



LESSON 4

The Carnal Christian and the Spiritual Christian

MAIN SCRIPTURES:
I CORINTHIANS 3:1-23

LESSON AIM: To lead to the understanding that some saved people don't always act Christian in their attitudes and in their actions because they are *carnal*, and have stopped growing in their faith. To show the difference in the life of a *consecrated* Christian and a *carnal* Christian.

SUGGESTED MEMORY VERSES:

I Corinthians 3:1; I Corinthians 3:16; Romans 8:6; and Romans 8:7.

OVERVIEW:

- I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?
- II. THE TWO TYPES OF CHRISTIANS
- III. THE BIBLE'S PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A CARNAL CHRISTIAN
- IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CARNAL CHRISTIAN AND THE SPIRITUAL CHRISTIAN

INTRODUCTION: As you read the main text for this lesson, you'll see that the Apostle Paul is writing to the Church members at Corinth. There was trouble in this crowd. Their church was filled with envy, strife and division. Yet in I Corinthians 3:1 Paul calls them brethren. That lets us know that they truly had been saved.

Their problem wasn't that they weren't converted, their problem was one of carnality. They were spiritually immature and had stopped living to please the Lord. Paul said they were "babes in Christ," meaning they hadn't grown at all since they'd been saved. This carnal life was marked by things like jealousy, arguments, fighting and even bragging about who was the most spiritual in the bunch.

It is possible to be a child of God and to come to the point where you stop walking in the *Spirit* and start walking in the *flesh*. When a Christian does this, he will become carnal. A carnal Christian will always be a miserable Christian. Therefore, it's important to learn to guard against that which will cause us to become carnal and lose the blessing of God upon our lives.

We're each responsible for our own growth as a Christian. We must grow above the necessity to be bottle-fed by others, and learn to feed upon the *meat* of God's Word that will build us up and cause us to grow to full stature and maturity. This is God's desire for all of His children.

(Where lines are provided after a Scripture reference, look up the verse and write a one sentence summary of what is Scripture is saying to you.)

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

A. Basic to the study of the carnal Christian versus the spiritual Christian is the proper understanding of what a Christian really is! A previous study covered the Bible's teaching on salvation in great detail. However, there are some additional facts about what it really means to be a Christian.

1. To be a Christian is to know that you've been saved by God's grace.

a. There's great misunderstanding today about what it takes to be a Christian. Many think you simply join the church, or are baptized to become a Christian. But make no mistake. No one can lay claim to the name *Christian*, without first being born again.

b. Perhaps we aren't preaching and teaching God's plan of salvation in its simplicity and truth.

c. Jesus didn't complicate salvation. He said it required only a childlike faith to be saved. (Matthew 18:3) _____

d. So, to be a Christian, one *must* first be saved. (If you have personal doubts about your own salvation, it would be wise to turn back to lesson 2 the New Birth, and read it carefully until you fully understand how you can be born again and have that assurance in your heart.)

B. Salvation isn't all that's required to qualify to use the name *Christian*.

1. By now you understand that one can be saved, yet not living a lot like Jesus did. This was the basic problem at Corinth. They were saved, but not living very Christ-like lives.

To be a Christian actually means to be like Christ in the two primary areas of life. I Corinthians 6:19-20 _____

These verses teach us that we're to bring glory to God in our body (our actions) and in our spirit (our attitudes).

a. A Christian, then, will endeavor to be Christ-like in *attitudes*.

To be a Christian is to have Christ-like thoughts and feelings toward others and to allow the Holy Spirit to control your temperament (moods).

b. To be a Christian is also to be like Christ in

actions. To glorify God in your body, you should endeavor to follow the example of Jesus. The daily life (outward actions) of a Christian is the only "Bible" many people will ever see.

- C. A true Christian is also one who lets Christ Jesus be Lord of his life.
1. Since Jesus lived with one great purpose—to do His Father's will—it would be fair to say that this should also be the goal and purpose of the life of every one who claims to be a Christian.
 - a. Read Philippians 2:5-8. Write a brief summary of what this passage teaches about Jesus. _____

 - b. Far too many lives are Christian only in name and not in practice.
 - c. If the *secular* rules over the *spiritual* in your life, then Christ isn't Lord!
 - d. When one has Christ as the Lord, things like sports, job, housework, gardening and hobbies won't be more important than things like church, prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship and service to the Lord through the local church.
 - e. You'll find that when you allow Jesus to be the Lord of your life He doesn't take away from the enjoyment of life; He adds to it. Those things which you've always enjoyed, if put into their proper place, will be even more enjoyable with the Lord's blessing upon them.
 2. The Christian life is an active life. It's a life of doing, going, witnessing, giving, sharing, helping and serving.
 3. The Christian life is the abundant life.
 - a. It's the best life, and it's the blessed life! It's the life of joy, peace and blessing when Jesus is Lord!
 - b. Think about this. If you were placed in a courtroom and accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

II. THE TWO TYPES OF CHRISTIANS

- A. A Christian is one who not only has been saved, but one who also endeavors to live a Christ-like life in attitudes and actions.

The Bible teaches us that there are two types of Christians.

1. There is the *carnal* Christian.
 - a. The word *carnal* means to be fleshly, or to

care more for the things of the flesh. (Romans 8:5) _____

- b. Living "in the flesh" (living to care only about material and physical things) doesn't please God.
- 2. There is the *spiritual* Christian.
 - a. The word *spiritual* means to care for things in the spiritual realm and to seek those things with greater desire than we seek temporal things. (Romans 13:14) _____

 - b. Galatians 5:16 teaches us that if we will walk in the Spirit we won't be troubled by the flesh.
- B. Whether you'll be a carnal Christian or a spiritual Christian depends largely upon you and your efforts and ambitions.
 - a. Galatians 5:25-26 _____

 - b. What does "walk in the Spirit" mean to you? _____

III. THE BIBLE'S PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A CARNAL CHRISTIAN

- A. The perfect example of a carnal Christian is found in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).
 - 1. Notice in verse 11 that Jesus said, "A *certain man had two sons...*" If He had intended that we only learn the lessons of the prodigal son, He would have just mentioned one son in His story.
 - 2. The lessons of the prodigal are important and easy to pick out of the story. We learn of the danger of a materialistic heart, the short-lived folly of sin, the end of the backslider's road, the steps of restoration and the wonderful attitude of the father toward a repentant son.
- B. There's another character to be found in Luke 15. He's the elder brother.

The elder brother is the perfect example of a carnal Christian. Who is he and what does he have to teach us?

 - 1. He's called a "son" in verse 25, so we know he represents those who are saved.
 - a. By salvation we become the sons of God.
 - b. John 1:12 _____

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2. In verse 29 we learn that he is a servant.
 - a. He, unlike his dropout brother, was still at home and still serving his father.
 - b. Even so, there are indicators that let us know that he was a carnal son.

 3. He was filled with the spirit of envy and jealousy toward his brother.
 - a. See Luke 15:25-28. His anger was generated by the special treatment his brother was receiving.
 - b. When he should have rejoiced on behalf of his brother, he was jealous and envious.
 - c. Envy, then, is an indicator of a carnal life. Proverb 27:4 _____

 4. His feelings were easily injured, and his wrong attitude hindered his fellowship with others.
 - a. Notice his childish attitude, which comes across in Luke 15:28.
 - b. He wouldn't go into the house to fellowship with the others who had gathered to rejoice because his feelings were hurt.
 - c. Being easily offended is a mark of the carnal life, and an indicator that one isn't spending much time in the Bible. Psalm 119:165 _____

 5. He viewed his work for his father as something to be endured, rather than something he enjoyed.
 - a. Look at Luke 15:28-29. He is saying, "I've 'slaved' away my life for you all these years."
 - b. This is one of our big problems today in the Lord's work. We serve the Lord, but we don't serve Him with the joy we ought to be experiencing.
 - c. When serving the Lord has become more burden than blessing, it's most likely an indicator that you aren't walking in the Spirit and may be in danger of becoming a carnal Christian.

 6. He was a man who was dominated by *self*.
 - a. Look at Luke 15:29 and count how many times he uses words like, "I," "me," and "my."
 - b. He was self-righteous.
 - c. He was self-centered.
 - d. He was filled with self-pity.

- e. When you see these attitudes in yourself, you need to take caution. It's an indicator of one who has become carnal.
- 7. He was a complainer who was judgmental and critical of his own brother.
 - a. In Luke 15:30 we see how he complained about the treatment and attention his brother was getting.
 - b. We see railing criticism of his brother.
 - c. He ignored the fact that his brother had repented and come home; he magnified the sins of his brother.
 - d. While it's right that we preach against that which threatens the work of the Lord and tears down and destroys the Word of God, it's wrong to fall into the habit of criticizing others.
Romans 14:10-13 _____

Criticism is "of the flesh." It endeavors to make one appear spiritual and righteous at the expense of another. This, too, is an indicator of the carnal life.

- 8. He didn't share the same concern for the one who had been lost as did his father.
 - a. Notice the father's attitude over one who "was lost and is found" in verse 24. His was the attitude of joy and rejoicing!
 - b. From verse 28 through verse 32 we see the lack of compassion and concern evidenced in the life of the elder brother.
Truly, the elder brother is a great example of those who are "sons of God" but still walk in the flesh and live a carnal life.

IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CARNAL AND THE SPIRITUAL CHRISTIAN

- A. There is a difference in their *motives*.
 - 1. The carnal Christian lives for the flesh and the desires of the flesh. Romans 8:5 _____
 - 2. The spiritual Christian lives for the Lord and desires to serve and please Him. II Timothy 2:4 _____
- B. There is a difference in their *food*.
 - 1. The carnal Christian is still a spiritual baby and feeds only upon the "milk" of God's Word.
 - a. I Corinthians 3:2 _____

b. Hebrews 5:13-14 _____

2. The spiritual Christian loves the Word of God in its entirety, which includes the study of doctrine.

a. I Timothy 4:15-16 _____

b. II Timothy 3:16-17 _____

C. There is a difference in their *growth*.

1. The carnal Christian is an infant. He will show the characteristics of immaturity (selfishness, self-centeredness and becoming easily upset with others). I Corinthians 3:1 _____

2. The spiritual Christian will continue to grow and mature in the faith. (II Peter 3:18) _____

D. There is a difference in their *walk*.

1. The carnal Christian walks in instability. (An infant is unstable and depends upon others to help him walk; so does the carnal Christian.) James 1:8 _____

2. The spiritual Christian walks in the example that Jesus left for him to follow. (Colossians 2:6) _____

E. There is a difference in their *fruit*.

1. The carnal Christian allows the cares of this world to choke out the fruitfulness of his life. Matthew 13:22 _____

2. The spiritual Christian lives a life of fruitfulness for _____

the Lord's sake.

a. Matthew 13:23 _____

b. John 15:5-8 _____

F. There is a difference in their *joy*.

1. The carnal Christian will always suffer a loss of joy.
 Psalm 51:12 _____

2. The spiritual Christian will have fullness of joy, even
 in adverse circumstances. Romans 14:17-18 _____

G. There will be a difference in their *reward*.

1. The carnal Christian will have no reward when he
 stands before God. I Corinthians 3:13-15 _____

2. The spiritual Christian will receive a reward based
 on his labor for the Lord.

a. Read Matthew 6:19-21 _____

b. Revelation 22:12 _____

SUMMARY: All who have been saved by the grace of God, through faith in Christ Jesus, will be in Heaven someday. However, not all who are saved really live the Christian life here upon this earth.

To be a Christian means more than being saved. It means to mimic the life of Jesus before the world. It means to endeavor to follow in His steps and to live as he lived. Some will say, "The Lord knows I can't be perfect, like Jesus." That's true, but should that keep us from the goal of striving to be more like Him today than we were yesterday? It's the duty of a child of God to grow in the Christian life and to take on more and more of the characteristics of his Father in Heaven.

One will not grow without a proper diet and some sort of exercise. If we're to grow in the faith, we must feed ourselves daily upon the Word of God. We must, as the Bible instructs,

“exercise ourselves unto Godliness,” which simply means practice being more like Christ. What kind of Christian will you be—carnal or spiritual? That choice must be determined by each of us at the start of every new day.

REFLECTIONS: Answer the following questions individually or in class. Give careful attention to your answers. This exercise is what the Bible refers to as *meditation*. Think on these things...

1. What does the word *Christian* really mean? When is one eligible to use the term?

2. In what two areas of life are we told to glorify God? How can we do this?

3. What does it mean to be *carnal* as a Christian?

4. List some of the characteristics that will become evident in the life of one who is carnal.

5. How can one guard against becoming carnal in the Christian life?

6. How should a carnal brother or sister be treated?

7. List reasons that prove we are wiser to live the spiritual life as opposed to the carnal life.
