

COUNTERFEIT CONVERSION - PART 2

The “Carnal Christian”

Much is said today about the “carnal Christian.” Such a one, we are told, has made Jesus “Savior” but not *Lord*. It appears by this that a man can be saved, but not surrendered to Christ; following Him, but still serving self. And it is easy to see why this idea has arisen. Preachers and personal workers are at a loss to explain the strange contradiction of a self-pleasing, self-centered person who claims the name “Christian” without bearing any resemblance to this Savior they profess to love. Yet ask them, “Do you believe in Christ? Have you accepted Him as your personal Savior?” “Oh, yes,” is the invariable answer. If these are all the basics, they are apparently in order, so another source of counsel must be sought other than conversion.

Out of a morass of uncertain Christianity, men have looked for a way to distinguish between an “effective” Christian who lives like his Lord, and the “believer” who seems no different from his pagan neighbor. The distinction has been made between making Christ *Savior* and believing Him for salvation and making Him *Lord* that He might use this person for service. This “carnal Christian” becomes a *middle stage* person. He may partly serve God and at the same time partly serve himself. His ticket to heaven is guaranteed, his discipleship is optional. All this, we trust, can be substantiated by Holy Scripture. Can it?

Just what does *God* have to say about the “carnal man”? Before examining this question, you should understand that God looks at the heart of man. Whatever you are on the outside, God looks at your heart. He knows the real reason why you live the way you do. Because of the simple fact that almost every Christian duty and feeling can be imitated or duplicated by the unsaved man, we will concentrate on God’s analysis of conversion and God’s verdict on this issue. It will do no good to ask, “*What* are people who call themselves Christians, doing today?”, and make these findings the criterion of true faith. Our guide must be the Bible, for on the evidence of this Holy Book, rests the final truth of each matter of faith.

Just how much like a Christian can a sinner be? The Bible answers, *exceedingly* so. It tells us that an unsaved man can be strictly moral in his outward life (Matt. 23:8); outwardly very prayerful (Mk.12:40); zealous in religion (Matt.23:15); and conscientious in doing what is expected of him. (Matt. 23:23) None of these things are necessarily the sign of a true child of God. An unsaved man may be very much like a Christian in desires; to be of some use to others, to make converts and give money for the work of religion (I Cor. 13:3; Matt.23:15; Lk. 18:12). But desires are not the measure of true faith. The sinner may hate the same things a Christian hates but for a totally different reason, and that difference brings him a totally different destiny. It is the *heart*, or the *supreme, ultimate choice* man lives for that determines whether he is a true Christian or not in God’s sight. If the heart is wrong, everything else is wrong, no matter what is done outwardly. Either your heart is set on serving Christ supremely or it is set on serving yourself supremely. You are loving or you are selfish. You are living intelligently or unintelligently. You belong to God or you do not. (Matt.6:22-24; 7:17-20; 12:33-35; Jn.3:19-21; Rom.6:16-18; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 1:15; Jas. 3:10-11)

It's Hard To Tell the Phony (Sometimes)

The sinner may want to *glorify God*, and still be unsaved! The true saint does this because he *loves* Him, and wants to see Him glorified; the counterfeit, because he believes this is the way to be saved, and desires it as a means to *his* great end, *his* own benefit. The counterfeit may want to *repent*, because he is afraid if he does not he will be lost; the Christian repents because he hates sin itself, because it dishonors God. They may both *believe in Christ*; the true saint because he loves Him; the other, that he might have a hope of Heaven.

They may both feel like obeying God; the Christian, that he might be more like his Lord; the counterfeit because he wants the rewards of obedience. Desires are the same; the heart, in each case, totally different. One is saved; the other is not.

They may also agree in actual *affections* and *resolutions* towards certain things. A counterfeit may even “love,” (as far as *feelings* are concerned), such things as the Bible, prayer and witnessing, even “love” Christ and the Father - *yet still be unsaved!* *Feelings* are not the true test of faith. God sees the heart, and the essential difference is this; the true saint loves God with the unselfish love of trust and obedience, because he sees His character to be supremely excellent and lovely and he loves Him for His own sake. The counterfeit “loves” God with a feeling of “buddy-buddy” affection, because he thinks God is his particular friend that is going to make him happy forever, and why shouldn’t he love Him? (Matt.5:46) The Christian loves Christ because he has responded to His love provision for us to return to God. (I Jn. 4:19) The phony loves because he thinks God is going to save him from Hell and give him eternal life among other things, and he connects the friendship of Christ with his own selfish interests. The saint loves Him for what He *is*; the counterfeit, for what He *gives*. One seeks the Giver; the other, His gifts. One gives himself to God to *do* whatever He asks; the other comes to *get* whatever he can for himself, his own happiness and his own selfish purpose in life. (John 6:26-29; John 2:24)

Both true and false may feel badly about the low state of religion or church; both hate infidelity, injustice, and prejudice. The true saint, because it is opposed to God, to holy living, and to his Kings’ Kingdom. The counterfeit, because it injures an interest in which he is concerned, (for himself, of course), and if allowed to spread, will injure his hopes for happiness, oppose the religion he has chosen, and run contrary to his own views and opinions. (Matt.5:20) A man can even “hate” *sin* and yet not forsake it, being no more a Christian than the devil. How often an addict hates drugs because they have ruined him, but not for sins’ sake. He hates their bad effects, but loves the sin itself. Both may attend religious meetings, pray in secret, be self-denying and even be willing to suffer martyrdom for their faith. Yet, even in these, the basic motive of each may be utterly opposed. One has truly changed his direction and supreme purpose of life from living for self, to living for God. His life is moved and marked by *love*, he unselfishly *chooses* the highest good of God and the universe to the best of his knowledge. The other has merely changed his *means* of serving himself, from the secular to the religious. His life is marked and motivated by *selfishness*. He wants his own happiness above the interests of everyone in the universe, including God.

Now, if the Bible be our guide, it is clear that a man cannot truly be called a Christian when he is supremely selfish. And if the “selfish Christian” cannot be found in the Bible, as far as

God is concerned, there is no such thing. Yet it is said that the Bible teaches this, and such a person may be called a “carnal Christian”. Let us first examine the Bible signs of the carnal man, to see whether or not we may call him at least a partial Christian.

The word “carnal” comes from the Greek root “sarx” (flesh) giving “sarkikos” meaning “fleshly.” Each time the word “flesh” or “fleshly” is used in the Bible describing a moral action, it can be replaced by the word “carnal”. The two words are the same in Greek, they only differ in some English translations. Let us first of all list the signs of the carnal man as opposed to the spiritual man in Romans chapter 8:

CARNAL MAN	SPIRITUAL MAN
Condemned (Rom.8:3)	No condemnation (Rom.8:1)
Walks after the flesh	Walks not after flesh (Rom.8:4)
Under law of sin and death	Free from law of sin and death (8:2)
Minds things of flesh	Minds things of Spirit (8:5)
Carnally minded is death	Spiritually minded is life, peace (8:6)
Enmity (enemy) against God	Friend of God (8:7) cf. Jn.14:15-21, 14.
Not subject to God’s law	A subject of God’s law (Rom.13:8-14)
Cannot be subject to law (cf. Matt.12:33-35)	God’s law the rule of his life (cf. Matt. 7:13-27; I Jn.2:3-7)
Cannot please God (Rom.8:8)	Pleases God (Jn.14:21; 16:27)
In the flesh (Rom.8:9)	Not in the flesh (not carnal) (Rom. 8:1)
Out of Christ	In Christ, if Spirit indwells (Rom.8:9)
None of His (Rom.8:9)	A child of God (Rom.8:16)
Shall die (spiritual death) 8:13	Shall live (Gal.3:2-3; 5:24)

Paul lists another set of signs characterizing the carnal man in Galatians 5:16-26.

"WORKS OF THE FLESH"	actions of the CARNAL MAN
Adultery	Wrath
Fornication	*STRIFE
Uncleanness	*SEDITION
Lasciviousness	Heresies
Idolatry	*ENVYINGS
Witchcraft	Murders
Variance	Drunkenness
Emulations	AND SUCH LIKE

... “of the which I told you before, as I have also told you in *times past* that *they which do such things* shall **not inherit** the Kingdom of God.” (v.21)

*NOTE especially these starred characteristics for later reference.

Another list of the characteristics of carnal people is given in 2 Peter 2:9-22. We are told that they are *ungodly* and are reserved for judgment (2:9). Those singled out for the worst judgment are those who have *known* the Gospel and *still* live selfishly and carnally. They “walk after the flesh” in the lust of uncleanness and despise government, (rule or authority; immediately, of a society, but ultimately of God, refusing His Lordship). (2:10)

They are self-willed and self-loving, (AMP 2:10) showing most of the signs of the people in Galatians 5:16-26: *fornication* (2:14), *uncleanness* (2:10), *lasciviousness* (2:2), *emulations* (2:18), *sedition* (2:10), *heresies* (2:1) *drunkenness and revellings* (2:13). These men are *cursed* (2:14), they have *forsaken* the right way, gone astray (2:15) slaves of *sin* (2:19). “...to whom the *mist of darkness is reserved forever*” This does not sound like heaven!

It should be reasonably evident now, that a man who claims to be a “carnal Christian” does not have a very promising future, because his life is identical with the *unsaved man*. He is a slave to the flesh, a servant of his own desires and as such a rebel against the good rule of God, righteousness, and holiness.

But it is asked, “Didn’t Paul address the Corinthian Christians as ‘carnal’ in I Cor. 3:1?” Since this is the *only* passage where the word “carnal” is used where a superficial reading might give the impression of a “selfish Christians” - *notwithstanding* the above Scriptures listed *by Paul himself* against this very idea, let us examine it in detail. If the “carnal” Chris-

tian philosophy is not taught here, it is not taught anywhere in the Bible. And if it is taught here, this passage is in direct contradiction to those already studied.

NOTE in introduction:

- a. Paul's audience will, of course, include the unsaved (cf. his letter to the Romans 1:7-8 and 2:1-24. Also to the Galatians (cf. Gal.1:1-5 and 3:1-5);
- b. He specifically states the criterion of those he addresses *as saints*, those *sanctified in Christ*, (set apart in Him, not following sin, living like Christ as I Jn. 4:17) (I Cor. 1:2.)

SETTING ANALYSIS: I Cor.2:9-16

1. Paul came under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit, not his own powers. The *purpose* of his visit, (and letter), is to combat faction, division, and false teaching not of the Holy Spirit. This implies:
 - a. That he has God's authority to tell them something from Him;
 - b. They may not like what he has to say;
 - c. No matter whether they do or not, they had better be prepared to act on his words!
2. He amplifies his purpose (showing more of Christ's glories for those that *love* Him, (I Cor.2:6-11), then says that the Spirit shows men God's right and goodness. Accordingly:
 - a. Spiritual men are taught of God what is wrong in situations (vs. 11-15);
 - b. They do *not* live in sin (v. 15; cf. I Jn. 1:5-7; 3:4-8);
 - c. God knows and shows what is right to spiritual men, who have His mind. (v.16) *however...*

This sets the atmosphere for a searching, but loving rebuke. Paul has heard of some very suspicious activities still going on in this Corinth church. Sin could only occur if:

- a. Some Corinthian Christians still thought some sins might be allowable or even justifiable through either lack of light or false teaching;
- b. Some sinners in the church were still successfully posing as true Christians.

From this, Paul says: "I, brothers, could not speak to you as *spiritual* (men) but as *carnal* (natural, fleshly, unsaved men) as babies in Christ (or; as uninstructed people in the Word of God as to what a Christian should be like). He explains further by saying the first time he spoke to them, they had so little light they hardly seemed like Christians, so he had to give them "milk" (simple, basic facts of true faith for conversion). *But*, now some have still not changed! A "baby" Christian is not partially selfish and "growing" from partial repentance and commitment to complete repentance. All true men of God have forsaken all *known* sin, and are not knowingly living in sin. A Christian "grows" by responding to moral light given and disciplining new areas as God reveals.

If they were babies, they should have learned last time. There was only one other explanation for such sin problems continuing under the light of truth he had given them:

"For you are *yet* (still must be *unsaved*) *carnal*; for whereas there is among you:

- ENVYINGS: (zelos - cf. Rom. 13:13; Jas. 3:14,15; I Cor. 13:4; but especially Gal. 5:21)
- STRIFE: (eris - cf. Rom.13:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; but especially Gal. 5:20 as above)

- DIVISIONS: (dichostasia - “a two-fold upstanding”, used only twice elsewhere in Scripture; Rom. 16:17 as “faction”, and Gal . 5:20 as *sedition*)

“...are you not *carnal*, and walk as *men*?” or “Are you not worldly-minded and behave like the unconverted” (Berk.) (I Cor.3:3)

Notice carefully: Paul makes no case for a selfish Christian at all. There is no *option* here to forsake all sin; it is an absolute *necessity*. No honest Bible scholar could at all justify the salvation of a man who still lives in sin. If he does not know what he is doing is wrong, it is *not* sin. (Rom. 7:7-9; Jas. 4:17; Lk. 23:34; 12:47-48; 11:47-51; Jn. 9:41; 15:22,24) If he sins *ignorantly*, he is a baby; if he sins *knowingly*, he is a phony.

“Christian” implies being a “little-Christ” or “Christ-like”. (I Jn. 2:6;4: 17; 3:7,3) What kind of blasphemous combination is a “*Carnal Christ-Like*?” You might as well talk about “godly sinners” or “heavenly devils”. God sees *sinners*. He sees *saints*. He does not see “sinful saints” or “saintly sinners”. What fellowship has light with darkness? We are good or bad, selfish or loving. No definition of a Christian, that allows fellowship with the sin that cost God His Son and Christ His life, comes from the Holy Spirit of God. The “carnal Christian” philosophy is all right in its place. That place is Hell. If you are living in known sin, it is time you quit. If you live a carnal life, you are not a Christian, and have no right to call yourself one. “Carnal” or otherwise.

- *Neither does the following passage, (I Cor. 3:5-15), refer to a “selfish” Christian who has not served God on earth, makes heaven, but loses his “rewards” in the fire. Paul is not talking about *salvation*, but *ministries*. This passage is a terrible warning to a man who tries to build a ministry on his own basic salvation, (through Christ the Foundation Stone), but presents a sub-standard message. He preaches to others a salvation God cannot justify or endorse. Through carelessness or spiritual blindness, tradition or man-centered activism, he fails to faithfully present God’s conditions for new birth. He himself is saved, but all his work and ministry of sub-standard quality and presentation is *burned*. (I Cor.3: 15)*