

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 2:14 - 3:4

Topic

The apostle Paul introduces to us the carnal Christian who he describes as a believer still yielding to his or her flesh

Title

“Christian con Carne”

He was given five... maybe six, months to live. His doctor somberly advised Joe, “You have some life left... live it well.”

The diagnosis: Brain Cloud. Might as well travel to a South Pacific Island and satisfy the natives by throwing yourself into a volcano.

The “Joe” was Joe Banks, played by Tom Hanks in *Joe Versus the Volcano*.

He didn't really have a Brain Cloud; it was a scam to get someone to volunteer as a human sacrifice.

Brain Cloud *is* a real thing, only it's not fatal. I suffer from it. So do many of your. It's a temporary inability to think properly, or to remember something.

(It's not to be confused with a Brain Freeze).

You didn't think I'd start with something that serious, did you? I hoped to lighten the mood a bit because I *am* going to use medical diagnoses as an illustration. I didn't want it to bring some of you immediately back to a traumatic memory. To quote Nick Fury, "I'm nice like that."

Something is wrong... You go to the doctor... After the exam, and running all the pertinent tests, you receive the diagnosis. Whether it's something mild or major, you are smart to take it seriously and take the steps necessary to cure or help counter or control what you've got.

We're going to begin our studies in First Corinthians with the diagnosis that will greatly help us in understanding what was going on in that church.

Not a physical diagnosis, of course; a spiritual one. It was presented to the believers in Corinth by the apostle Paul after he had 'examined' a first-hand report about what their church life was like.

It's found beginning in chapter two, verse fourteen, and it carries on into the fourth verse of chapter three:

1Co 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

1Co 2:15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one.

1Co 2:16 For "WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM?" But we have the mind of Christ.

1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

1Co 3:2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able;

1Co 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

1Co 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

There were problems in the church at Corinth; lots and lots of problems. With the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Paul was able to diagnose their toot condition 350 miles away: "For you are still carnal."

"Carnal" means *flesh, or of the flesh, or fleshly*. In this context, it describes a believer in Jesus Christ who still thinks like, and behaves like, they did *before* they were born again, one who yields to the influence of their unredeemed flesh rather than to the in dwelling Holy Spirit.

Since it is possible to be in Christ and "still carnal," it makes sense that we let the Holy Spirit examine us; run some tests; then heed His diagnosis.

I'll organize my comments around two questions that must be asked and answered:

#1 Are You Still Natural And A Nonbeliever?, and, if not, #2 Are You Still A Carnal Believer?

#1 Are You Still Natural
And A Nonbeliever?

(2:14-16)

“The doctor will FaceTime with you now.” Sounds odd, but what is being called *TeleHealth* is growing in popularity.

Paul diagnosed the church in Corinth from Ephesus. He told them their condition using three states of being: Natural... Spiritual... and Carnal.

1. The natural man, woman, or child is a person who has been born once, born physically, but not born a second time, not born spiritually. It is a word that describes all nonbelievers.
2. “He who is spiritual” describes a person who has been born again. It doesn’t mean they are mature. We sometimes use that word and say, “That person is really spiritual.” That’s not the sense here. It simply means the person is

saved. The moment you are saved, you have the Spirit, therefore you are spiritual.

3. Then there are those who are “still carnal.” When we get there, in our second point, you’ll see Paul was definitely describing a believer - but one whose behavior was being influenced by the *world* and not by the *Word*.

1Co 2:14 But the natural man...

Adam and Eve have been given new names. Titles, really. They are now called, by geneticists, Y-chromosomal Adam and Mitochondrial Eve. Genetics has finally caught-up with the Bible - realizing we all descend from an original Eve.

The natural man is the descendant of the first biblical couple - Adam and Eve. Their legacy is that they exercised their free will in Eden to disobey God. It brought upon them the consequences God had clearly warned them of, namely, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in

the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:15-16).

1. The moment they disobeyed God, they immediately died *spiritually*.
2. The moment they disobeyed God, they began to die *physically*.
3. And the moment they disobeyed God, they were destined to die *eternally* - to be separated from God for all eternity in a place of conscious torment we refer to mostly as Hell.

This event we call the Fall of Man, or simply, the Fall. A result of the Fall is that every descendant of Adam and Eve, i.e., every human being ever conceived, inherits a sin nature, and we commit acts of sin, that disqualify us from entering Heaven.

The natural man - the way we all start out - is physically alive and soulishly active, but is spiritually dead. Without divine intervention, he or she will die physically and then eternally.

1Co 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

WiFi allows your SmartPhone or tablet to connect wirelessly to a network on the world-wide-web. It sends out a signal those devices can receive.

The Spirit of God is omnipresent, but the natural man cannot “receive the things of the Spirit of God” because he or she was born with no capacity to connect. The spirit of the natural man is dead; his receiver, as it were, is not functioning.

The “things of God” are “spiritually discerned.” Thus the natural man, hearing unaided about the “things of the Spirit,” considers them “foolishness.”

The Bible is full of stories that seem foolish but turn out to reveal a wisdom that can only be attributed to God.

1Co 2:15 But he who is spiritual...

You don't become "spiritual" (in this context) by spending lots of time fasting and praying. You don't become spiritual by giving of your time and talents. Being spiritual isn't an achievement; it's a **receiving-ment**.

It means you've been born again. In the very first Nic-at-Night, the Jewish leader, Nicodemus, came to Jesus after dark to ask the Lord a few questions. As He usually did, Jesus turned the tables on His questioner, telling him that he must be born again in order to go to Heaven. Jesus pointed-out that Nicodemus had already been born once - born physically. He needed a second birth, a spiritual one. He needed to be quickened; regenerated; saved.

Jesus is the Savior of the whole world - especially those who believe. That means His death and resurrection are sufficient to save anyone, anywhere, at any time.

He said no man could come to Him unless He draws them. But He also said that by being lifted up in death on the Cross He drew all men to Himself.

How is that implemented? Let me read a short doctrinal statement that I agree with:

We believe that humanity was created in the image of God but fell from its original sinless state through willful disobedience and Satan's deception, resulting in eternal condemnation and separation from God. In and of themselves and apart from the grace of God human beings can neither think, will, nor do anything good, including believe. But the prevenient grace of God prepares and enables sinners to receive the free gift of salvation offered in Christ and His Gospel. Only through the grace of God can sinners believe and so be regenerated by the Holy Spirit unto salvation and spiritual life.

God's prevenient grace is the grace that "goes before"; that's what the word means. It is all the ways God works in our lives before we really know Him at all. It reveals God's heart for His creation.

It testifies to God's being the initiator of a relationship with Him and reveals Him as the One who pursues us - not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9).

God calls all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel, and graciously enables those who hear the Gospel to respond to it positively in faith. God the Holy Spirit frees your will to receive the Lord. The natural man is thus by the Spirit of God enabled to receive Jesus by grace, through faith; or to go on rejecting Him.

1Co 2:15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one.

This verse is too often taken out of context to defend someone who claims they have authority from God that cannot be "judged," but must be accepted. What this verse is really saying is that, once born again, you *can* discern and understand the things of the Spirit. The natural man cannot judge you; he is ignorant of spiritual things.

1Co 2:16 For "WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM?" But we have the mind of Christ.

It's a quote from the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. It's a rhetorical question. The answer to it is, "No one." The natural man has his philosophies and religions - all of which seek to supplant the Creator and "instruct Him" on how they want to be saved.

If God says the Cross of Jesus Christ is wisdom in saving those who trust the Lord, who receive Him and are born again - then it is wisdom.

Paul quickly adds, "But we have the mind of Christ." He's saying that, once saved, **we** *can* understand "the mind of the Lord."

We wouldn't be so foolish as to think we could instruct Him. Instead we are able to be instructed by Him. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and by the second birth, we can discern them.

How many times have *you* been born? Once, for sure. Have you been born twice - born spiritually? No question could be more important to answer.

#2 Are You Still A Carnal Believer?

(3:1-4)

Some say that the Carnal Christian is not a Christian. Paul disagrees:

- In verse one of chapter three he addressed those who were “still carnal” as “brethren.” Since Corinth was a mostly Gentile church, Paul cannot mean fellow Jews. **They were his Christian brothers and sisters by virtue of the second birth.**
- Same verse - he called them “babes **in** Christ.” If you are “**in** Christ,” *you are saved*.

1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal...

My paraphrase of this would be, “Brothers and sisters, you’re saved, but I have to conclude from your behavior that you are carnal.”

It might be good to pause and discuss the Corinthian carnality crisis. We’ll read in a moment, in verse three, that there was “envy, strife, and division” in the church. Those are behaviors of the natural man. When a spiritual man - a believer - behaves that way, he or she is yielding to their unredeemed flesh. He or she is thinking like the world. They are thinking like they thought before having “the mind of Christ.”

There’s a lot we could say about Corinth, the city. This ought to suffice. In ancient Greece, “Corinthian” was an insult addressed at vagrants, drunkards and sexual deviants.

Bible commentators universally compare it to places you go to in order to sinfully over-indulge your physical passions.

You might think Vegas, but it has slipped to #4 on the list of most sinful cities in the world. Amsterdam would have been my guess; it is #8. A city I can't pronounce in Thailand ranks #1.

Some of the carnalities in the church in Corinth:

- Sexual sin was being tolerated, even celebrated. Example: There was a man among them who was living incestuously with his father's wife.
- The Lord's Supper was being defiled. Some among them would not share their food in the potluck preceding Communion. They hoarded it and, like Emile in *Ratatouille*, "hoarked it down." Others were getting drunk prior to partaking.
- Believers were suing other believers, dragging them into the secular courts, making a mockery of the wisdom of God, and of love for one another.
- Some of them were continuing to visit the temples of various idols, and eating the meals that were a sacrifice to false gods. Their *belly* was leading them - not their *beliefs*.

1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

1Co 3:2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able;

We immediately associate “milk” with immaturity, and “solid food,” like meat, with maturity. People like to say things like, “That church is teaching milk; we’re getting the meat.”

The Word of God is compared to lots of great foods besides milk and meat, e.g., bread and honey. Milk doesn’t always refer to something less nourishing than meat.

I think Paul was comparing them to babies. Babies are super-cute, but they are super selfish. They are the epitome of the sin nature. They cry for no reason, usually at the worst time. They poop whenever and wherever they feel like it. (Even cats use a litter box). They throw tantrums.

They definitely want their way; especially if you're "not the mama." No way you want them to remain babies all their lives.

1Co 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

They weren't "mere men," i.e., unsaved. But they were "behaving" like the natural man they once were.

1Co 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

The believers were rallying around different Bible teachers. Paul noted that their motive for doing so was "envy," producing "strife and divisions."

Anytime you can identify envy, strife, and divisions among believers, they are carnal. It doesn't matter the reason; or the excuse. It's easy to think we are right and, therefore, can act wrong in defense of it.

We're not off the hook if we're not doing any of the things Paul addressed in his letters to the Corinthians. There are other ways to remain carnal:

- We can be doing the work of God in our own strength, not His. Carnal.
- Our basic worldview itself can be materialistic. Carnal.
- We can make our own plans to live comfortably and avoid the commitment of discipleship. Carnal.

One of the news stations has a motto, "Be informed, not influenced." (Of course, their news reports lean to the far left).

We might adapt the motto to say of believers, "Be in-filled by the Spirit, not influenced by the world."

If you are committing sexual sin... Or causing division... Or suing another believer. Or getting drunk... Those are defined for you as being carnal.

The Holy Spirit wants to go deeper, deconstructing your thinking to see where your fundamental approach to life and godliness is “still carnal.”

Paul didn't label them “carnal” as if it was something to be commended. It should have shocked them. It should have been like a medical diagnosis that rocks your world. Those of you who've heard your doctor say, “You've got cancer,” know what I mean.

If God says, “You've got carnal,” then you ought to want to eradicate it before it spreads.

Commentators stress over, “How much sin is too much sin since a saint still can sin?” They admit there is such a thing as the carnal Christian, but they insist it is only a temporary, a momentary state. They seem afraid to say, as if it is a heresy, that a believer can remain carnal.

Is there a carnal believer in the Bible that can serve as our example? I'll give you a clue: This man's wife was a pillar in the community.

Lot was the nephew of Abraham. Here are some of the highlights (or we might say, lowlights) in his biography:

- Given a choice of grazing land for his flocks, Lot chose the well-watered plain in the direction of the notoriously wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- Lot kept moving closer to Sodom and Gomorrah until he settled there.
- He became a city leader, but had zero testimony for God, and exerted zero influence.
- When the men of Sodom and Gomorrah surrounded Lot's house wanting to sexually assault the two visitors inside, Lot offered to send out his two virgin daughters instead.
- When the two visitors - who were angels - told Lot to flee so they could destroy the place, he lingered. He and his wife and two daughters were literally drug out of town.

- Told by the angels to flee to the mountains, Lot refused, and told them he would go to another city. Then he decided to hide in a cave instead.
- While holed-up in the cave, on successive nights, Lot's two daughters got him drunk and had sex with him - becoming pregnant with sons Moab and Ammon, whose descendants would long trouble the nation of Israel.

If you read your Bible straight through, you get the story of Lot pretty early in Genesis. By the time you open Second Peter, about 60 books later, you haven't thought about Lot for a long time. Here is what you read:

2Pe 2:7 [God] delivered **righteous** Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked

2Pe 2:8 (for that **righteous man**, dwelling among them, tormented *his righteous soul* from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds) -

2Pe 2:9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the **godly** out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,

Godly? Righteous? Wow. Who said? **God said.**

We thank God for super-abounding grace. Should sin abound so that grace might more abound? God forbid we would think that way. Do you really want to be a believer like Lot?

Since there are these three categories - Natural, Spiritual, and Carnal - ***What man are you?***

If the diagnosis you receive is “You are still carnal,” your prescription is, ***“Repent!”***

If it’s that you are natural - “ You must be born again.”