathedrals in France are beautiful on the inside, their exterior is often distasteful because of the art carvings, which depict animals with hideously distorted features. Inquiring about this strange custom, he was told that the builders in the Middle Ages wanted these figures to represent man's carnal appetites and prejudices! They were placed there to remind all who came to worship that they should leave bitterness and wrath outside the sanctuary if they hoped to receive God's

blessing. To approach the Lord in any other manner, would be unacceptable, and would deprive them of inner peace.

I'm not condoning hideous creatures on church buildings, but what a reminder this is for all of us today, as Christians. We must remember the hideous creature that yet resides within all of us. Call it what you may, but we know it, as the sin nature. When our lives become controlled by the sin nature, and we consistently live under its energy and power, it's then we develop, into what the Bible calls, a carnal Christian.

III. He is a stagnate man.

1 Corinthians 3:1

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.”

This man is stagnated which means he is not growing, developing, or making spiritual progress in his Christian life. In this instance, the Corinthians were termed as a “babes in Christ,” since they had not grown or matured in their Christian living. The term “babes” indicates that these carnal believers were still in the infant Christian stage. They were still baby Christians, or like newborn infants, who still needed to be supported by others. This means they had not grown in their spiritual life and walk. They were not babes because they were newly redeemed; they were still baby (immature) Christians after being saved for a long period of time. They never advanced from beyond their spiritual babyhood. This was a real tragedy, since they had every opportunity to grow and mature in their Christian life, but failed to advance spiritually.

Of course, it's not wrong to be a baby Christian. Every one of us was a newborn spiritual infant when we were born again or regenerated. We were all compared to spiritual infants just starting off in the Christian journey. However, the problem with the Corinthian Christians is that they never made spiritual progress and matured in their Christian lives. One characteristic of carnal Christians is that they never advance from their newborn state of infancy. In general, carnal Christians do not grow in victory and maturity through the understanding and application of Biblical truth to their lives. They do not advance in their Christian walk, victory, maturity, growth and testimony, as they should.

Nothing is more precious or wonderful than a little baby; however, a twenty-year-old with the mind of an infant is heartbreaking. A baby who acts like a baby is a joy; but an adult who acts like a baby is a tragedy. The same is true in relationship to our Christian life. We must take responsibility for what we hear and how we respond to the Bible, so we can begin to mature in our Christian life. When are we going to start growing up? Are you going to remain a baby Christian all your life? When are you going to start listening to God's Word, growing (1 Pet. 2:2), and making spiritual advancement in your Christian life?

Dr. McGee used to say, as only he could:

“It is tragic that there are people who have been members of the church and have been saved for years, and they are still going around saying, “Goo, goo, goo.” They have nothing to contribute but little baby talk. All they want is to be burped periodically.”

There are two observations related to his lack of growth.

A. The reason for his lack of growth (1 Cor. 3:2)

The reason the carnal man is not growing and living in defeat is rather obvious; he does not know the Bible and is not applying it to his daily living. When Paul says, “I have fed you with milk and not meat” (1 Cor. 3:2), he was chiding them for their lack of spiritual understanding and knowledge of the Bible. These saints were “not able to bear it” (the deeper teaching of God’s Word) because of their spiritual infancy.

Robert Gromacki makes this observation of the carnal man:

“He is a brother, a member of the family of God through regeneration (John 1:12). However, he is not able to receive the same level of instruction, as the spiritual Christian. Instead of manifesting the mind of Christ, he is reflecting the mind of the natural man.”

Baby Christians are ignorant Christians, when it comes to knowing and applying the Bible to their lives. It’s not that they can’t know truth (1 Cor. 2:12); they simply won’t allow the truth to penetrate their hearts and change their lives (1 Cor. 3:2). One of the key characteristics of the carnal Christian is that they shut the door to Biblical learning and teaching. The Corinthians actually had good Bible teaching from Paul and from Apollos (1 Cor. 3:4), but still were not growing and maturing in their Christian lives. They were not hearing the meat of the Word of God and growing in their understanding and appreciation of truth. This is why they were still babies in their Christian experience.

The “milk” (beginning food) of the Word of God (1 Cor. 3:1) has reference to the beginning teachings related to salvation and the Christian life. Milk is what you first introduce to newborn babies. Paul first introduced the milk or simple truths regarding salvation and sanctification to their lives. However, these believers at Corinth did not advance from these simplistic truths into a deeper understanding of God’s Word.

The “meat” (solid food) of the Word of God has to do with the deeper truths (1 Cor. 2:10) that are related to both salvation and to the Christian life. They refer to the deeper truths concerning salvation (justification, redemption and regeneration) and sanctification (holiness and living the Spirit-filled life).

Hebrews 5:14 states:

“But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

A new Christian might explain the death of Christ as, “Christ died for my sins.” A long-time student of the Word, on the other hand, would go into such things as regeneration, justification, substitution, and propitiation. One explanation would not be truer than the other; but the first would be milk and the second, solid food, or meat. The same is true regarding the deeper Christian life. A new Christian might understand that God wants to change his life and rid him of worldly habits, but not fully grasp or understand God’s plan for victorious Christian living and how to have daily victory, through the Spirit’s power. Simply stated, the carnal Christian lives like a baby Christian because he has been indifferent to God’s Word; he has not allowed the great truths of Scripture to penetrate his heart, and bring maturity into his Christian walk and experience.

One man, after visiting the church, came to me and said he did not like any preaching that was over his head. He told me that he was used to preaching that was very simple and evangelistic. What he was really saying to me was that he could not take the meat of the Word of God! He was used to the milk bottle instead of the meat counter of God’s Word. This kind of preaching will stunt the growth of Christians. Every pastor will have to give an account for the way he has preached and how he has fed his flock (1 Peter 5:2-4). When a preacher preaches salvation messages over and over again, then the Christians within the church will never grow up. If all that a Christian hears is how to become a Christian, instead of how to live the Christian life, then he will never mature. The preacher should not neglect the milk, but he needs to start serving up some porterhouse steaks and filet mignon, as well. He needs to delve into the deeper truths of God’s Word that will enable his flock to grow and mature in their understanding and application of God’s Word to their lives.

John MacArthur said:

“When you go into a church that is not accustomed to exposition, realize that a period of training the listeners is needed. You must move your flock from whatever they have been hearing into thinking logically, rationally, and even deeply about the Word of God. This is the process of weaning them from whatever they have been on whetting their appetite for the meat of God’s Word.”

In the case of the Corinthians, they were not responding to the good teaching which they had (1 Cor. 4:3). Like the Hebrew Christians, they were not hearing what was being spoken to them.

Hebrews 5:11

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.”

This carnal Christian moves through life with his ears closed to truth. He is not open and receptive to truth any longer, nor is he attempting to apply the truth of Scripture to his life.

Revelation 2:11 says:

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...”

A person who does not use information will lose it; and spiritual truth is no exception. The spiritual truths that we ignore and neglect cannot be effectively used for our Christian living. The carnal man’s neglect of truth results in his refusal to grow through the Word, his lack of skill in the use of the Scripture, his ability to absorb the solid food of the Bible, and a lack of discernment (Heb. 5:11-14).

In recent years, we have seen a significant increase in information on nutrition. We can read dietary facts and figures on the labels of cans and on the packages of almost everything we eat. We cannot even pronounce half the words on the label! And the more we learn about foods, the more we realize the truth of the axiom: “We are what we eat.” The same is true in the spiritual realm; we are what we take into our spiritual minds and hearts. We become what we assimilate into our personal lives. If we are not learning the Bible, either by lack of teaching or hearing, then we are not going to mature in our Christian experience.

Jeremiah 15:16 says:

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.”

This should be our daily desire. We should want to hear the Word of God and allow it to transform our lives (James 1:25). One thing is certain; we need to hear the “meat” (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:14) of God’s truth, so we can grow out of our infancy stage, to a place of spiritual maturity.

I was walking through a well-known Farmer’s Market in the hometown area, where I live, which is called the Green Dragon. I’m not sure how it really received its name, but I do know this, the sausage sandwiches are out of this world! One day, as I was walking through the market, I came to the sausage sandwich stand. I didn’t think I was really hungry for one of the sandwiches until I saw a man eating one. The sauce was dripping down his arm and the onions were piled so high on the sandwich, that they were falling off and on to the floor, when he would bite into the bun. After watching him for several minutes, I suddenly realized that I was providentially led to buy a sausage sandwich for myself! It was good to the last bite. By way of application, we need to bite into the meat of God’s deeper truths, which will enable us to develop in our Christian lives, gain victory and discernment, and live a life that is spiritually pleasing and honoring to the Lord.

B. The results of his lack of growth (1 Cor. 3:3-4)

1 Corinthians 3:3-4

“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”

The Bible is teaching that the Corinthians evidenced carnality in their lives by the sinful divisions they created around personality figures.

Immaturity produces two results.

1. Behavior that is sinful

The “envying, and strife, and divisions” (1 Cor. 3:3) were the direct result of their carnality. The carnal believer wants to start “church tremors” within assembly life. The church today must be on guard against this kind of carnality. The truth is this; whenever you are jealous and create strife and division within assembly life, you can mark your actions as being carnal and not according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Divisive Christians are carnal.

Their jealousy and division was created when they prided themselves in the teachers they were following (“I am of Paul” and “I am of Apollos”). The carnal Corinthians had created a personality cult around these leaders and made themselves out to be spiritual, based upon the teacher, or preacher they followed. The problem was not with the preachers; it was with the saints that were following them. It’s not always the preacher’s fault! Maybe, if the Corinthians had listened to what the preachers were saying, instead of creating a cult around them, they would have been spiritual, instead of carnal. Here is how it worked. If you were not in Paul’s group, or if you were not in Apollos’ group, then you were unspiritual and written off as an outsider. The carnal Christians had their feathers ruffled anytime someone was not in their club and disagreed with them.

Dr. Harry Ironside said this about the carnal man:

“He is delightful to get along with as long as he can have his own way. As long as he can run everything to suit himself he is perfectly happy and agreeable, but cross him in the least degree, bring something before him that is contrary to his own desires, and at once there is a stirring of the flesh within him.”

All of us must beware of carnality in our lives, as Christians. We should ask ourselves some questions.

- Am I jealous when someone else gets promoted before me?
- Do I enjoy being argumentative before others?
- Am I causing division?

- Am I idolizing some other person?

There was a sense of rivalry between the two parties. There was the Pauline crowd and there was the Apollos crowd. One group wanted to rename the church "Pauline Bible Church." The next group wanted to use the name, "The First Church of Apollos." This kind of comparison is carnal. When will we learn that the church is not a place to hand out trophies, applaud people, and give out awards for the best singer in the church? This kind of action is the breeding ground of carnality. You get your eyes focused on man and personalities instead of God.

Roy L. Laurin said this about carnal Christians:

"They are spiritual parasites who live on others, and spiritual parasites are dead weights."

These saints were trying to survive on the personalities of preachers instead of the message of the Word of God. They are like spiritual parasites living off of the personality of some man, instead of the real meat of the Word of God. What was the great mistake of these carnal believers? They put the man before the message! This is what happens with young believers, when they get into one of the churches where the preacher is a real charismatic and celebrity type of person, who does a lot of jumping and hollering. They get caught up in the man instead of really wanting to eat the meat of the Word of God. They go to see a man do aerobics instead of wanting to learn the Bible. Church becomes more like a circus show where a clown is performing his tricks. The sad result is that these types of Christians never grow. In fact, you cannot grow by looking at men. You must look into the Word of God ("looketh into the perfect law of liberty" - James 1:25).

Someone has remarked:

"Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people."

Instead of greeting one another with a holy kiss, they wanted to greet one another with a holy fist! We must learn to get rid of the carnality in our lives and churches. Of course, the Corinthians had other marks of carnality, such as greed or selfishness (1 Cor. 11:17-21; 14:4, 5, 12), disorderly worship (1 Cor. 14:23-40), rejection of Biblical authority (1 Cor. 14:34-35), worldly friendships (1 Cor. 15:33), lack of separation from pagan religion (1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 6:14-17); sexual promiscuity (1 Cor. 6:16-18), and drunkenness (1 Cor. 11:21).

I once heard a Presbyterian preacher say on the radio that he went to the movie theater, and watched an R-rated movie, and was convicted. Well, he should have been convicted! In fact, I don't believe he shouldn't have been in the movie theater in the first place, since this is a place where the foulest and most hideous things are openly glorified on screen (1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Tim. 5:22). Friend, carnality also shows up when we begin to accept worldly amusements. I know what many

are saying today; there is much more to carnality than just smoking, movies, gambling, dancing, and drinking. Yes, there is much more to worldliness than just these worldly amusements, as we have already seen (1 Cor. 3:1-4); however, let's not forget about the worldly amusements that are carnal!

We should rid our lives of worldly taboos and amusements like drinking, dancing, and devilish music. Today many saints are trying to act like soldiers in the Lord's army while trying to march to the beat of Lucifer's drums. These types of sins are a breeding ground for carnality and they can cause us to lapse into a carnal way of living.

2. Blending in with society

Paul does not mince words; he tells these saints they were acting like the unsaved or unregenerate people of the world ("walk as men" – 1 Cor. 3:3). There are many Christians like this today. They are not "natural" (1 Cor. 2:14), but they basically live their lives like the unsaved, or natural man. Please notice that Paul does not say that the carnal Christians "are" men, but they walk "as" men. The inference is that these believers were acting and walking like the "natural" man. The carnal Christian reflects the natural man more than he does the spiritual man; therefore, his life is lived out in the defeat mode instead of the spiritual mode. This is the general description of carnal Christians. They walk and live "as men," or as the unsaved within the pagan society.

Tom Constable makes an important contribution at this point: "This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave as and to appear to be unbelievers. The Corinthians' conduct indicated carnality, not lack of eternal life. Prolonged immaturity as a result of carnality is a condition all too prevalent in modern Christianity. Often we mistake carnal Christians for natural men, unbelievers."

I could not state it any better! Many Christians today live out their lives in defeat and worldliness. They look like the world, dress like the world, and listen to the same kind of music that is in the world. Their carnality is reflected in the overall way they are living. Various sins master their lives, and they live in much the same manner as the culture, and society that surrounds them. These saints were blending in with the culture and living lives similar to the unsaved. They were chameleon Christians, living like the unsaved, and blending in with their surroundings.

I recall watching an undersea program that showed a strange looking fish that swam near the bottom of the ocean reef. It actually looked like a swimming rock. The unique ability that this fish had was to blend into the surrounding rocks in order to protect itself. It could stop swimming and look like it was a permanent fixture in the rocks or reef below. This is the way the carnal man lives his life. He tries to blend into the society that surrounds him.

There is a cure for carnality; it's spirituality! We must live the life of the spiritual man (1 Cor. 2:15), which means we walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, on a daily basis and overcome carnal sins, which defeat our lives and keep us from living life on the higher plane. Here is the real problem with the carnal Christian. The Holy Spirit lives within their lives (Rom. 8:9), but the Holy Spirit does not own their lives (1 Cor. 6:19); therefore they cannot live a spiritual life.

A severe ice storm hit southern lower Michigan, causing great damage to trees and shrubs. As brother DeHaan surveyed the destruction in his own neighborhood, he checked the two large white birches in his backyard. Sure enough, one had lost some of its prominent limbs, but its partner had suffered a different fate. The entire tree had toppled over and was completely uprooted. Why the one and not the other, he thought? The answer was simple. Instead of standing straight up, this 35-foot giant had grown at an angle. So when the heavy ice accumulated on its branches, it couldn't withstand the downward pull of gravity. It simply fell in the direction it was leaning.

In a similar fashion, we too, can fall in the direction that we are leaning in life. If we begin to lean toward carnality, we will eventually become a carnal Christian in our overall manner of living and conduct, and lose reward when we stand before the Lord (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Carnality slowly overtakes our lives; sometimes in an imperceptible manner. If we are not careful, we can be like the frog in the water. As the temperature is slowly turned up the frog is unaware that he is slowly being boiled! Friend, we must deal with carnality, as it invades our lives (1 John 1:9), so we do not find ourselves leaning in the wrong direction!

2 Corinthians 7:1

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

So, is there any difference between an unsaved man and a carnal Christian? This is a question we must answer before finishing our study on the carnal man. Even though there are many similarities between the unsaved natural man and the carnal man (“walk as men” – 1 Cor. 3:3), there are also some distinctions between these two men. Making these distinctions will let us know that the carnal Christian is truly saved in spite of his carnality. One difference about the carnal Christian is that he does possess the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and for this reason, he will always bear some fruit within his Christian life. Life begets life.

Matthew 13:23

“But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Some conclude that carnal Christians will never bear any fruit of any kind throughout their lives. This simply is not true. Even when a person lives a carnal

lifestyle, it does not mean he cannot show any signs of spirituality, throughout his Christian life. Nor does it mean he will necessarily be carnal in every area of his life. We must remember that every believer will have something that God can praise him about in connection with his life of service here on earth (1 Cor. 4:5).

Dr. Ryrie has said this concerning the carnal Christian man: “But somewhere, somehow, he will also do some thing(s) that will merit Christ’s praise.” No true Christian will live in an *absolute* state of carnality (Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:17), possessing no change in his manner of living, but the carnal Christian does live in a *pattern* of carnality and defeat (1 Cor. 3:3).

Just because a carnal person never really commits his life to Christ, does not mean he will never honor God, at certain points of his life. The carnal Christian will bear some spiritual fruit in his life, which will demonstrate that he is a regenerated, or born again believer (Rom. 6:22; Eph. 2:10; 1 John 3:5-10; 5:18; John 15:2). In other words, all believers bear some fruit (Christlikeness, good works, giving, praise, witnessing) in their lives. However, this fruit will vary in each person and may be very minimal in the life of a carnal believer. God simply uses what we give to Him.

The truth is this; every born-again Christian bears some fruit, “some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt. 13:23). This clearly demonstrates that there is varying amounts of fruit which can be produced within the lives of believers. Not every believer will produce the same amount of fruit. This leads to a logical conclusion. Although the lifestyle of the carnal believer is predominately like the unsaved (1Cor. 3:3), there will always be some fruit within his life. This fruit will be evidenced that others might see God working in his life, even in a small fashion.

Many times the carnal Christian is like the believer in John 15 who will only bear some “fruit” instead of “more fruit” and “much fruit” (John 15:2, 5, 8). You will notice that the branches, which do not bear any fruit, are taken away and burned (John 15:6). Jesus suggests by this picture that people, who do not bear any real fruit for God, are unsaved, and will eventually be taken away into judgment. This is what happened to Judas Iscariot (John 13:13-18). The opposite is true of the carnal Christian; he will be saved in spite of his failures and carnality (1 Cor. 5:5).

There are many examples of believers who have lived in carnality. As already mentioned, there are the examples of Lot (Gen. 19:1; 7-8), Saul (1 Samuel 10:1,6-11; 11:6; 28:3). Solomon (1 Kings 1-10; Ecclesiastes 1-2), King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26), Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), Laodiceans (Rev. 3:16-19), Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:1-3), sinning church members (1 Cor. 5:1-5), and some who have persisted in sin, which brought God’s premature death upon their lives (1 Cor. 11:29-30; James 5: 1 John 5:16). An honest examination of Scripture will conclude that not every Christian perseveres in real victory and holiness to the end of his life. Furthermore, not every Christian lives the kind of spiritual life that

is God honoring. Genuine believers can live carnally and represent the fleshly way of life.

The Scriptures conclude that the carnal way of living is empty. Solomon summed it up very well when he said in Ecclesiastes 2:10-11: “And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.”

This is the ultimate reality and end of the carnal way of living. When you live your own way, everything becomes empty and meaningless. There is no rhyme or reason to living. Life is empty (“vanity”) and you find no satisfaction in life (“vexation of the spirit”). The word “vexation” has the idea of longing or desire that can never be satisfied. There is a continual emptiness within the spirit of a man who searches for satisfaction within the world system. Many writers liken this “vexation of the spirit” as a searching or chasing after the wind. You can never catch the wind!

Ecclesiastes 2:1 says:

“I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity.”

“Worldly joy is fleeting—vanity itself;
Vain the dazzling brightness, vain the stores of wealth;
Vain the pomp and glory; only Thou canst give
Peace and satisfaction while on earth we live.
There is none, Lord Jesus, there is none like Thee
For the soul that thirsteth, there is none like Thee.”

The carnal man drinks from the cisterns of the world and discovers they never can satisfy; only Christ can satisfy, as promised to the woman at the well (“shall never thirst again” - John 4:13-14).

“I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But ah, the waters failed,
E’en as I stooped to drink they fled
And mocked me as I wailed.”

The carnal Christian cannot possess true lasting satisfaction or meaning in life. He discovers that “the pleasures of sin” are only “for a season” (Hebrews 11:25).

To live a life of carnality is not God’s norm for any believer in Christ. When a believer continues to live carnally, instead of spiritually, he is shaming the name of Christ (1 Cor. 15:34). The carnal Christian lives in defeat more than victory; he is down more than he is up; he primarily lives selfishly, instead of spiritually in his

daily routine of life. He is the Christian who has developed a consistent pattern of rebellion in his life (Ps. 78:8) and his overall bend and direction in life is fleshly, instead of spiritual, as Paul teaches (1 Cor. 2:15-3:1-4). His primary goals, ambitions, decisions, daily living, and amusements are rooted in carnality instead of spirituality; therefore, he lives and acts like an unsaved man in many ways (“walk as men” - 1 Cor. 3:3).

Millie Stamm tells the story how one day she and her friend took an early morning walk through the woods. It was a beautiful morning. The birds were singing and the sun was shining through the trees along the trail, reflecting its rays on a lake close by. The family dog went with us on the walk. However, he was not satisfied to stay on the path, but ran from one side to the other. As we returned, the dog was exhausted, panting as hard as he could. I said, “Do you know why your dog is worn out? It is from all the detours he took along the way. He was off the trail more than he was on it.”

This is one way to describe the life of the carnal Christian. He runs off the clearly marked path of spirituality. He takes many detours off the intended path that God wants him to walk. Instead of following the path of the Lord, like the neighbor’s dog, he creates a divergent path of his own choosing. He is off the trail more than he is on the trail. This is a true picture of a carnal man. What path are you traveling today? Is it your own path, which you have created, or is it the ordained path that God has created for you, as a Christian? You may be traveling upon the carnal path of your own choosing today. If this is the case, you need to repent of your selfishness, sin, and spiritual neglect and get back on God’s ordained path for victorious and spiritual living.

Revelation 3:19

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”