

## Message #11

## I Corinthians 3:1-4

If you ask most people who is a carnal Christian, more than likely most will point to someone who is not too faithful, who is doing this or not doing that. One who looks this way or that way. But very few will say the one who is carnal is the one who is the isolationist, the one who is divisive, the one who plays by his own rules. But according to the Apostle Paul, in this text that is exactly what carnality was. The carnal person in Corinth was not one outside of the church, but one in the church.

**THE BELIEVER IN THE CHURCH WHO IS JEALOUS, DIVISIVE, POWER HUNGRY AND ISOLATED IS ONE WHO IS CARNAL AND ONE WHO WILL NEVER GROW IN THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD.**

As with any passage of Scripture, the context is extremely important. Paul had just ended a discussion concerning two types of spiritual conditions: the natural man, the man who is lost who has no capacity for understanding the things of God, and the spiritual man, the man who is saved who has a profound capacity for understanding the deep things of God.

The Corinthians naturally assumed they were the spiritually deep crowd, those with the mind of Christ. Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that their factious, self-centered attitudes were carnal and were stifling their own spiritual growth.

**QUESTION #1 – What is carnality? 3:1, 3**

If you are reading a King James Version, the word that shows up many times in these verses is the word “carnal” (3:1, 3, 4). If you are reading the NIV, the word that shows up many times is the word “worldly.” If you are reading the NASV, the word that shows up many times is the word “fleshly.”

Actually the word “carnal” or “worldly” is a word that literally means flesh or fleshly. In this context it is obviously NOT referring to the skin of a person, but to the spirituality of a person.

When this word is used in connection with the spirituality of a person, it is used to refer to attitudes and actions which are contrary to and opposite of the righteousness which is prompted by the Spirit of God (i.e. Gal. 5:17). Carnality is exactly the opposite of spirituality. It describes attitudes and actions which are not in conformity with the Word of God or the Spirit of God.

Paul uses two different Greek words for carnal or fleshly in this context. The first (SARKINOS) (3:1), emphasizes the substance or make-up of the person. The second (SARKIKOS) (3:3), emphasizes the nature which dominates a person. The first word seems to focus on what fleshliness is and the second seems to focus on how fleshliness acts.

**QUESTION #2 – Who is carnal? 3:1**

Two important words from **verse 1** indicate that those who are carnal are truly saved: 1) The word “brethren” and 2) The prepositional phrase “in Christ.”

The main distinction between a carnal person and an unsaved person IS NOT the lifestyle; it is the indwelling Spirit of God.

Carnal people in the church may have a certain amount of knowledge (1:5) and may be extremely gifted (1:7), but they ARE NOT dominated by the Spirit of God; they are dominated by their own flesh and they want to dominate others.

**QUESTION #3 – What is the effect of carnality? 3:2**

Perhaps the most damning effect of carnality is that it guarantees a person will be at an infant level in his ability to grasp the deep things of the Word of God. Carnality by divine decree stunts spiritual growth. The carnal Christian IS NOT growing or mature in his knowledge of God because God won't allow it.

Our spirituality is NOT ONLY determined by our lifestyle, but by our depth level of understanding spiritual things.

In Heb. 5:11-6:2, the following things are classified as milk level-type things: 1) Basic things about Jesus Christ (6:1a); 2) Repentance from dead works (6:1b); 3) Faith in God (6:1c); 4) Instruction concerning baptism (6:2a); 5) Laying on of hands (6:2b); 6) Resurrection (Heb. 6:2c); 7) The issue of eternal judgment (6:2c).

Carnal Christians like and are drawn to simple, milk-level instruction because it is the ONLY type of instruction they can understand. 1) Carnal Christians like teaching that talks about Jesus dying on the cross for sins and that people should believe on Him; 2) They like reminders of judgment and baptismal services. BUT they DO NOT like to get too deep.

**QUESTION #4 – What are the characteristics of carnality? 3:3-4**

**Characteristic #1** - A carnal Christian is jealous of others. **3:3a**

Carnal Christians are motivated to do things out of an eager, zealous jealousy.

**Characteristic #2** - A carnal Christian is in strife with others. **3:3b**

The word “strife” indicates verbal contentions and verbal wranglings.

**Characteristic #3** - A carnal Christian is one who walks as other men. **3:3c**

A walk is the way a person lives his life.

The thing the carnal Christian doesn't realize is that the Spirit of God is constantly searching him (2:10) and because of his carnality, the Spirit of God WILL NOT allow him to grow.

**QUESTION #5** – What is the cure for carnality?

The cure is very simple; stop yielding to the flesh and start yielding to the Spirit of God.

Carnal Christians are in the church; they are active and involved. They serve God their way, not God's way and the proof of their carnality is their shallow grasp of the Word of God.

Are you carnal? It is time to change. Will you change or will you stay in your carnality?