

Doctrine of the Carnal Christian

1. The doctrine of the carnal Christian teaches that after a person becomes a Christian, there is a choice to either grow in grace by following the Lord, or to remain a babe in Christ, and live like a natural man.
2. The passage that is appealed to for this doctrine is 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.
 - *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. 2 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. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*
3. From this passage it is taught that there are three categories of men.
 - There is the natural man.
 - There is the spiritual man
 - There is the carnal man.
4. The carnal man is described as being like the natural man who is unconverted.
5. One major reason for the widespread popularity of the carnal Christian doctrine is that the doctrine has been part of the notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible*.
6. Mr. Scofield believes that Paul divides men into three classes:
 - There is the Natural Man, who is the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth;
 - There is the Spiritual Man, who is the renewed man, Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit, in full communion with God;
 - There is the Carnal Man, who is "flesh". The Carnal Man is the renewed man who, walking "after the flesh," remains a babe in Christ.
7. To "walk" implies the bent of the life, a leaning or bias in one direction, and that direction is towards carnality.
8. A popular presentation of this doctrine presents the teaching like this: After you have invited Christ to come into your life, it is possible for you to take control of the throne of your life again. The New Testament passage, 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, identified three kinds of people:
 - The Non-Christian. The natural man is a self-centered man, his interests are controlled by self.

- The Professing Christian. This is the person who confesses Christ as Lord and Savior and lives a faithful life of gospel obedience.
 - The Carnal Christian. According to the theory there is no essential difference between the Non-Christian and the Carnal Christian. The bent of the carnal Christian is the same as that of the non-Christian even though the carnal Christian has made a profession of receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour.
9. It is to be acknowledged that Christians do sin. There are babes in Christ. There is divine chastisement which all Christians receive. There is even a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal or fleshly.
 10. From time to time, every Christian is carnal in some area. In every Christian "*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:17).
 11. However, to concede these points does not allow for a classification whereby a Christian may live a whole lifestyle of total carnality so there is no essential difference between the Christian and the natural man.
 12. The apostle Paul does not say that the believers in Corinth are living like babes and like the unregenerate in EVERY area of their lives but in one area only.
 13. The apostle has already referred to the church as the "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*", who are recipients of "*the grace of God*", and enriched by Christ "*in all utterance, and in all knowledge*" (1 Corinthians 1:2-5).
 14. However, the Corinthians were acting like natural men by dividing themselves into various factions.
 15. Proof that Paul knows only two classes of men may be found in the following passages:
 - *1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*
 - *2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*
 16. The carnal Christian doctrine is not an innocent doctrine. It undermines the two basic blessings of salvation which are:
 - a new heart and
 - forgiveness of sins.

- ❖ *Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: 33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*
 - ❖ *Ezekiel 36:24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*
 - ❖ *Hebrews 10:15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, 16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; 17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*
17. When a sinner is reconciled to God, the blood of Christ covers his sins. This is the first blessing of salvation.
 18. The second blessing of salvation, according to the Scriptures, is a new heart, a new nature.
 19. For a Christian to live in total carnality without repentance, is for the work of redemption to be void and meaningless.
 20. There is a difference between speculative faith (Acts 8:12-23), temporary faith (John 2:23, 24; 12:42, 43; Luke 8:13), and saving faith (John 3:16; Acts 16:31).
 - *Speculative Faith. Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. 18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

- *Temporary Faith. John 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men,*
- *Saving Faith. Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

21. A "carnal" Christian may profess faith but it is not always saving faith.

22. The carnal Christian neglects the place of repentance in the life of the believer which is a vital part of the gospel message.

- *Acts 20:20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

23. The Puritan John Cotton was right when he wrote: *“There is none under a covenant of grace that dare allow himself in any sin; for if a man should negligently commit any sin, the Lord will school him thoroughly and make him sadly to apprehend how he has made bold with the treasures of the grace of God. Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? God forbid. None that has a portion in the grace of God dareth therefore allow himself in sin; but if through strength of temptation he be at any time carried aside, it is his greatest burden.”*

24. Many people live comfortably behind the carnal Christian doctrine just as people accept the concept of being backslidden as "normal" Christian living.

25. There is no scriptural comfort to be found in being a backslider or being carnal.

26. There is certainly no biblical basis for believing that a person can live a life of carnality and still be in the sphere of true saving grace.