

Pneumatology
The Doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SANCTIFICATION - Part 3

Spirituality and Carnality

A. Introduction

1. The bible states that the moment a person is “born again” he finds himself in a state of babyhood. Just as in physical birth a child grows from babyhood to adulthood, so also when a person is born into God’s family, through faith in Christ, he must grow from babyhood to adulthood. The person must mature in the things of Jesus Christ.
2. As far as one’s position in Christ is concerned, every believer is made an adult son in God’s family the moment he receives Christ as personal Savior (Gal. 3:26). But in experience, every Christian starts out as a babe and must grow into maturity (2 Pet. 3:18).
3. All Christians are somewhere along the road to maturity. They are either adults, adolescents or babes in spiritual things, but no one is completely mature.
4. The trouble today with so many Christians is that they have not grown into maturity. They have not grown up spiritually. They are suffering from infantile paralysis—they are babes when they should be adults.
5. Because believers are not going on in the things of the Lord, the infant mortality rate is very high. Many Christians never get much further than their initial salvation experience.
6. God’s desire for every Christian’s life is that he or she might mature in the things of Christ. God desires to have spiritual giants, not anemic pigmies.

B. Carnality and Spirituality (1 Cor. 2:14—3:4)

1. Context: The context is about speaking the wisdom of God to those who are “mature”— (*teliois*) (2:6). The world cannot know God’s revelation but for those ready to receive God’s Word there are blessings beyond human understanding (2:7-13). In fact, the natural man (unsaved) cannot receive any divine revelation (2:14).
2. “But the spiritual man” – This is a reference to those who are mature in Christ. Those who can comprehend the deep things of God.
3. “Makes judgments about all things” – The spiritual man examines all things because he has the spiritual capacity for divine truth.
4. “But he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment” – While the spiritual man can examine all spiritual truth, he himself cannot be understood by anyone who is unregenerate or immature in the things of Christ.
5. “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” – The spiritually mature man knows something of the mind of Christ. To judge the spiritual man is to judge the Lord, for the Lord has instructed the spiritual man.

6. "But we have the mind of Christ" – The "we" is a reference to Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus, who were all mature Christians. To have the mind of Christ is to be operating on the deep things of Christ.
7. "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual,"– Paul could not speak of the Corinthian church as mature, but as carnal. The Corinthians were not growing because their own spiritual condition prevented them from advancing on in the truth. They had not reached any degree of maturity.
8. "But as worldly (carnal)" – This word "carnal" (*sarkinos*) is very closely related to the idea of "in the flesh," denoting a weakness toward sin. It is one who is fleshy. This is not speaking of sinfulness but of a babe in Christ who has not grown into maturity. Every Christian is or has been in this state of carnality (babyhood). Those Corinthians were carnal-babes. POINT: It is absolutely necessary and perfectly normal for all Christians to go through a baby stage, but it is quite unnatural for them to stay in this state.
9. "Mere infants in Christ" – Here Paul definitely equates carnality (*sarkinos*) and babes in Christ (*napiois*). For a person to understand divine truth he must be "born again" (2:14). But once a person becomes a child of God, this does not qualify him immediately for all spiritual truth. POINT: When a person is first saved, he is a babe in Christ and is qualified to receive the milk of the Word.
10. "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it," – Milk is for babes and strong meat is for the mature. In context, Paul is speaking about the 18 months he was at Corinth teaching these Christians during his first visit to them. Paul did not reprimand them for babyhood because this is a stage all Christians must pass through. NOTE: The "milk of the Word" appears to be what Paul taught the Corinthians when he was first with them. From 1 Cor. 2:2 it is clear that the milk of the Word is the simple teachings of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Thus the gospel is the milk of the Word. What then is the meat of the Word? Probably the deep teachings of books like Romans, Ephesians, Galatians and Philippians. NOTE: We may also conclude that the main part of the teaching in 1 Corinthians is milk because Paul infers that these Corinthians still couldn't take in the meat of the Word.
11. "Indeed you are still not ready, you are still worldly (carnal)." -- Paul says they still don't take in deep spiritual food, for it had been over four years since he instructed these Corinthian Christians. He says they are still carnal. Now Paul uses another word for carnal (*sarkikos*) which means "according to the flesh," or willfulness towards sin. It is one who is fleshy. After four years they were still babes and they were babes by choice because of rebellion in their hearts. They were now carnal-rebellious. They should have been out of babyhood but they willfully refused to go into maturity. Thus Paul reprimands them.
12. "For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly (carnal)? Are you not acting like mere men." – This state of carnal-rebelliousness brought a critical spirit and they walked as men; that is, they had moved so far from Christ they bore many of the characteristics of unsaved people.

C. Various Views on the Carnal and Spiritual Man

1. View #1: Saved and Unsaved
 - a. Argument: Some take the spiritual man as contrasted with the natural man (1 Cor. 2:14). Thus the spiritual man is characterized as one indwelt by the Spirit, having the mind of Christ and able to judge all things. As a saved man indwelt by the Spirit, every Christian has the capacity and potential to understand divine revelation. When addressing the Corinthians, Paul could not address them as spiritual, even though they were saved, for their lives

- gave little evidence of salvation. Because of their low spiritual condition, Paul had to speak to them as unsaved men (carnal).
- b. Objections: The objections to this viewpoint are many.
 - (1) The context is about the mature (*telioios*), referring to mature believers (1 Cor. 2:6).
 - (2) The spiritual man judges all things (1 Cor. 2:15) and experience shows that there are many Christians who do not judge “all things.”
 - (3) The “mind of Christ” refers to the mature mind of the Apostle and his workers over against the immature mind of the Corinthians.
 - (4) The context definitely implies that the Corinthians were not spiritual Christians but carnal Christians (1 Cor. 3:1-4).
2. View #2: A Christian Walking According to the Spirit or According to the Flesh
 - a. Argument: The context is about the carnal Christian who is walking by the flesh (1 Cor. 3:1-4), and to walk by the flesh means that one is not controlled by the Spirit. Therefore at any given moment a Christian, whether a babe or an adult, is either controlled by the Spirit and characterized by spirituality or he is not controlled by the Spirit and is characterized by carnality. This view makes no distinction between the two words for “carnal” in the context.
 - b. Objections: The objections are:
 - (1) The context is about the mature (1 Cor. 2:6).
 - (2) It clearly says that the spiritual man judges, discerns or examines all things, and surely a babe in Christ does not have this ability.
 - (3) Paul definitely contrasts the spiritual man with the carnal-babe in Christ, making spirituality somehow related to maturity (1 Cor. 3:1).
 3. View #3: Maturity Contrasted With Carnal-Babes and Carnal-Rebellious Christians.
 - a. Arguments: The context is about the “perfect” (mature—*telioios*); thus the spiritual man is a mature Christian who has walked in dependence upon the Spirit for a long time. The opposite of a spiritual man is a carnal-babe (1 Cor. 3:1 - *sarkinos*). A failure to grow out of babyhood produces a carnal-rebellious Christian (1 Cor. 3:2-4).
 - b. Support: The support for this position is:
 - (1) The context is about maturity (perfect - *telioios*).
 - (2) The spiritual man judges all things and only the mature Christian can do this
 - (3) The spiritual man is contrasted with the carnal man (*sarkinos*) and the carnal person is equated with a babe in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1).
 - (4) Other verses such as 1 Cor. 14:37 and Gal. 6:1 indicate that this refers to the spiritually mature.
 4. Summary and Conclusion
 - a. Assuming view #3 to be the correct one, several observations can be made. First it may be seen that it takes time to become a spiritual man. The spiritual man is a man who has walked in dependence upon the Spirit over a long period of time. Secondly, it is not enough to say that a spiritual man is a mature Christian alone, but he must be a mature Christian presently filled with the Spirit. Thirdly, it may be seen that the babe in Christ may be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and spiritually minded (Rom. 8:6), but he cannot be considered spiritual for it takes time and a constant attitude of dependence upon the Spirit to become a spiritual man.
 - b. Therefore it may be concluded that at any given moment the babe or mature Christian will either be controlled or not controlled by the Spirit, but only the mature Christian, filled with the Spirit, can be called a spiritual Christian.