

# The Carnal Christian

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the characteristics and challenges of carnal Christians, emphasizing the need for spiritual maturity and growth.*

**Duration:** 35:14

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:5-6, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 3:23, James 1:22, 1 Peter 3:15

**Topics:** "Carnal Christians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of living above our feelings and senses as Christians. He shares a story about a young man who struggled with having the desire to pray and emphasizes that this is a common issue among the modern generation of Christians. The preacher highlights the temptation to blame secondary causes and encourages listeners to shift their focus away from themselves and towards spiritual things. He concludes by stating that there is no instant transformation into a spiritual person, but rather it is a process that requires purpose and a focus on the character within.

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## Transcript

What's the title of the text of this sermon? If one can think chapter three, it is one-thirty. I would tell you that almost everybody, almost everybody, thinks that a spiritual existence, if they think of a spiritual person at all, they think of him as being a rather cautious, timid, mousy, soft-walking, soft-spoken, gentle, and harmless person who walks about with a gloomy smile, and who cannot be aroused through any kind of spiritual indignation. But, I'm curiously enough not to find this to be the scriptural definition of spiritual arousal.

It's false. King Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, false. John, good, shouldn't be said to be spiritual again.

There's another definition for the word, and I want to speak about it this morning, rather negatively approaching it, and showing how that a carnal Christian who is an immature Christian, regenerated, yes, but carnal nevertheless, in that he is spiritually imperfect, retarded in his development, and it's possible to be spiritually retarded, just as it's possible to be spiritually retarded in our physical development, or mental development, and thus having the characteristic of a baby, or of a very, very young child. How is the word, baby, real? He said, I couldn't speak unto you as unto mature Christians, but as unto carnal Christians, which he then gave this synonymous description, which is the word, baby, in Christ, so that there are representatives in the church of Christ. There are three classes, usually, or four, of those in every church,

persons who attend all the time, but for some reason never do get converted.

They come, and they seem to enjoy it. They have friends among the religious people, which are Christian people, but they themselves never pass from death unto life. That's one class.

Then there is another class, those who are claimed to be Christian, but are not, and then there are those who are true Christians, but are carnal, and then there are those who are Christian and are spiritual. Now, we can best know what an unspiritual Christian is and what a spiritual Christian should be by contrast by noticing the characteristics of a baby. No doubt I've mentioned this in illustration or sermons in times gone by, but we want to focus attention on it for a few minutes today.

Let's look at a baby. There isn't anything I'd rather look at myself, and I feel just a little bit like a traitor saying the things I've got to say about babies this morning, because I'm something of an expert on babies, I think. We've had enough grandchildren and enough of little adopted twins all around, and I haven't joined all dead children so many in my time.

The few minutes I hold them in my hands, I consider a ministerial privilege, so I love the babies. But after all, they're little human beings, and as little human beings they have certain characteristics. And not I, but Paul said those characteristics were unspiritual.

He said they were carnal, and that when those characteristics are in a Christian, you find an unspiritual Christian. Now, the first thing about a baby that I know is the self-centeredness of the little thing. The baby has a little world all of its own, and it hasn't any idea that there's any other world but its world.

It's mother, it's father, it's brother, it's sister, it's crib, it's out chair. It is a self-centered little thing, and it is a central term, and everything else revolves around that little central term. All others are but bodies in this orbit, and thus we see Paul's concept of a unspiritual Christian.

It means somebody that is self-centered, living a self-centered Christian life. Reborn again Christian, but living so that everything takes its significance from that Christian. Now, that's one characteristic of a baby, and it's one characteristic of a carnal Christian.

Not only that the baby is affected unduly by its senses, but it hasn't learned to disobey its senses or to ignore them, to draw conclusions based upon evidence rather than go along with its feelings. So, this is the characteristic, and unspiritual Christians are the same. They tend to live by their feelings.

If there's what we call a good atmosphere in the church, then they've had a good time. There's a reason they haven't had a good time, and thus they are more or less victims and fools of their environment. A baby is.

It's a victim of its environment, a living victim, because it tends to tell it. It tends to have the fingers look harsh like a band-aid. Although the finger may stop hurting, and the baby continues to cry long after it's forgotten why it started.

Because it's unduly affected by its feelings, or it's too hilarious. We get too exuberant for no reason in the world. I just covered this hour, let it all be beauty, beauty, beauty.

If you put your nose down on her nose, and mumble words like that, essentially she mumbles, she's a little over a year, why that she would go into a hysterical laughter, because I practiced on it, and we had a good

time together. But, I wonder why? What's so funny about that? I don't know what's so funny about it, but she thought it was one of the rippest pieces of humor that had ever come within her little year old circle of interest or attention. And that's, well, she and I do that now.

That's our fun together. But, I don't think it's funny humor to see her go wild about it, but now that's a child cast down for no reason, or hilarious for no reason. Victims of their feelings, and of their senses.

And, Paul said, we are yet carnal in faith, and this is also the characteristic of a Christian. A little carnal, we are too easily exhilarated, too easily, too easily lifted up, and too easily cast down. After a while, the Christians have learned better, but we'll look at that later.

Then a third thing about a baby is its potentially direction external. Now, a baby has no inward life at all. There are even psychologists who say, I don't believe this, but psychologists who say that babies are born without minds.

Their minds develop. I don't believe that, but I do know that they're born with with capacities, mental capacities, but without anything in it, and without anything in their little minds. But, as they get older, of course, they develop, but they have no inward life.

They rest completely in the external. Now, this also is characteristic of a carnal Christian, who lives too much in visible religion, and it's externalized. He's engrossed by things on the outside, colored lights and strange sounds, or pretty sounds, and garments, or certain uniforms, or certain decorations.

Anything that pleases the entirely mind by calling it out from the center to the outside, from the internal to the external. Heaven, you may be sure of this, just as sure of this as you live, that just in proportion as we are affected by external circumstances, we are carnal. For Jesus said that the Father is worshiped in spirit and in truth.

No other way. The external can be a prison. External can be any unlovely place, but it's the heart of life.

The spirit dwells within. Worship and communion with God can be real, and can be unaffected, and the tranquility remains the same because the spiritual Christian does not rest in external. Then I wrote a quick point about the baby who lives with complete absence of purpose.

You never saw a baby that ever had a purpose, or if he did, it was the next thing he thought to do. He wants that red ball that lies just beyond his reach, and he hasn't learned to call yet, and so he was powerful to that. But when he checked it, he tore it down because he has no purpose.

He didn't want it for any purpose, and he got it. No purpose is fulfilled, and that, of course, is characteristic of babies. Sweet as they are, and I wouldn't want to get them, but they're the loveliest thing left on earth.

But the absence of purpose in the life of a child, when the child gets a little older, gets to be 10, maybe, or 12, he begins to change things, or he begins to put things away, to change stance, or say he's torn something. He begins to get purpose into his life, and by the time he sings, he'll learn how to work after school, lay off money to go further to school, and by the time he's in his 20s, he will have had a life purpose where it's out for himself, as far as this world's concerned. The babies have no purpose at all, and I find that the eternal Christian has no purpose either.

He lives for the next blessing. He wants to know where the good preacher is going to be, and he goes to hear him. He wants to know where the fine choir is going to sing, and he goes and sits down and proposes carnality by listening to the finest choir that he can find.

Or, he wants to know where the good crowd is assembled, and he gets that charge, he'll excuse his name, out of the crowd. Well, there's no purpose there. He never went aside and got on his knees and said, God, why was I ever born? And being born, why have I been redeemed, and what's this about? And then the fifth thing is that the baby lives a life of prayer and strife.

The most unproductive creature on the face is the loveless, and they're the most loved of the babies. They have a life, they live a life of prayer and strife altogether. And everything they do, they've got to turn it into prayer.

You ever see the baby nurse violently on the bottle for a while, and then we get the nut and we spin it around and throw it, or toss it clear out on the floor, and then we'll laugh uproariously when we see the milk spill on the top, come off down on the right. Everything has to be turned into prayer with the baby. And I want to be nice about this.

I'm trying as hard to be nice. Please pray for me so that I can be nice. But whatever just happens, it's a realistic betrayal, we'll have to say, that the modern generation of Christians, they're living for prayer and strife, prayer and strife.

I've got a folder from a certain Bible conference. You know, they're out on top of their bounding billows on a luxury liner, and they're going across, they have everything their heart could wish, and they have pictures of beautiful palm trees and all the rest like Florida and California. And it's going to be a strictly chaperoned luxury liner with a chaplain on board that talks on Romans just before the chaplain board game every morning, given a religious flavor.

And they say, what is the purpose of this? It is to promote an interesting mission. And they say, walk today where Jesus walked yesterday. A certain evangelist claimed to have walked, yes, but not with the same person.

We want to pray, too. We have no hesitation in advertising our Bible conference with religious playgrounds. So, that's a proof of how carnal we are.

We believe a life of prairie and trifle, and then speculance and quarrelsomeness. The sweetest baby that ever lived did not seek any fungus. No one will your mothers ever tell me now the baby is a nice little angel when she comes.

She's not. She takes and makes ugly sounds when she comes, even though she's almost a monster. Now, this speculance and fretfulness is strictly a premature reaction, because it is the temptation to blame secondary causes.

I can always tell a Christian because he blames secondary causes. If he's a preacher who loses his job, he blames his boss. Instead of blaming his sheer ineptitude and inadvertency to come true, he blames his boss, or he blames his disrespectful tenderness, or he has blamed old Adam, who is like that.

This woman now gave it to me. She did it. And some of you dear Christians, but you Christian women that aren't making it very well, you say, if you had a good spiritual husband, you'd be a better Christian.

No, you wouldn't be. You just think you were, because you'd have less reason to know you're not. You figure that now? So now, that's what I mean.

As long as there's nothing there to tempt you to think you're better than you are, but a drowsy husband that won't shave Sunday morning, that trips around in a t-shirt and very jazzed, you say, he's your trouble. No, he's not your trouble. He could be your sanctification if you know how to use him.

Well, he said his wife is his sanctification, and if you knew how to use opposition, you could turn it into a help, upwards toward God. Now, that's one thing a girl always does. Always blaming secondary causes.

You never do, baby, to blame for anything. It's always somebody else. And then, the restricted and limited diet of a baby.

They do much with Bible, but it's always the tender of the passages that they mark. They tip over those rough and rigorous passages that tear you apart, and bring you down, and whip you from there, and chase you in. And so, the baby lives on the diet of milk and strained vegetables.

It has to. Now, that, my brethren, is a picture of a baby. Now, this is not a baby painted.

This is a baby lost. In the time I was old enough to know that I had little brothers and sisters, I had been a sentimentally complete victim to the smile of a baby. I had a brother seven years, eight years younger than I, and we lived in an unheated, that is, we slept in an unheated upstairs, and I slept with him.

And I remember taking him in my arms and taking him to bed when he was a little chap. And I would put my face down on the pillow and warm it for him, so he didn't have to put his face on the pillow. Or I'd rub it really hard with my hands.

I didn't even have sense enough to know his nose was twitching with his teeth. So, I'd warm his pillow and then lay him down there. And I looked after him just as if he was my child.

I got a pure love for him. And when he got a little older, I hated to think the time would ever come when I'd get to hold my baby home because I wanted to stay with my baby brother. Well, that's how much I love babies.

But, you just have to admit, brethren, as we described the baby here this morning, a self-centered little guy, affected unduly by his senses, resting in external without any purpose, loving to play and having no serious purposes in life, and living on a simple diet. Well, there we have a baby. Now, what do we do? Well, nature takes care of the baby pretty soon.

Nature begins to shift the baby out from the center, and it never gets deluded from being self-centered. Of course, that's a part of sin, but it gets interest away from itself and learns to stand up and defy its senses, learns to reason instead of go by its senses, learns to live for the character within rather than for external things, learns to have a purpose in life even if it's only to be an actor or a ball player or something else, but a purpose. So, nature takes care of that for most of us as we mature.

But, on spiritual things, that's an illustration gone from nature, fallen nature. Now, on spiritual things, what shall we do? Well, I'll tell you. I know of no single experience that would instantly transform a carnal person into a spiritual one.

Now, I'd like to be able to tell you that I do. I wish that I could say to you now here I positively know how you can come to the Lord, meet certain conditions, and instantly cease to be a carnal and become a spiritual person. Well, it just isn't that way.

We must let the spirit teach us and discipline us and mature us and grow big within us, and to let God walk within us and learn by trial and error and prayer and repentance and tears and power of heart for our carnality, and then believe in the power of God to serve us with his spirit and begin to work with his soul that leads us away from self-centeredness and leads us to love the whole world. They used to sing, I lived the world around, back in St. Peter's day. So, believe the King, you ought to live the world around and pray for the whole world.

Somebody said, Dr. Simpson lost his mind as he got older, and therefore they don't believe that healing is in the heart. So, Dr. Simpson lost his mind. My brethren, I examined into that most carefully when I wrote his letters.

I talked to those with me, his secretary, his warmest personal friends, and I got the facts right down. You know what? He had arteriosclerosis when he was about 75 years old. He lived here a few years and couldn't even move.

But you know what? He never forgot the name of one of his missionaries, and the terrible story certain people do that Dr. Simpson, in his last hours, repented because he hadn't accepted the teaching of this touching text. Well, now I happen to know what happened in the last hours of Dr. Simpson's life. The last hours of Dr. A. B. Simpson's life, he sat with his wife out on the front stoop of his house, his modest house, and then he said, Now, Margaret, it's time that I should pray for our missionaries.

So, he got on his knees. He didn't have 787 men, but he got on his knees, and without missing one, he prayed by name for every missionary in the Christian Missionary Alliance, and then he lay down on his bedside. That's how it was, my brethren.

He was not risen for himself, but he was rounder all the way. Now, the second thing you've got to ask God to do, expect him to do, is to teach you to live above your feelings and your senses. Often in the morning, three young men came to see me from one of the religious institutes within the Chicago area some time ago, and they were all hot-hungry boys, they were.

They were the ones that God filled with holy ghosts, and one of them couldn't sleep nearly all night for the joy of it, after our meeting had made proper order. Anyway, they were having a tough time of it, and one of them was in trouble because, he said, sometimes when he gets down on his knees, he doesn't have any desire to pray. And they thought, because I was the oldest of his brothers, that I never had any difficulty like that, and I just began to testify to them.

I said, Boy, do you know there are times when I have to force myself to pray as though for a little while there's not much use in it? And their faces began to shine. Someone said, Oh, what a relief! What a relief! He said, I thought I was backslidden. Because I have troubles like that.

I don't always feel spiritual, and I said, Boy, if you don't feel spiritual, you've got company. A lot of others are going, but you've got to pray to the rest. You've got to pray time and time again.

And it comes after a while, and God bless these three young men, but they wrote me a letter and showed me what a great relief it was to know that you never get to a place where you're just a sort of angel waiting

to be recognized. You've got your fight down here, and you've got to learn not to trust your feelings. When you get up in the morning feeling as if you didn't wish you hadn't, and in the evening wish a little more ardently that you hadn't.

That often happens. Don't let that get you down. A baby will worry about that and howl for most.

But a grown-up Christian says, Well, this wasn't my day. This wasn't my day. No doubt Paul had his days when he cut his finger with his needle and things weren't going right.

And so, we keep our faith in God and Christ, and know that no matter how we feel, it's all right anyhow. You're going to rest in the next turn. You've got to change that as a spiritual Christian.

Stop resting in the next turn. I learned long ago to preach wherever I stand up. I can't change it, because the church says, Why do you go and preach for that part? Look at the things they do.

I can't do that. I go to churches and other gatherings, and I see things that I just sit there and wait it out. Two songs that I can't see why were ever written sung by people that never should have been permitted to do.

And yet, I did it externally. You've got to tune out, you know. You get another wavelength and wait it out.

Then when they say, Now I'll give you a nice long flowery which you don't deserve, then get up and pray. But if you live in the externals, brother, you die. They keep doing grown-up Christians don't, and then grown-up Christians get it perfect.

Don't know why they're here. Awful, awful, my friend. So confusing are the circumstances, so self-contradictory that if I didn't know my Bible, and know I know God, and know certain things and be able to point back to certain markers where the stones were set up at the garden to say this was for her, God bless you, I could easily blow my blessed ministerial talk.

But I don't do it because I know there are certain purposes I'm fulfilling. Truly, but I'm fulfilling them. So, to have a purpose, and then stop praying.

God's poor place for sinners. They've got to have their religion turned into clay, folks. They drink a while, and throw the bottle on the floor, and laugh about nothing, and get blue about nothing.

Ah, that's carnality. That's not spirituality. Spiritually, Christian has a life of labor.

He looks upon the world not as a playground, but as a battleground. And men just die. The real Christian reads his whole Bible.

This will make some of you mad, but if you're living on your morning daily devotions taken out of the book somebody compiled, I warn you, that's pablum. I don't care who wrote it. It's still pablum.

Read your Bible, brother. Read all your Bible. Read it all.

I don't say these other things are harmful. I just tell you, if you have nothing else, you're not merit. Read all your Bible.

Read the beginning. And back in the Kingdom, so-and-so begat so-and-so, and so-and-so begat so-and-so. Read it.

You say, what's it there for? Well, I don't know. God put it there. Read it.

Read the Chronicles, and Job, and the books you don't like. Read the whole Bible. Real Christians ought to be able to take a fool around and die.

Now, that's the spiritual Christian is contracting with the Chronicles. Not the mouth, but the person who has learned, has grown up in God, and he's mature, and grown in the Spirit. That's the Christian.

So, let's ask God to make us a mature Christian, and grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What do you say? Amen? Amen. What's the title of the text of this sermon? It's 1 Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 1-3.

I will tell you that almost everybody, almost everybody, thinks that a spiritual Christian, if they think of a spiritual Christian at all, they think of him as being a rather cautious, timid, mousy, soft-spoken, gentle, and harmless person who walks about with a permanent smile, and who cannot be aroused through any kind of spiritual indignation. But, I'm curiously enough to find this to be the spiritual definition of spirituality. First of all, can't Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, Paul, John, and Jude shouldn't be said to be spiritual again? There's another definition for the word, and I want to speak about it this morning.

Rather negatively approaching it, and showing how that a kind of Christian who is an immature Christian, regenerated, yes, but kind on every level, in that he is spiritually imperfect, retarded as it is in his development, and it's possible to be spiritually retarded. Just as it's possible to be spiritually retarded in our physical development and mental development. And, thus, having the characteristics of a baby, of a very, very young child.

Paul uses the word baby, yes. He said, I couldn't speak unto you as unto mature Christians, but as unto current Christians, which he then gave this synonymous description, which is the word baby in Christ. So, that there are, evidently, in the Church of Christ, there are two classes usually, or four.

There is the added church, persons who attend all the time, but for some reason never do get converted. They come, and they seem to enjoy it. They have friends among the religious people, the Christian people, but they themselves never pass from death unto life.

That's one class. Then there is another class, those who are claimed to be Christians, but are not, and then there are those who are truly Christians, but are kind, and then there are those who are Christians and are spiritual. Now, we can best know what an unspiritual Christian is, and what a spiritual Christian should be.

By contrast, by noticing the characteristics of a baby. No doubt I've mentioned this in illustration or sermon in times gone by, but we want to focus essentially on it for a few minutes today. So, let's look at a baby, and there is an incident I'd rather look at myself, and I feel just a little bit like a traitor saying the things I've got to say about babies this morning, because I'm something of an expert on babies, I think.

We've had enough, enough grandchildren and enough of little adopted friends all around, and I haven't joined Lord David's children so many in my time. In a few minutes I'll hold them in my arms. I consider it a ministerial privilege, for I love the babies, but after all, they're little human beings, and as little human beings they have certain characteristics.

And not I, but Paul said those characteristics were unspiritual. He said they were carnal, and that when those characteristics are in a Christian, you find an unspiritual Christian. Now, the first thing with all of the babies that I notice is the self-centeredness of the little thing.

The baby has a little world all of its own, and it hasn't any idea that there's any other world but its world. It's mother, it's father, it's brother, it's sister, it's crib, which I care. It is a self-centered little thing, and it is the center of time, and everything else revolves around that little center of time.

All others are but bodies in mixed orbits, and that, we see, Paul's concept of an unspiritual Christian is being somebody that is self-centered, living a self-centered Christian life. Reborn again, certainly, but living so that the everything takes its significance from that Christian. Now, that's one characteristic of a baby, and there's one characteristic of a carnal Christian.

Murdering of a baby is affected unduly by its senses, but having learned to disagree with the senses, or to ignore them, should draw confusion based upon evidence rather than go along with its feelings. So, this is a characteristic, and unspiritual Christians are the same. They tend to live by their feelings.

If there's what we call a good atmosphere in the church, then they've had a good time. If there isn't, they haven't had a good time, and thus they are more or less victims and fools of their environment. A baby is.

It's a victim of its environment, a living victim, because its senses tell it. If it pinches a finger, it howls like a banshee. Although the finger may stop hurting, and the baby continues to cry long after it's forgotten why it started.

Because it's unduly affected by its feelings, or it's too hilariously, we get too exuberant for no reason in the world. I discovered just how a little Judith, if you put your nose down on her nose and mumble words like that. I said, she mumbles.

She's a little over a year. Why, that she's a bit of a hysterical laughter, because I practice on it. We had a good time together, but I wonder why.

What's so funny about that? I don't know what's so funny about it, but she thought it was one of the richest pieces of humor that had ever come within her little year-old circle of dangers or attention.

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