

## **The Remedy for Carnality**

### **"Carnal" Christian**

Can someone be "carnal" and still be a Christian? The two words almost seem to contradict each other. Yet, churches today are filled with carnal Christians, who look and act just like the sinners around them.

Pastors do not know what to do with them -- and neither do congregational members. Since many naive believers (and even some ministers) have the idea that Christians do not sin, they have come up with two common conclusions. The first is: sinning Christians were never saved. The second is: sinning Christians have lost their salvation. Both conclusions are wrong -- the person *is* saved. The truth is, Christians *can* sin. The sinning Christian is "carnal," but he *is* a Christian.

### **A Definition of Carnality**

Paul faced this issue with the Corinthian church, the most unspiritual church in the New Testament. This was a church of truly born-again people who never grew up, who continued to sin both mentally and outwardly. Paul called them "brethren" and "carnal." He had no problem combining a title for a Christian with an attribute of a sinner.

*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

-- 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Paul said the Corinthians were filled with envy, strife, and division and they walked as "men." The Amplified Bible says they walked as "mere men," as sinners. This gives us our first clue to understanding the carnal Christian and why there is no difference between their attitudes and actions and those of the world.

## **Walking as Mere Men**

The carnal Christian is under the control of the nature of the flesh. He has the Holy Spirit living inside him -- but he is no longer *controlled* by the Holy Spirit. Inside the carnal believer is all the power he needs to live a godly life, but he chooses to live by the same power as a sinner. The sinner does not have the Holy Spirit living inside him and can only try to make it through life by his own efforts and works, by the strength of the flesh.

Because the carnal Christian chooses to bypass the very nature of God living inside him and tries to make it through life by the strength of his own efforts, he is no more effective in the kingdom of God than a sinner.

## **Sin Makes Us Carnal**

What disconnects us from the power of the Holy Spirit and reconnects us with our old way of life? Sin. We have to understand that not only *can* Christians sin, they *do*. They can also do a good job of it. In fact, a Christian can sin better than a sinner! You have not been truly lied to until you have been lied to by a Christian. You have not been truly cheated in a business deal until you have been cheated by a Christian who calls you "brother" and says, "Hallelujah" and "Praise God" while he is doing the cheating. I know this sounds harsh, but perhaps it is time to pull our heads out of the sand and wake up to reality. Paul told Timothy a Christian can be "worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8).

A Christian has to cross many more barriers to sin than a sinner does. When a sinner sins, he is only doing what comes naturally. But for a Christian to sin, he must first override the conviction of God and of his own heart -- he must be *fully determined* to sin!

## **Why are They Called Heroes?**

There is not a perfect believer who has ever lived except Jesus Himself. The Bible is filled with stories of believers who sinned. In most cases, they sinned on a much larger

scale than you or I ever have. Even so, God did not throw them away. He did not tell the angels, "Maybe they were never saved in the first place." Nor did He say to Jesus, "I think this one has lost his salvation."

Heroes such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and David all sinned and sinned big. None of the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews chapter eleven are there because they were perfect. They are heroes because when they sinned and failed, they repented and stood back up.

Moses disobeyed God and struck the rock instead of speaking to it. He lost his chance to enter Canaan because of disobedience to God's command.

Elijah ran from Queen Jezebel the day after calling down fire from heaven. (We, too, are often prone to a defeat immediately after a great victory.) Elijah then ran from God and hid in a cave and would not obey God. He ended up losing his ministry and was replaced by Elisha.

We know both Moses and Elijah did not lose their salvation. They went to heaven. They both appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and will one day return as the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven.

Noah opened the door to the ark -- and almost immediately got drunk. Abraham tried twice to give his wife away to save his own life. He also had a son through a handmaid as he attempted to fulfill the promise of God in his own strength.

We could do an entire lesson on David alone. Described as, "the man after God's own heart," he was guilty of murder, adultery, and lying. Yet King David's throne is the one Jesus will sit upon forever.

We often look at the sin, but God looks at the person. First Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Each of these heroes of faith -- Moses, Elijah, Noah, Abraham, and David -- found the key to returning to the strength of God. It has never changed from their day to ours. The key to moving from carnality to spirituality is confessing your sins.

## **You, Too, Can be a Hero of Faith**

The message of Hebrews chapter eleven is not about achieving certain levels of faith -- it is about the mercy of God that forgives believers who sin. The message of chapter twelve is that we, too, can become heroes of faith:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12:1

Let me emphasize four phrases from this verse.

1. "We also" -- This great chapter on God's heroes is still being written today. Every believer is attached to the roster of Abel, Enoch, Rahab, and Sarah.
2. "A great cloud of witnesses" -- The heroes who have died are witnessing our lives here on earth today. They are in the grandstands of heaven cheering us on, encouraging us to rid ourselves of sin and finish our race.
3. "Lay aside every weight and sin" -- This is the chief message of chapter eleven. David is not just telling us to grow in faith. He is telling us to lay aside our sins and weights as he did. After David sinned with Bathsheba, he wrote in Psalm 51, "...for I acknowledge my transgressions...against thee and thee only have I sinned" (vs. 3,4). David went on to be a better king than he had ever been.

God not only forgives -- in time, He restores the one who truly repents.

4. "Let us run with patience the race" -- God knows that without the ability to put away our sins, we could never run our race. *Forgiveness is not a license to sin, but to serve.*

## **One Powerful Verse**

There is one verse in the Word of God which stands out above the others. In fact, after the scriptures concerning the new birth and the infilling of the Holy Spirit, this is the most important scripture for Christians today.

This one verse has the power to take us from carnality to spirituality in one split second. God does not reward us according to our iniquity, but according to His mercy and grace. Whether you have sinned for one minute, one hour, one month, or one year, this verse will forgive all of those sins immediately:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.  
1 John 1:9

John was writing to both Christians of *his* day and to *us* today, so let's take a closer look at this powerful scripture:

1. John sinned at times too. This most stable of all Jesus' disciples, the one who understood love more than any man of his day, admitted he had sinned. Notice he said, "If *we* confess.... John included himself with the believers he was writing to.

John was not aloof as many ministers may be today. He did not say, "If *you* confess *your* sins."

2. John said, "If we *confess* our sins...." The Greek word for *confess* means "to say the same thing." It could better be translated "admit" or "acknowledge." This is the word David used in Psalm 51:3 -- "for I acknowledge my transgressions."

There are times when you *know* God says you have sinned, the Word says you have sinned, and your own heart is telling you that you have sinned. So just admit it. Say the same thing: "I have sinned."

4. "God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" -- God has never changed. His faithfulness to us is the same as it was to Abraham, Elijah, and David. Since God is no respecter of persons, He cannot and will not single us out for our sins and refuse to forgive us.

Satan may tell us our sins are different or unique. The devil will try to make us still feel guilty after God has forgiven us. But God's forgiveness is greater than Satan's accusations. No sin you can commit is greater than God's faithfulness.

5. God will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If there are any unknown sins surrounding the sins we confess, God takes advantage of our confession to cleanse us

from all sins of ignorance. The grace of God is greater than anything we could possibly imagine!

### **Where Do You Stand?**

If you have sinned, it is time to ask God to forgive you and receive your cleansing. Perhaps you have confessed your sins, but you cannot forgive yourself. To be honest, this is the height of arrogance. When you say, "God can forgive me, but I cannot forgive myself," you are actually saying your standards are higher than God's! You are acting as though you are bigger and better than God.

If you remain on the sidelines, God will use someone else to finish your work as He did with Elijah. But His first choice is for you to forgive yourself, get off the bench, and get back into the race again.

So "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed" (Hebrews 12:12,13). God is waiting on you to get back into the race so He can restore healing into your life.

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