

# Can Christians be Carnal

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. Am I okay to close up this laptop and put it aside?! All right. I'd like to welcome each and every one of you here this morning to the service.
- As we come together to worship our Lord and Savior and to be a blessing one to another.
- And this morning I've been blessed already. Thank you to the worship team for giving of your time and your talent, your giftings to come and lead us in song.
- And songs that, you know, touch into what we share out of the Word of God on Sunday morning.
- And as well for the mission report. It's good to get a taste of what they experience, to see the pictures, to hear the testimonies, to hear of what the Lord is doing around the world.
- [ 1 : 2 4 ]     And even as we talked this morning in Sunday school, we looked at the parable of the wheat and the tares and how the world is God's field.
- The world of mankind, the world over it is all around the globe. It is God's field and He is working. And just to see a glimpse of how He is working in Mexico.
- And we know that He is doing that elsewhere as well. So thank you for that report as well. And as we are aware already of upcoming opportunities to go back to that same orphanage and to do some more projects there.
- Hopefully it sets some hearts afire to plan for that next winter to go and to serve there for a time.
- Thank you, Eric, as well for reading our text for us. We won't be looking at all of it this morning. I don't think time will allow. But nonetheless, it is good to read this portion.
- [ 2 : 4 3 ]     And we'll get as far as we get. We're continuing in 1 Corinthians in chapter 3. Last Sunday, the guest speaker, we had Darren Froese come and share chapter 2, a good portion of it, and talking about spiritual wisdom and the wisdom of God.
- His wisdom is so much more than any man or any person's wisdom. And so our text this morning, it continues on.
- It relates to what Paul was writing in chapter 2 about spiritual wisdom and how true wisdom, which the world does not know, it comes from God.
- And we find that in chapter 2 in verse 7 and the first part of verse 8. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew.
- So true wisdom coming from God. And that wisdom is revealed to believers through the Holy Spirit.
- [ 4 : 0 5 ]     We find that in chapter 2 verse 10. But God has revealed them, speaking of these mysteries, the hidden wisdom of God, God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.
- For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. And He then reveals, the Spirit reveals these mysteries to us believers, as He shares in verse 11 and 12.

For what man knows the things of a man except the Spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

So the wisdom of God, how it is true wisdom, it is deep wisdom, unlike anything that man has, and yet it is revealed to us by His Spirit.

[ 5 : 14 ] As the Spirit indwells us and teaches us, He reveals the hidden wisdom of God. And so as Paul continues this letter going on into chapter 3, and he's addressing the Corinthian church, he addresses a lack of growth or maturity.

And so it's the points to look at this morning, the lack of growth or maturity, and how carnality stunts spiritual growth.

And so the title that I have for the message this morning, Can Christians Be Carnal? Paul, in the beginning of chapter 2, we had that two Sundays ago, that he relates how he came to Corinth with a plain message.

He came with the testimony of God, just the plain and simple gospel. There was no fancy speech. He wasn't that gifted in, you know, being that great of a speaker.

There was no fanfare there. There was no advertising. You know, there's a great speaker coming to town that got the crowds hyped up. Paul simply showed up, and he did what Paul did.

[ 6 : 43 ] He began to evangelize. He shared Christ crucified with everyone he met. Everyone needs Christ.

No one is exempt from this fact. And that is the message that Paul relayed to whoever would listen. And he did this in Corinth.

And, you know, Paul had various ways of doing it. You know, whether I'm... Scripture doesn't record it that much maybe, but I'm sure he did a lot of one-on-one in the streets with people.

He went into the synagogues, and he taught them there. And he did it when he received an audience before the kings or the rulers of the land or the philosophers, you know, as he was in Corinth in Athens with the Greeks, the great philosophers.

And when he received an audience with royalty, he didn't hold back there either. He taught them about God as well. He proclaimed Christ to them. Or, you know, when he was chained to a guard in prison.

[ 7 : 55 ] He spent time in prison, and there too, he shared the testimony of God. He shared the gospel.

And so Corinth was no exception. He did this here as well. The gospel seed was planted there by Paul as a servant of Christ.

And so now as he writes this letter in 1 Corinthians, he's addressing a lack of spiritual growth in Corinth.

He is not there. I believe he was in Ephesus as he wrote this letter. But there were those of Chloe's household, as he discloses.

They brought reports to him regarding the church in Corinth. And these reports were not good. There were issues that were plaguing the church, that were stalling its growth.

[ 9 : 04 ] It was so much so that Paul says in verse 1 of chapter 3, And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

So he could not speak to them as spiritual people, but he had to speak to them as carnal people. And so we'll get to the carnal side of things.

This first point, I just wanted to focus on the lack of spiritual growth and about growing in Christ.

So Paul tells the Corinthians, he comes right out, he is blunt, he tells them where they are at spiritually.

In verse 2, he says, I fed you with milk and not with solid food. For until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.

[ 10 : 12 ] So in the first part of verse 2, Paul is kind of taking a page out of Christ's book, and his way of teaching, and he's kind of, he's almost getting into a mini parable here.

He says, I fed you with milk and not solid food. So a question, when does a human feed only on milk?

It is in infancy, right? As a baby. Babies, as in when they are born, they begin life, you know, fed only with milk.

How long does a baby survive on milk alone? It's not all that long, right? There's only a number of months. It's less than a year.

You know, it doesn't take long. A few months into life, and they will experiment as well, and the parents, you know, have a part in it, recognizing as the child is growing, they're starting to get a couple teeth.

[ 11 : 19 ] It's time to introduce some solid food to them, and we experiment with it, and there's certain foods that the baby has no problem. This works well, and they begin eating that, and others, you know, maybe choking a little bit at first.

Okay, we need to hold off with this for a little bit, but they only spend a few months, the first few months of their life, living solely on milk. Paul telling the Corinthians that they are still on milk is saying to them, you are babies in the spiritual sense.

And keep in mind, the Corinthian church has been in existence probably about five years at the time of Paul writing this. It's thought to be in about 50 A.D. or so, 50, 51 A.D., that Paul first came to Corinth and started the church, and this was about five years later that he is writing this letter to them.

And so, you know, feeding on milk, spiritually, you're still babies. And so, just on the other hand, as he talks about solid food as well, by solid food, Paul is referring to deeper doctrinal teaching.

But having moved on from the milk or the gospel, the elementary things, the gospel of salvation, having moved on to solid food, which is deeper doctrinal teaching, you know, as chapter 2 talked about, the mysteries of God or the hidden wisdom of God.

[ 13 : 16 ] So, another question. I have a number of questions this morning. How much does a person grow spiritually in five years' time?

And the answer is that it varies. You know, it depends on the individual. In some people, we'll see quite a bit of growth in five years, right?

Spiritually speaking, there's quite a bit of growth. Others, you know, maybe not as much growth, but there is growth. It's a bit slower. Reality is that sadly, in some, growth is almost non-existent.

And that is what Paul is saying is the case in Corinth. There has been next to no growth in five years.

And so, to bring this home a bit, a question for us to ponder on, you know, personally, how much have I grown in five years?

[ 14 : 30 ] Or how much do I think I should grow spiritually in five years? should I still be on milk? And so, it's thought this morning, too, that we should maybe look at, you know, what does Scripture say regarding spiritual growth?

Excuse me. I've only picked out a couple of passages to look at a little bit. Scripture would have a lot more on it.

But just to quickly go through that a bit, just to get a taste for it, let's turn to 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 2.

It reads, As newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby.

So, Peter, in writing this, talking to new believers as newborn babes, as new converts in Christ, desire the pure milk of the word.

[ 15 : 51 ] Have a hunger for this milk, for the elementary things of the gospel, for the basics of salvation. Have a hunger for it.

And we all start out as newborns in the faith. The new birth, we are, there's a new beginning. We are babes in Christ. That is, we all begin there.

We all begin with the milk of the word, that plain, simple gospel. And as we, as we respond to the gospel and we develop this hunger for it, we should want more of it.

We should want to know more and more. And so, what happens as we continue feeding on this? What do babies do as they continue feeding on milk?

They don't stay that tiny infant. They grow, right? And the time comes where solid food needs to be introduced. And we have it here as well to have that hunger.

[ 16 : 59 ] Desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby. So, as new converts, we need milk.

We need to hunger for that spiritual milk. We want more. But as we want more and more of it, you know, that we grow thereby. We need to grow.

From there, let's flip to Ephesians chapter 4. So, Ephesians chapter 4 and I'll read verses 12 to 14 for us.

Actually, I'll back up to verse 11 just for some context as well. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

For the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

[ 18 : 13 ] And then verse 14 that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

So just some phrases to highlight in that passage. You know, the equipping of the saints in verse 13 says that we or in verse 14 we should no longer be children.

It all points to the fact that growth should happen or that it has happened. You know, like a baby we begin on the milk but over time as solid food is introduced the baby has matured into a young child and as verse 14 brings out here, you know, to have enough spiritual growth to reach a level of maturity of the knowledge of the truth that we can detect the false teachings that surround us and that we do not fall for them.

So, we begin as a baby, we grow into a child in the faith but we don't stop there. That growth is a continual thing. We need to reach maturity and that maturity takes us throughout our whole life here on earth.

and we need to grow and to mature in our knowledge in doctrine that we are not tossed to and fro by false teachings that we learn to discern them.

[ 20 : 01 ] As well, I'd like for us to turn to Hebrews chapter 5. Last passage I have to kind of chart the growth of a believer.

And Hebrews chapter 5 reading verses 12 to 14 and this relates to where the Corinthians were at.

So, verses 12 through 14 of Hebrews chapter 5. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

So, you know, it relates directly to where the Corinthians were at. They should have been grown, there should have been enough growth to the point where they could give out what they were taking in.

[ 21 : 27 ] They ought to have been teachers by now. They should have been able to teach others. You know, milk is for infants. It is for those unskilled in the word of righteousness.

At the new birth, we begin with the milk. We are unskilled. We have a need to learn. The solid food or the deeper doctrinal teaching is for those who are of full age, for those who have reached a level of maturity to understand, to understand these deeper doctrinal teachings.

And so, our spiritual maturity is evident by the type of spiritual food that we are able to digest. And so, continuing on in our text, let's look at Paul's assessment of the Corinthians calling them carnal.

Continuing on in verses 3 and 4, for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

For when one says, I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? And so, the question, is it possible for Christians to be carnal?

[ 23 : 13 ] I believe most of us would be familiar with the term carnal, carnal, having an understanding of what the word means, but I did put down a couple of definitions for it, just to freshen that up.

And so, the definition of carnal, the first definition I have here is pertaining to flesh, fleshly, sensual, opposed to spiritual, so against the spiritual.

The second definition of carnal, being in a natural state or unregenerate. carnal, so taking these definitions at face value, being carnal doesn't fit with a Christian.

You know, defining it as being opposed to spiritual or unregenerate doesn't describe a Christian, does it? And not even an infant one, right?

An infant Christian. It wouldn't describe them. It sounds more like the unbelievers out in the world. And so, how can Paul say that the Corinthians are carnal?

[ 24 : 44 ] If we quickly look back to chapter 1 of Corinthians in verse 9, he writes, God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, he's already put it into the letter, you know, God being faithful and having called these Corinthians into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Saying, you are believers. He's writing to Christians. Christians. They have been saved.

So, what is it that is making them carnal? Why does he in chapter 3 tell them they are carnal? Well, also in chapter 1, Paul already began to call them out on the problems that were plaguing the church.

Problems such as envy, strife, and divisions. He has it here again in verse 3 of chapter 3. A few of the things plaguing the church. What did we just read?

[ 26 : 01 ] in Ephesians chapter 4. We read that God distributes gifts within the body of believers for what?

For the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ, which is the church, right? And also in chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote about the giftings that God had distributed within the believers, the body of the church in Corinth.

And so in part, those giftings would have been for edifying the church, for building one another up. And so here in chapter 3, in verse 3 of chapter 3, for where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

what Paul is describing as the conduct of the Corinthians, does it sound like they were exercising their giftings?

Were they edifying one another? It sounds more like them tearing each other apart, right? The church was beginning to crumble in Corinth.

[ 27 : 26 ] You know, are these types of actions, are they befitting of a believer? Is that how we ought to act?

No, it is not. Romans chapter 12. Turning to Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As believers, we are called to be set apart from the world, to be transformed, to be changed, to be different. Now, just to reflect a bit more on spiritual growth, a few more questions for us.

[ 28 : 43 ] Where are we at before we are born again? we are in our natural state, right? The old nature, we are carnal.

And so then, what happens at new birth? When we are born again, we receive a new nature.

nature. And what then happens to the old nature? Still in Romans chapter 6, looking at verse 6, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

So the old nature was crucified with Christ, it was done away with. One more question, do we stop sinning when we receive this new nature, when we are born again?

The answer is no. There is still sin in our life. And so, I believe we're all in agreeance, there is a change when we are born again.

[ 30 : 14 ] There's that evidence of being set apart, there's new life within, we're looking to change our ways, we're starting a new life, and yet there's still sin in our life, there's still old habits that need to be broken.

And that speaks of carnality, of our old nature. Because we have become Christians, doesn't mean our old ways are erased, they are gone.

They are still there. But we must deal with them, we must overcome them, we must choose Christ over flesh.

It's the daily struggle of a Christian, no matter what our level of maturity is. Take Paul for an example.

Would we consider Paul as being carnal with the work that he was doing for the Lord? he was on fire for the Lord, he was evangelizing, right?

[ 31 : 34 ] And yet, what does Paul say about himself in Romans chapter 7? Romans chapter 7 verses 15 to 25, and our time is fleeing on us, so I won't read all of it, but he begins, you know, what I'm doing, I do not understand.

He has been converted, right? He says, for what I will to do, that I do not practice. So here is what I want to do. I want to live for the Lord, I want to live a life pleasing to Him, but that I do not practice.

It's not what I'm doing. What I hate, that I do. So the old nature, the sinful ways, things that have become repulsive to him, he's still doing these things.

So, you know, struggles that Paul was going through that he relates to us, we can identify with them. We too go through these things.

Paul wrestled with the flesh. He had a carnal side as well, but he had the spiritual maturity to recognize that it was the flesh that was tempting him to go after the carnal things while the inner man, his spiritual side, delighted in the law of God.

[ 33 : 02 ] And we find that in verse 21 of chapter 7 in Romans. I find then a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

So that struggle, that internal struggle, the spiritual versus the carnal. And so, you know, each day Paul had to make that choice, you know, which side of me will prevail today.

And so, Paul's struggle is our struggle as well. We too face this same scenario.

And our choice will dictate our spiritual growth whether we're going to drink milk or move on to solid food.

food. The spirit within us, you know, the spirit wanted to feed the Corinthians, to teach them the depths of God's wisdom.

[ 34 : 24 ] But the Corinthians allowed outside influence, the carnal culture of the world around them, you know, to influence them, you know, envy and strife, quarrels.

These were the choices that the Corinthians made to live with. You know, they elevated individual church leaders, preferring one over the other, you know, seeking to be recognized as a follower of so-and-so, you know, rather than seeing that everyone is equal under God.

And so, for us today, you know, what carnal things still influence us today? The things that the Corinthians struggled with, the envy, strife, divisions, they're still with us today.

They're very real. What other carnal things tempt us? Is it love of money or personal gain?

Is it storing up earthly treasures? revenge? Being self-willed or self-seeking?

[ 35 : 47 ] Is it sexual immorality? Or being ill-tempered? Or gossip? You know, the list goes on and on and on.

Every single day, we are bombarded by choices. You know, behaving like mere men, carnal men, it's easy.

You know, I wake up in the morning, I focus on me, myself, and I, I will act carnally. You know, it's the old sinful nature of our flesh, how we operate under the curse.

Following Christ does not come naturally. We have to consciously choose to follow Him.

We have to consciously choose to live a life pleasing to Him. Each and every day, we have to choose to hunger after His Word, to feed on His Word, and to grow in it to where we wean off of the milk and we move on to the solid food.

[ 37 : 11 ] We allow the Spirit to teach us the hidden wisdom of God. Now, our flesh doesn't want this. It will fight against it.

The old man would rather live in pleasure, indulging in various lusts, you know, things that bring only temporary satisfaction.

Only Christ brings true fulfillment. He is the wellspring of living water that quenches our thirst. He is the bread of life that satisfies our hunger.

And so, to answer the question, can a Christian be carnal? The answer is yes, he most definitely can. Lord willing, we'll look at this more next Sunday because as the letter to the Corinthians carries on in chapter 3, Paul has more to say about this.

But for this morning, to apply this passage personally to our own life, each one of us needs to examine ourselves, to examine our own life.

[ 38 : 36 ] where am I in my personal walk with the Lord? Has there been growth from the time I was saved to today?

what does my spiritual diet consist of? Am I allowing the Spirit to feed me, to grow me, that I am able to understand the mysteries of God?

And I trust that we'll be honest and truthful with ourselves as we reflect on our Christian walk. I trust that we will notice spiritual growth.

And if anyone realizes that carnality is a struggle in your life, don't lose hope.

Take it to the Lord. pray to the God who loves you and who wants the best for you, to strengthen you and to help you to choose Christ rather than the flesh.

[ 40 : 03 ] He will hear you and he will answer you. Also, seek out a more mature brother or sister in Christ, to be a mentor to you, to disciple you, to walk alongside of you, to help you along.

Having strong Christian support is worth very much as we seek to know and to follow our Lord.

There are others who have gone before us, who have gone through this, who have the experience, who can help us, bring us along. remember, as the body of Christ, as the church, we are a family.

We want to help each other, to support each other, to lift each other up, to pray for one another, and to grow up together.

Let's pray. Lord God, we come before you this morning. Lord, we thank you for your word.

[ 41 : 18 ] We thank you for the milk in your word. We thank you for the solid food in your word as well.

Lord, that your word includes both, that as we come to you and we hear about you and we hear the gospel and we respond to it, that we have that milk there to feed on, to grow us to the point where we become young children, where the teeth come in and a desire for solid food comes in.

And as we begin to taste of this solid food, as the Spirit feeds us, that we are able to digest this solid food, and the hidden wisdom of you, O Lord, that the deeper doctrinal things that you long to teach us and to establish us in, that we begin with the Spirit's help, we begin to discern and to understand and to grow, and we reach maturity.

Lord, we thank you for all of these things in your word, and this morning, just pray that as we go from here and we go about the rest of our day and in the week, in the days, the weeks ahead, that we have this intake of your word, and that we drink it up, and that we chew on it, and that we grow by it.

Lord, just strengthen us to make the choice to choose you each and every day, and that we resist the carnal side, but we rather, we choose to walk in the Spirit.

[ 43 : 13 ] Lord, we just pray these things in the precious name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.