

Doctrine of the Carnal Christian

1. The doctrine of the carnal Christian teaches that after a person becomes a Christian there is a choice to either grow in grace, follow the Lord and become a spiritual Christian, or to remain a babe in Christ and live like natural men.
2. The passage that is appealed to for this doctrine is 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. From this passage it is taught that there are three categories of men - the natural man the spiritual man, and the carnal man. The carnal man is described as being like the natural man who is unconverted.
3. One major reason for the widespread popularity of the carnal Christian doctrine is that the doctrine has been part of the notes in the Scofield Reference Bible.
4. Paul divides men into three classes: "Natural" i.e. the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth; "Spiritual" i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God; "Carnal," "fleshly," i.e. the renewed man who, walking "after the flesh," remains a babe in Christ.
5. It should be noted that according to Scofield, men are divided into three classes: natural, spiritual, carnal. One of these classes of men comprises the carnal, the fleshly, the babe(s) in Christ, who walk after the flesh. To "walk" implies the bent of the life, a leaning or bias in one direction, and that direction is towards carnality.
6. A popular presentation of this doctrine presents the teaching like this: After you have invited Christ to come into your life, it is possible for you to take control of the throne of your life again. The New Testament passage, 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3, identified three kinds of people:
 - A. **The Non-Christian.** The natural man is a self-centered man, his interests are controlled by self.
 - B. **The Professing Christian.**
 - C. **The Carnal Christian.** According to the theory there is no essential difference between the Non-Christian and the Carnal Christian. The bent of the carnal Christian is the same as that of the non-Christian even though the carnal Christian has made a profession of receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour.
7. It is to be acknowledged that Christians do sin. There are babes in Christ. There is divine chastisement which all Christians receive. There is even a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal. Every Christian is carnal in some area of life at many times in life. And in every Christian "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal. 5:17). However, to concede these points does not allow for a classification whereby a Christian may live a whole lifestyle of total carnality so there is no essential difference between the Christian and the natural man.

8. The apostle Paul does not say that the believers in Corinth are living like babes and like the unregenerate in EVERY area of their lives but in ONE area only. He has already referred to them as the "*sanctified in Christ Jesus*" who are recipients of "*the grace of God*" enriched by Christ "in all utterance, and in all knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:2-5). However, they were acting like natural men by dividing themselves into various factions.
9. Proof that Paul knows only two classes of men may be found in the following passages: 1 Corinthians 2:14-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17.
10. The carnal Christian doctrine is not an innocent doctrine. It undermines the two basic blessings of salvation which are:
 - A. a new heart and,
 - B. forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-27 cp Heb. 10:15-17).
11. When a sinner is reconciled to God, the blood of Christ covers his sins. This is the first blessing of salvation. The second blessing of salvation, according to the Scriptures, is a new heart, a new nature.
12. For a Christian to live in total carnality without repentance is for the work of redemption to be void and meaningless.
13. There is a difference between speculative faith (Acts 8:12-23), temporary faith (John 2:23,24; 12:42,43; Luke 8:13), and saving faith. All "carnal" Christians profess their faith but it is not always saving faith.
14. The carnal Christian neglects the place of repentance in the life of the believer which is a vital part of the gospel message (Acts 20:20,21). The Puritan John Cotton was right when he wrote: "*There is none under a covenant of grace that dare allow himself in any sin; for if a man should negligently commit any sin, the Lord will school him thoroughly and make him sadly to apprehend how he has made bold with the treasures of the grace of God. Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? God forbid. None that has a portion in the grace of God dareth therefore allow himself in sin; but if through strength of temptation he be at any time carried aside, it is his greatest burden.*"
15. Many people live comfortably behind the carnal Christian doctrine just as people accept the concept of being backslidden as "normal" Christian living. There is no scriptural comfort to be found in being a backslider or being carnal. And there is certainly no biblical basis for believing that a person can live a life of carnality and still be in the sphere of true saving grace.