

'Ye Are Babes'

by A.W. Tozer

A spiritual Christian is one who lives above their feelings and senses, has a purpose in life, and is guided by the Spirit.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Characteristics of a Christian"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that true spirituality is often misunderstood, as many perceive spiritual Christians to be timid and gentle, while the Bible presents a different picture. He categorizes Christians into four groups: unconverted attendees, false Christians, carnal Christians, and spiritual Christians, highlighting that carnal Christians exhibit traits of immaturity similar to babies, such as self-centeredness and being overly influenced by their senses. Tozer urges believers to grow beyond these characteristics by seeking spiritual maturity through discipline, purpose, and a deeper relationship with God. He calls for Christians to move away from external influences and trivial pursuits, advocating for a life of purpose and a comprehensive engagement with Scripture. Ultimately, Tozer encourages the congregation to strive for spiritual growth and maturity in their faith.

Transcript

"Ye Are Babes"

Pastor and author Aiden Wilson Tozer

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To be a spiritual Christian, I discover 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-walking, soft-spoken, gentle and harmless person who walks about with a permanent smile and who cannot be roused to any kind of spiritual indignation. But I, curiously enough, do not find this to be the Scriptural definition of spirituality. If so, then Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, Paul, and John and Jude couldn't be said to be spiritual men.

There is another definition for the word and I want to speak about it this morning, rather negatively approaching it, and showing how a carnal Christian 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, our mental development, and thus having the characteristics of a baby or of a very, very young child.

Paul uses the word "babes" here and said, I couldn't speak unto you as unto mature Christians, but as unto carnal Christians, which he then gave this synonymous description, descriptive word, babes in Christ. So, there are evidently in the church of Christ; there are three classes usually, or four, there is in the average 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 claim to be Christians, but are not. And then there are those who are truly Christians, but are carnal. 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 attention on it for a few minutes today. Let's look at a baby and 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 am something of an expert on babies, I think. We've had enough, enough grandchildren and enough of little adopted friends all around. And I've enjoyed dedicating 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'll find an unspiritual Christian.

Now, the first thing about a baby that I note 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. Its mother, its father, its brothers or sisters, its crib, its highchair, it is a self-centered little thing. And it is the central sun and everything else revolves around that little central sun. All others are but bodies in its orbit. And thus, we see Paul's concept of an unspiritual Christian as being somebody that is self-centered, living a self-centered Christian life, being born again certainly, but living so that everything takes its significance from that Christian. Now, that's one characteristic of a babe and it's one characteristic of a carnal Christian.

Another is that a baby is affected unduly by its senses. It hasn't learned to discipline its senses or to ignore them. It draws conclusions 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 they 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 a victim of its environment, a willing victim because its senses tell it if it pinches a finger it howls like a banshee. Although the finger may stop hurting and the babes continue to cry long after it's forgotten why it started. Because it's unduly affected by its feelings or it's too hilariously, it gets too exuberant for no reason in the world.

I discovered that our little Judy, Judith, if you put your nose down on her nose and mumbled words such as she mumbles, she's a little over a year, why that she would go into hysterics of laughter. And of course, I practiced on her 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 richest pieces of humor that had ever come within her little year-old circle of interest or attention. And she and I do that now. That's our fun together. But I don't think it's funny. It's humorous to see her go wild about it. But now that's a child, cast

down for no reason; hilarious for no reason, victims of their feelings and of their senses. And Paul said, ye are yet carnal. Ye are babes. And this is also the characteristic of a Christian that is carnal. He is too easily exhilarated. He's too easily lifted up and too easily cast down. After a while a Christian should learn better, but we'll look at that later.

Then, a third thing about a baby is its propensity to rest in externals. Now, a baby has no inward life at all. There are even psychologists that say, I don't believe this, but psychologists say that babies are born without minds, their minds develop. I don't believe that. But I do know that they're born with capacities, mental capacities, but without anything in it; and without anything in their little minds. But as they get older, of course, it develops, but they have no inward life. They rest completely in externals.

Now, this also is characteristic of a carnal Christian. He lives too much in visible religion, and it's externalism. He goes by things on the outside, colored lights and strange sounds or pretty sounds, and garments or the certain uniforms or certain decorations. Anything to please the childish mind by calling it out from the center to the outside, from the internal to the external. Brethren, 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 worshipped in spirit and in truth. No other way. The externals can be a prison. The external can be any unlovely place. But, if the heart is right and 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 externals.

Then, I noticed this point about a baby too, is his complete absence of purpose. You never saw a baby that ever had a purpose, or if he did, it was the next thing he saw to do. He wants that red ball that lies just beyond his reach and he hasn't learned to crawl yet. And so, he'll howl for that. But when he gets it, he'll throw it down, because he has no purpose. He didn't want it for any purpose. And when he got it, no purpose was fulfilled. And that of course is characteristic of babies, sweet as they are, and I wouldn't want them different. But they're the loveliest thing left on earth. But there's absence of purpose in the life of a child.

When a child gets a little older, he gets to be ten maybe, or twelve, he'll begin to save things, or he'll begin to put things away. He can save stamps or save pennies toward something. He's beginning to get purpose into his life. And by the time he's in his teens, he'll learn how to work after school to lay up money to go further to school. And by the time he's in his 20s, he will have had a life purpose worked out for himself as far as this world is concerned, but babies have no purpose at all.

And I find that the 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 tickles his carnality by listening to the finest choir that he can find. Or, he wants to know where the biggest crowd is assembled. And he gets a charge, if you'll excuse the slang, 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 play and trifles. The most unproductive creature around the place is the loveliest and the most loved, the baby. They have a life. They live a life of play and trifles all together. And everything they do; they've got to turn it into play. Did you ever see the babe nurse violently on his bottle for a while, and then when he gets enough, begin to spin it around or play with it or toss it clear out on the floor, and then he'll laugh uproariously when he sees the milk spilled and the top

come off down on the rug. Now everything has to be turned into play with the baby. And I want to be nice about this. I'm trying hard to be nice. Please pray for me so that I can be nice. But brethren, if we're realistic at all we'll have to say that the modern generation of Christians, they're living for play and trifles, play and trifles.

I got a folder from a certain Bible conference, you don't know where it is, so don't ask me to tell you. They are going to take a trip and go out on top of the bounding billows on a luxury liner. And they're going of course to have everything that the 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 to give talks on Romans just before the shuffleboard game every morning to give it a religious flavor. And they say, what is the purpose of this? It is to promote an interest in missions. And they say, walk today where Jesus walked yesterday. And a certain evangelist friend of mine wrote yes, but not with the same purpose. We want to play you see. We have no hesitation in advertising our Bible conferences as religious playgrounds. So that's a proof of how carnal we are. We live a life of play and trifles.

And then petulance, fretfulness and quarrelsomeness. The sweetest baby that ever lived is not sweet when he's hungry. None of you mothers ever tells me now that your baby is a nice little angel when she's hungry. She's not. She takes and makes ugly sounds when she's hungry even though she's only two months old. Now this petulance and fretfulness is strictly an immature reaction because it is a temptation to blame secondary causes. I can always tell a carnal Christian because he blames secondary causes. If he is a preacher and he loses his job, he blames his Board instead of blaming his sheer ineptitude and inability to come through, he blames his Board. Or he blames his District Superintendent or he has blamed, old Adam was like that. This woman that Thou gavest me, she did it.

And some of you dear Christian women that aren't making it very well, you say if you had a good, spiritual husband you would be a better Christian. No, you wouldn't be. You would just think you were because you would have less reason to know you're not. Can you figure that one out? Well, that is what I mean. So long as there is nothing there to tempt you, you'll think you are better than you are. But a grouchy husband that won't shave Sunday morning and sits around in a t-shirt and plays jazz, you say he's your trouble. No, he's not your trouble. He could be your sanctification if you knew how to use him. Wesley said his wife was his sanctification. And if you knew how to use opposition, you could turn it into a help upward toward God. That's one thing a baby always does, he always blames secondary causes. You never knew a baby that was to blame for anything. It is always somebody else.

And then there's the restricted and limited diet of a baby. The baby marks its Bible, but it's always the tender little passages that they mark. They skip over those rough and vigorous passages that tear you apart and bring you down and discipline you and chasten you. And so the baby lives on a diet, the diet of milk and strained vegetables. It has to. Now that my brethren is the picture of a baby.

Now this is not a baby-hater. This is a baby lover. From the time I was old enough to know that I had little brothers and sisters I have been a sentimentalist, complete victim to the smile of a baby. I had a brother seven years, eight years younger than I and 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 and for him. So, he didn't have to put his face on the cold pillow. I'd rub it real hard with my hand. I even had sense enough to know in those days that friction would raise heat. So, I'd warm his pillow and then lay him down there and I looked after him, just looked after him as if he was my child out of pure love for him. And when he got a little older, I hated to think the time would ever come

when I'd get old enough to leave home, because I wanted to stay with my baby brother.

Well, that's how much I love babies. But you would just have to admit Brethren that we described a baby here this morning. A self-centered little guy affected unduly by his senses; resting in externals 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 delivered from being self-centered of course. That's a part of sin. But it gets interests away from itself and learns to stand up and defy its senses. And learns to reason instead of by its senses. It learns to live for the character within, rather than for external things. It learns to have a purpose in life, even if it's only to be an actor or a ballplayer or something else to get a purpose. Nature takes care of that for most of us as we mature. But now in spiritual things. That's an illustration drawn from nature, fallen nature.

Now, in spiritual things, what shall we do? Well, I'll tell you. I know of no single experience that will instantly transform a carnal Christian into a spiritual one. Now, I 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 and meet certain conditions and instantly cease to be a carnal and become a spiritual Christian. 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 sorrow of heart for our carnality. And then believe in the power of God to fill us with His Spirit, and begin to work with the soul that He leads us away from self-centeredness, and leads us to love the whole world.

They used to sing, I'll live the world around back in Simpson's day. They believed a Christian 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 ought to ever be taught because Dr. Simpson who taught it lost his mind. My Brethren, I examined into that most carefully when I wrote about his life. I talked to those that knew him, his secretary, his warmest personal friends, and I got the facts right down. You know what? He got arteriosclerosis when he was about 75 years old and lived two or three years and couldn't be used. But you know what? He never forgot the name of one of his missionaries. And they tell the story, certain people do, that Dr. Simpson in his last hours, repented because he hadn't accepted the teachings of such and such.

Well, now I happen to know what happened in the last hours of Dr. Simpson. The last hours of Dr. A.B. Simpson where these, he sat with his wife out on the front stoop or porch 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 then, but he got on his knees and without missing one, he prayed by name for every missionary in the Christian Missionary Alliance, went in and lay down on his bed and died. That's how he died my brethren. He was not living for himself, but he was round the world with it.

Now, the second thing you got to ask God to do and expect Him to do is to teach you to live above your feelings and your senses. Often in the morning, as three young men came to see me from one of the religious institutions within the Chicago area here some time ago. And oh, how hungry boys they were. They're the ones that God filled with the Holy Ghost until one of them couldn't sleep nearly all night for the joy of it. After our meeting, and they've sought the Lord. Well, anyway, they were having a tough time of it. And one of them was in trouble, because he said some times when he gets down on his knees, he doesn't

have any desire to pray. And they thought, because I was as old as Methuselah's twin brother that I never had any difficulty like that. And I just began to testify to them. I said, boys, do you know there are times when I have to force myself to prayer. It's dull, and for a little while, there's not much juice in it. And their faces began to shine. One of them said, oh, what a relief he said. I thought I was backsliding, 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. There are a lot of others that don't, but you've got to pray through that. You got to pray past that. And it comes after a while, and God met these three young men, but they wrote me a letter and told me what a great relief it was to know that you never get to a place where you're just sort of an 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, or wish you hadn't. And in the evening, wish still more ardently that you hadn't. That often happens. Why don't let that get you down. A baby won't worry about that and howl for mother. 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 stuck 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 alright anyhow. And then resting in externals. You've got to change that. The spiritual Christian has to stop resting in externals. I learned long ago to preach wherever I stand up. I can't change. They say, Tozer, why do you go and preach for that crowd. Look at the things they do. I am not responsible. I go to churches and other gatherings and I see things that, I just sit there and wait it out. I hear songs that I can't see why they were ever written; sung by people that never should have been permitted to do it. And yet, externals, you've just got to tune them out you know. Just get on another wavelength and wait it out. Then when they give you a nice long flowery introduction which you don't deserve, then get up and preach. But if you live in externals, brother, it's too bad. Babies do, grown up Christians don't. And then grown-up Christians get a purpose. They know why they're here. Often my friends, 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 Jordan to say this was where God blessed me, why I could easily blow my blessed ministerial top. But I don't do it because I know there are certain purposes I'm fulfilling, poorly, but I'm fulfilling them. So have a purpose.

And then stop playing. God's poor, playful kittens. They've got to have their religion turned into play for them. They drink a while and then throw the bottle on the floor and laugh about nothing and get blue about nothing. That's carnality. That's not spirituality. A spiritual Christian has a life of labor. He looks upon the world not as a playground, but as a battleground.

And then the diet, 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 a 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 say that if you have them and nothing else, you're not nourished. Read all your Bible. Read all the begats, and back in the Kings, so and so begat so and so and so on. 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. A real Christian ought to be able to take a full-rounded diet.

Now that's a spiritual person as contrasted with the carnal person. Not the mouse, but the person who has grown up in God and who's mature and has grown in the Spirit. That's the Christian. So, let's ask God to make us mature Christians and grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What do you say? Amen. Amen.

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