

CAN A CHRISTIAN BE CARNAL?

Oh boy! “To live above with saints, we love – that will be glory. But to live below with saints we know – well now that’s a different story.”

The word “carnal” (Gk. *sarkikos*) means “fleshy”. Can a Christian be carnal? The answer is “no” and “yes”. Positionally, believers (having the Spirit) are spiritual and not carnal (cf. Rom. 8:5-9; 1 Jn. 3:9). However, in practice believers can be carnal. The problem is that believers do not always live consistently with their position in Christ. In 1 Cor. 1:2 Paul addressed the church at Corinth as *“those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”*. However, in 1 Cor. 3:1-4 Paul repeatedly labeled them as “carnal”. Their POSITION was one of sanctified saint, but in PRACTICE they were “behaving” carnally!

In Romans 8:5 Paul made a strict contrast between unbelievers who “live according to the flesh” and believers who “live according to the Spirit”. One is flesh-bent and the other is Spirit-bent and everyone is in one category or the other. Yes, believers still grapple with the reality of the flesh (Rom. 7:25), but now the influence of the Spirit is also an inescapable reality (cf. Gal. 5:17). It is this reality of the Spirit in the life of all true believers that makes all the difference (cf. Rom. 8:9).

“Easy Believism” says you can be a believer without your faith ever really changing your life. It is a most perverse LIE straight from the pit! Easy Believism champions the idea of a permanent category of “Christian Carnality”. Yes, Christians can behave carnally, but not without divine intervention. God is not an irresponsible heavenly Father who just sits idly by while His children live according to the flesh as a perpetual way of life (cf. Heb. 12:7-11). That completely misses the message of the New Testament. It completely misses the reality of regeneration, and it completely misses the greater message in the book of 1 Corinthians which deals with “Christian Carnality”.

The “carnal” Christians at Corinth were not just going on about their lives as normal. No, there was DIVINE INTERVENTION. In 1 Cor. 11:30 Paul said that because of their sin *“many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.”* Because of their carnality, many were sick and dying. They didn’t just continue on in an endless “carnal mode” without God intervening. Paul then went on to say, *“But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”* (1 Cor. 11:32).

Chastening is evidence of being a true child of God. Hebrews 12:8 says *“if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you*

are illegitimate and not sons.” And the writer goes on to say that God chastens His children “that we may be partakers of His holiness.” (Heb. 12:10). If one can live a carnal life unchecked by God’s discipline, it is PROOF that they have never truly been saved. If a believer persists in sin, there is such a thing as “sin that leads to death” (1 Jn. 5:16).

God does not just let His children live in perpetual carnality. The Spirit lives inside every true believer (1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 4:30).

Paul is clear that those who live in an unbroken pattern of sin are not saved and will not inherit the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Believers are God’s “workmanship” and He is at work in our lives (cf. Eph. 2:10). *“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6).

In salvation Christ sets the believer free from the penalty, power, and pattern of sin (cf. 1 Jn. 3:6-8). Charles Spurgeon rightly said: *“Now, what is salvation? Some people think that it means being saved from going down to hell. That is the result of salvation; but salvation means being saved from the power of sin, and being saved from the tendency to sin, as well as being saved from the punishment of sin.”*

Because of God at work in their lives Proverbs 4:18 says, ***“the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.”***

If POSITIONAL sanctification is a reality, then PRACTICAL sanctification will follow. The one is just as sure as the other and Hebrews 10:14 joins the truth of them together. The evidence of permanent POSITIONAL sanctification is seen in the reality of ongoing PRACTICAL sanctification.

Hebrews 10:14 (NKJV)

14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.