

Are You a Carnal Christian?

What happens when you don't read, listen, or learn from the Bible after you become a Christian? The apostle Paul confronts this very issue within church of Corinth. Paul recognized that the divisive problems of the church were rooted in education and spiritual growth, because the church misunderstood the gospel and did not fully comprehend the implications of Christ's death and atonement for mankind's sin.

And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to fleshly (**sarkinos**) men, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are still not able, for you are still fleshly (**sarkikos**). For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly (**sarkikos**), and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor 3:1-3, LSB)

1. In the above passage, a lexicon was used to find the Greek words used for the English word "fleshly." Do you notice that the root word "sark" is in the Greek terms "sarkinos" and "sarkikos?" When the Greek term "sark" is translated into Latin, it becomes "carne", which is where the English word "carnal" comes from.

Using a Bible Dictionary, look up the meaning of "carnal." For example search online for "studylight holman" and look up the word "carnal."

2. What does "milk" figuratively represent? Share your observations of what it is intended to do. How does it apply to your life?

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1 Pet 2:1-3, NASB)

3. What do you observe in this passage? Define "word of righteousness." How does this help you understand what a "fleshy" Believer is? Discuss your thoughts! Ultimately, how will you account for your life before God?

Concerning him we have much to say, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become poor listeners. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unacquainted with the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil. (Heb 5:11-14, NASB)

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Teacher Notes

What happens when you don't read, listen, or learn from the Bible after you become a Christian? The apostle Paul confronts this very issue within church of Corinth. Paul recognized that the divisive problems of the church were rooted in education and spiritual growth, because the church misunderstood the gospel and did not fully comprehend the implications of Christ's death and atonement for mankind's sin.

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Teach the student that, by using a lexicon, they would know what these two Greek words means:

“**Sarkinos**” places a material context to the root term “sark”, and it means “made of flesh.”

“**Sarkikos**” places an ethical or moral context to the root term “sark”; thus, with an implication of motive, the term means “controlled by the flesh”.

Language can convey precise information so it is worthwhile to take the time to define words.

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Encourage the student to always reach out for a Bible dictionary when encountering a biblical word they don't fully understand. Using more than one dictionary is also very helpful and more informative.

Carnal is anything related to the fleshly or worldly appetites and desires rather than to the godly and spiritual desires. The apostle Paul indicates that even church members can be carnal in immature in their faith. Behaviors that indicate this is jealousy and quarreling.

2. What does “milk” figuratively represent? Share your observations of what it is intended to do. How does it apply to your life?

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Ask the student to share his observations of “milk.” How is it described? In the competition of your desires, what does Paul encourage you to do? What is its benefits? Take the time to discuss all of your observations!

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Ask the student: what does “righteousness” mean and how is that determined?

Righteousness is a something God determines of a person. This person is one who listens and obeys God. For example, Abraham believed in the Lord; and God credited it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

Righteousness is not a one time designation. It is a life living in obedience to God. For example, before Abraham was credited as righteous, he traveled from his homeland and his family to an unknown land, because the invisible God of heaven told him to do so.

Ask the student: how does Paul define an infant Believer? Circle key phrase of the text! Share all of your observations! In this light, what is a carnal Christian?

An infant Believer is one who can only be taught the elementary principles of the actual words of God.

A carnal Christian is one who does not grow in their faith, knowledge, and relationship with God. This Believer: a) is a poor listener, b) needs someone to re-teach him the elementary principles of the actual words of God, and c) is unacquainted with the word of righteousness.

Ask the student: how does Paul define a mature Believer?

A Believer who reads, obeys God’s word, and practices to have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil.

Ask the student: why does Paul expect everyone to become a teacher? Does the Bible say this??

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Ex 19:5-6, NASB)