

# Spiritual or Carnal

by Andrew Murray

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*Andrew Murray's sermon emphasizes the distinction between spiritual and carnal Christians, highlighting the importance of yielding to the Holy Spirit for true growth and maturity in faith.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 3:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Yielding to the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Andrew Murray emphasizes the distinction between spiritual and carnal Christians, explaining that while all believers have received the Holy Spirit, many remain carnal due to their unwillingness to yield fully to Him. He highlights that spiritual maturity requires growth and a willingness to deny self, as evidenced by the Corinthians' jealousy and strife. Murray stresses that true spiritual insight and understanding come from a life surrendered to the Holy Spirit, and that knowledge without love is ineffective. He calls Christians to embrace their identity as spiritual beings, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform their lives. Ultimately, he urges believers to seek a deeper relationship with God, marked by love and obedience.

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## Transcript

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not Yet able to bear it; nay, not even now are ye able; for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men?'-- -1 Cor.3:1-3

In the previous Chapter the Apostle had contrasted the believer as spiritual, with the unregenerate as the natural (Or Psychological) man: the man of the Spirit with the man of the soul (1 Cor.2:14, 15). Here he supplements that teaching. He tells the Corinthians that, though they, have the Spirit, he cannot call them spiritual; that epithet belongs to those who have not only received the Spirit, but have yielded themselves to Him to possess and rule their whole life. Those who have not done this, in whom the power of the flesh is still more manifest than that of the Spirit, must be called not spiritual, but fleshly or carnal. There are thus three states in which a man may be found. The unregenerate is still the natural man, not having the Spirit of God. The regenerate, who is still a babe in Christ, whether because he is only lately converted, or because he has stood still and not advanced, is the carnal man, giving way to the power of the flesh. The believer in whom the Spirit has obtained full supremacy, is the spiritual man. The whole passage is suggestive of rich instruction in regard to the life of the Spirit within us.

The young Christian is still carnal. Regeneration is a birth: the centre and root of the personality, the spirit, has been renewed and taken possession of by the Spirit of God. But time is needed for its power from that centre to extend through all the circumference of our being. The kingdom of God is like unto a seed; the life in Christ is a growth; and it would be against the laws of nature and grace alike if we expected from the babe in Christ the strength that can only be found in the young men, or the rich experience of the fathers. Even where in the young convert there is great singleness of heart and faith, with true love and devotion to the Saviour, time is needed for a deeper knowledge of self and sin, for a spiritual insight into what God's will and grace are. With the young believer it is not unnatural that the emotions are deeply stirred, and that the mind delights in the contemplation of Divine truth; with the growth in grace, the will becomes the more important thing, and the waiting for the Spirit's power in the life and character more than the delight in those thoughts and images of the life which alone the mind could give. We need not wonder if the babe in Christ is still carnal.

Many Christians remain carnal. God has not only called us to grow, but has provided all the conditions and powers needful for growth. And yet it is, sadly true, that there are many Christians who, like the Corinthians, remain babes in Christ when they ought to be going on to perfection, 'attaining unto a full-grown man.' In some cases the blame is almost more with the Church and its teaching, than with the individuals themselves. When the preaching makes salvation chiefly to consist in pardon and peace and the hope of heaven, or when, if a holy life be preached, the truth of Christ our Sanctification, our Sufficient Strength to be holy, and the Holy Spirit's indwelling, be not taught clearly and in the power of the Spirit, growth can hardly be expected: Ignorance, human and defective views of the gospel, as the power of God unto a, present salvation in sanctification, are the cause of the evil.

In other cases the root of the evil is to be found in the unwillingness of the Christian to deny self and crucify the flesh. The call of Jesus to every disciple is, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.' The Spirit is only given to the obedient; He can only do His work in those who are willing absolutely to give up self to the death.

The sin that proved that the Corinthians were carnal was their jealousy and strife. When Christians are not willing to give up the sin of selfishness and temper; when, whether in the home relationship or in the wider circle of church and public life, they want to retain the liberty of giving way to, or excusing evil feelings, of pronouncing their own judgments, and speaking words that are not in perfect love, then they remain carnal. With all their knowledge, and their enjoyment of religious ordinances, and their work for God's kingdom, they are carnal and not spiritual. They grieve the Holy Spirit of God; they cannot have the testimony that they are pleasing to God. God is Love: if we would not be carnal, let us love. 'Above all things, put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.'

The carnal Christian cannot apprehend spiritual truth. Paul writes to these Corinthians: 'I fed you with milk, and not with meat; for ye were not able to bear it; nay, not even now are ye able.' The Corinthians prided themselves on their wisdom; Paul thanked God that they were 'enriched in all knowledge.' There was nothing in His teaching that they would not have been able to comprehend with the understanding. But the real spiritual entering into the truth in power, so as to possess it and be possessed by it, so as to have not only the thoughts but the very thing the words speak of, this the Holy Spirit only can give. And He gives it only in the spiritually-minded man. The teaching and leading of the Spirit is given to the obedient, is preceded by the dominion of the Spirit in mortifying the deeds of the body (see Rom.8: 13 and 14). Spiritual knowledge is not deep thought, but living contact, entering into and being united to the truth as it is in Jesus, a spiritual reality, a substantial existence. 'The Spirit teacheth, combining spiritual things with

spiritual;' into a spiritual mind He works spiritual truth. It is not the power of intellect, it is not even the earnest desire to know the truth, that fits a man for the Spirit's teaching; it is a life yielded to Him in waiting dependence and full obedience to be made spiritual, that receives the spiritual wisdom and understanding. In the mind (nous, in the Scripture meaning of the term) these two elements, the moral and the cognitive, are united; only as the former has precedence and sway, can the latter apprehend what God has spoken.

It is easy to understand how a carnal or fleshly life with its walk, and the fleshly mind with its knowledge, act and react on each other. As far as we are giving way to the flesh, we are incapable of receiving spiritual insight into truth. We may 'know all mysteries, and have all knowledge,'without love, the love which the Spirit works in the innerlife; it is only a knowledge that puffeth up, it profiteth nothing. The carnal life makes the knowledge carnal. And this knowledge again, being thus held in the fleshly mind, strengthens the religion of the flesh, of self-trust and self effort; the truth so received has no power to renew and make free. No wonder that there is so much Bible teaching and Bible knowledge, with so little of real spiritual result in a life of holiness. Would God that His word might sound through His Church: 'Whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal?' Unless we be living spiritual lives, full of humility, and love, and self-sacrifice, spiritual truth, the truth of God, cannot enter or profit us. Love alone is light: want of love is darkness (1 John 2:9).

Every Christian is called of God to be a spiritual man. Paul reproves these Corinthians, only but a few years since brought out of gross heathenism, that they are not yet spiritual. The great redemption in Christ had this most distinctly as its object, the removal of every hindrance, that the Spirit of God might be able to make man's heart and life a worthy home for God who is a Spirit. That redemption was no failure; the Holy Spirit came down to inaugurate a new, before unknown, dispensation of indwelling life and power. The promise and the love of the Father, the power and the glory of the Son, the presence of the Spirit on earth all are pledge and guarantee that it can be. As sure as the natural man can become a regenerate man, can a regenerate man, who is still carnal, become spiritual.

And why is it not so ? The question brings us into the presence of that strange and unfathomable mystery-the power God has given men of accepting or refusing His offers, of being true or being unfaithful to the grace He has given. We have already spoken of that unfaithfulness on the part of the Church, in its defective teaching of the indwelling and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and on the part of believers in their unwillingness to forsake all to let the Holy Spirit get entire possession, and do a perfect work in them. Let us here rather seek, once again, to gather up what Scripture teaches as to the way to become spiritual.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes the spiritual man. He alone can do it. He does it most certainly where the whole man is yielded up to Him. To have the whole being pervaded, influenced, sanctified by the Holy Spirit; to have first our spirit, then the soul, with the will, the feelings, the mind, and so even the body, under His control, moved and guided by Him, this makes and marks the spiritual man.

The first step on the way to this is faith. We must seek the deep, living, absorbing conviction that there is a Holy Spirit in us; that He is the Mighty Power of God dwelling and working within; that He is the representative of Jesus, making Him present within us as our Redeemer King, mighty to save. In the union of a holy fear and trembling at the almost tremendous glory of this truth of an Indwelling God, with the childlike joy and trust of knowing Him to be the Paraclete, the Inbringer of the Divine and irrevocable presence of God and of Christ, this thought must become the inspiration of life: The Holy Spirit has His home within us: in our spirit is His hidden, blessed dwelling-place.

As we are filled with the faith of what He is and will do, and see that it is not done, we ask for the hindrance. We find that there is an opposing power, the flesh. From Scripture we learn how the flesh has its twofold action : from the flesh springs not only unrighteousness, but self-righteousness. Both must be confessed and surrendered to Him whom the Spirit would reveal and enthrone as Lord, our Mighty Saviour. All that is carnal and sinful, all the works of the flesh, must be given up and cast out. But no less must all that is carnal, however religious it appears, all confidence in the flesh, all self-effort and self-struggling be rooted out. The soul, with its power, must be brought into the captivity and subjection of Jesus Christ. In deep and daily dependence on God must the Holy Spirit be accepted, waited for, and followed.

Thus walking in faith and obedience, we may count on the Holy Spirit to do a divine and most blessed work within us. 'If we live by the Spirit;' --this is the faith that is needed ; we believe that God, a Spirit dwells in us. Then follows: 'by the Spirit let us live;' this is the obedience that is asked. In the faith of that Holy Spirit who is in us, we know that we have sufficient strength to walk by the Spirit, and yield ourselves to His mighty working, to work in us to will and to do all that is pleasing in God's sight.

Gracious God ! we humbly pray Thee to teach us all to profit by the solemn lessons of this portion of Thy blessed word.

Fill us with holy fear and trembling lest, with all our knowledge of the truth of Christ and the Spirit, we should be carnal in disposition and conduct, not walking in the love and purity of Thy Holy Spirit. May we understand that knowledge only puffeth up, unless it be under the rule of the love that buildeth up.

Give us to hear Thy call to all Thy children to be spiritual. It is Thy purpose, that even as with Thy beloved Son, their whole daily life, even in the very least things, should give evidence of being the fruit of Thy Spirit's indwelling. May we all accept the call, as from Thy love, inviting us to our highest blessedness, conformity to Thy likeness in Christ Jesus.

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