

I Corinthians 2:14-3:3
Carnal and Spiritual Christians

- What are Christians to expect of their experience with respect to sin?

Matthew 7:21-23

“²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord. Did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”

I John 3:9-10

“⁹ No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. ¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”

- Most believers recognize that just because a person comes to faith in Christ does not mean that all expressions of the old life disappear. Sinful behavior continues to be a challenge for true Christians.
- How are we to explain or understand this gap between our experience and our calling?
- There have been differing understandings of how faith and faithfulness are related.
 1. **The Jewish position** - faithfulness is all that matters (faithfulness = faith).
 2. **The Roman Catholic position** - faithfulness is an expression of faith (faith = faithfulness)
 3. **The Lordship Salvation position** - faithfulness is a marker of faith (faith / faithfulness)
 4. **The free grace position** - faithfulness is a fruit of faith (faith > faithfulness)
- There have been various understandings of what is the key to closing the gap between “nominal Christianity” and “victorious Christianity.”
 1. The **“baptism with the Spirit.”** - This is the teaching of many Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian communities.
 2. Special **“sanctification” or “deeper life”** experience. - This is the teaching of some evangelical groups and followers of John Wesley.
 3. Some groups have put an emphasis on an inner **subjective “encounter”** of faith. - This is the teaching of some neo-orthodox Christians and main line denominations.
 4. Those who advocate what has come to be termed **“Lordship salvation”** teach that saving faith will by necessity produce victorious Christians - This is the view of many Reformed groups.
- I Corinthians 2:14-3:3 uses three Greek terms.
 - Psuchikos** - soulish, sensual, natural
 - Pneumatikos** - spiritual
 - Sarkikos** - fleshly, carnal

A. The "natural man" is guided by worldly wisdom.

"¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually" appraised."

1. He resists (does not appreciate) the things of the Spirit.
2. He rejects the things of the Spirit.

B. The "spiritual man" has the wisdom of God through the mind of Christ.

"¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. ¹⁶ For *who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him?* But we have the mind of Christ."

1. He discerns the things of God.
2. He cannot be explained by the world's wisdom.

C. The "fleshly or carnal man" is an undeveloped spiritual man.

"¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ."

1. He cannot be addressed as "spiritual."
2. He must be addressed as "fleshly."
3. He is a part of the Body of Christ.

D. The "carnal man" looks like a natural man.

Lessons for us.

"² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able {to receive it.} Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

1. He is on a restricted diet.
2. He should have grown but has not.
3. His immaturity comes out in his relationships.

E. Some common misunderstandings about "Carnality."

1. Carnal Christians in Corinth were not spectators to the Christian community.
 - a. They were confessing faith in Christ.
 - b. They were an active part of the church.
 - c. They had spiritual gifts and ministries.
 - d. They had passion for spiritual things.
2. False professions of faith exist.
 - a. Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" is born of the Spirit.
 - b. Not everyone who thinks that they are a Christian are really a true believer.
 - c. Not everyone who makes a profession of faith is a Christian.
3. Signs of genuine spiritual life may be undetectable to others.
 - a. Most signs (like love) are relative.

- b. Only God can see the heart.
 - c. Signs can come and go.
 - d. Signs can be evident in one area of life and not in another.
4. Carnal Christians may not always require church discipline.
- a. There are behaviors that require discipline.
 - b. Church discipline should be used sparingly.
 - c. Church discipline is the responsibility of elders.
5. Sinless perfection is not the normal experience of Christians in "this age."
- a. Many moral virtues are relative.
 - b. Unrealized or unintentional sins are still sins.
 - c. Spiritual maturity brings not only more discipline over sin but also more sensitivity to sin's presence.

F. Lessons from this text.

1. **Our social relationships will reveal our spiritual condition.** Selfless love is the fruit of true faith.
2. **True faith does not always insure Godly behavior.** Do not equate faithfulness and faith.
3. **Worldly Christians may not require condemnation but rather a special diet.** They have trouble feeding themselves.

Note: for more material related to this topic see apptoteach.org theology files
#713 Lordship Salvation,
#711 Holiness,
#715 Sanctification,
#803 Discipline,
#108 Problem text on Law and Grace.