

The ' Carnal ' Christian

by Jessie Penn-Lewis

Jessie Penn-Lewis explores the nature of the 'carnal' Christian and the path to spiritual maturity through understanding the Cross and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1, Galatians 5:19

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Deliverance from the Flesh"

Description

Jessie Penn-Lewis discusses the concept of the 'carnal Christian,' emphasizing that many believers, though regenerated, remain dominated by the flesh and its desires, which prevents them from fully experiencing spiritual maturity. She explains that there are three types of Christians: the spiritual, the soulish, and the carnal, with the latter being characterized by jealousy and strife. Penn-Lewis highlights the importance of understanding the significance of the Cross for deliverance from the flesh, urging believers to reckon themselves dead to sin and to walk in the Spirit. She stresses that spiritual growth should not be stagnant, and that believers must actively seek to live according to the Spirit to overcome the carnal nature. Ultimately, she calls for a deeper comprehension of the Cross to achieve true freedom and spiritual maturity.

Transcript

" And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ " (1 Corinthians 3:1 R.V.).

Let us repeat again at this point, that the " soul " is the seat of the self-consciousness (the personality, the will, the intellect), and stands between the spirit-the seat of the God-consciousness; and the body (the seat of the sense), or world-consciousness. Gall says that the " soul " derives its life, or animating power, from either the spirit (the higher part), or the animal (or lower part). In Latin the word for " soul " is anima-the animating principle of the body.

In the converted man i.e., one who has had his spirit regenerated, or quickened into life by the Spirit of God communicating life to the fallen spirit-the soul is dominated either from beneath, by the animal-life; or from above by the spirit life. It may be said, therefore, that there are three classes of Christians, * and these three classes of believers are clearly referred to in the Scriptures as(1) The spiritual man-dominated by the Spirit of God, indwelling and energizing his renewed human spirit. (2) The soulish man-dominated by the soul, i.e., by the intellect or emotions.(3) The carnal man-dominated by the flesh, in fleshly habits or desires, i.e., " the power of the flesh ".

The word used in I Corinthians 3:1 is not psuche--soul; but sarkikos-fleshly, the adjective of the word in Romans 8: 7, where it is written, that the " carnal (sarx) mind is enmity against God ". It is not said that the " psuche ", or soulish life, is enmity to God, but the fleshly mind. It is true that the natural, or "soulish " man, cannot receive, or understand, the things of the Spirit (I Cor.2:14), but he is not said to be in enmity, simply because he is soulish ! " And I (i.e., as the natural man-' man of soul', Gk.-cannot receive, so I, also) could not speak unto you, the deep things of God, as I would to the spiritual; but I was compelled to speak to you as I would to men of flesh," * wrote Paul, in effect, to the Corinthians, for although truly regenerate and " in Christ " yet they were so dominated by the flesh that he could only describe them as still " carnal " or fleshly. This was proved by the manifestation of the works of the flesh in jealousy and strife, for he writes to the Galatians, " the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like "(Gal. 5: 19-21). Any of these manifestations seen in a believer mark the workings, in some degree, of the "sarkikos " or fleshly life, passing out through the avenues of the soul, or personality, in jealousy or strife, etc. Such a one is not even a "soulish " man i.e., merely " natural "but a man walking " after the flesh ", even though his spirit may be revived, and quickened into life; and those who are thus walking " in the flesh ", cannot please God.

The Apostle's description of these Corinthian believers as being " carnal " or fleshly, and yet " babes in Christ ", shows clearly that " babes in Christ " are generally under the domination of the flesh-or " in the flesh "-at the initial stage of the spiritual life. In their regeneration they are truly " in Christ "i.e., vitally quickened with His life, and planted into Him by His Spirit, as it is written in John 3:16, " that whosoever believeth into Him may have everlasting life " (Greek) ; but these " babes in Christ ", vitally in Him by a living faith, have not yet apprehended all that the Cross severs them from by their being baptized into His death on the Cross, and quickened by His life.

It appears from the Apostle's language that he blames these Corinthians for being still " babes ", for the babestage ought not to be of very long duration. (Compare Hebrews 5:11-14) The regeneration of the spirit, which comes through the in-breathing of the Spirit of life from God, on the man's simple faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God upon the Cross in his behalf, should be quickly followed by the apprehension of the death of the sinner with the Saviour (Romans 6: 1-13), which brings about the deliverance from the life after the " flesh " which the Corinthian Christians had manifestly not yet known.

The marks of the carnal Christian, babes in Christ, the Apostle sketches very clearly, and by these marks every believer of the present time can judge for himself whether he, too, is "yet carnal". This leads us to consider at this point:

The Deliverance of the Cross

" They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh " (Galatians 5:24, R.V.). These are the words with which the Apostle ends his description of the " works of the flesh " in his letter to the Galatians, as he contrasts the " fruit of the Spirit " which the " spiritual " man-the man in whom the spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, rules -should bring forth in his life.

The " babes in Christ " who are " yet carnal " need a fuller apprehension of the meaning of the Cross; for in the purpose of God the death of Christ meant that the " old man " was crucified with Him, so that " they that are of Christ have crucified the flesh " with all its affections and desires. The same Cross that was revealed to the unregenerate man as the place where sin was atoned for, and his burden of sin removed

by the blood of the Lamb, is the place where the "carnal" Christian, who may be a "babe" in Christ, even though regenerate for many years, must obtain deliverance from the domination of the flesh, so that he may walk after the spirit, and not "after the flesh", and thus in due season become "spiritual", and a full-grown man in Christ.

ROMANS 6 IS THE MAGNA CHARTA OF LIBERTY THROUGH THE CROSS OF CHRIST, which the babe in Christ needs to know, for it most clearly sets forth the basis of deliverance, to which only a brief reference is made in Galatians 5:24, and other passages.

Only by an appropriation of death with Christ, with the putting to death of the "doings" of the body (Romans 8:13, R. V. m.; Colossians 3:5) can the believer live, and walk, and act in and by the Spirit, and thus become a spiritual man. "When we were 'in the flesh' the passions of sin ... wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death," wrote Paul to the Romans, "but now we have been discharged from the law, having died. .." (Romans 7:5,6, R. V. m.).

"In the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), the pure and holy Son of God hung upon the tree, an "offering for sin", and because He died for sin, and to sin in the place of the sinner, God thus has condemned for ever a life of "sin in the flesh" in all who are truly united to His Son. The believer lives "in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3) it is true, in that he is still in his physical body, but once he sees God's own Son in the "likeness of sinful flesh" hanging upon the tree, and knows that in Him he died to sin, from that hour he lives "in the flesh" (Galatians 2:20) as far as the physical body is concerned, but he does not WALK any longer "after the flesh" that is, according to the demands and desires of his body -but "after the spirit" -that is, according to his renewed spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. (Cf. Romans 8:5,6)

Based upon the work of the Son of God on the Cross of Calvary, in which the sinner for whom He died was identified with the Substitute who died for him, the redeemed and regenerate believer is called to "reckon", or account himself "dead to sin", because "our old man was crucified with Him". The Holy Spirit of God dwelling in his spirit can then carry out to its ultimate issue the Divine purpose that the "body of sin" -i.e., the whole continent of sin in the whole of fallen man may be "destroyed" or abolished,* as the man on his part steadily and faithfully refuses to "let sin reign" (Romans 6:6,11,13). It is as the "babe in Christ" knows this that the "flesh" ceases to dominate, and have control, and he rises in spirit into real union with the Ascended Lord-alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

The "babe in Christ" who apprehends this now knows the fuller meaning of being "Alive unto God"; and walking after the spirit, and by the Spirit, he ceases to fulfil the desires of the flesh, and henceforth gives his spirit, indwelt by the Spirit of God, the domination of his entire being. It does not mean that he may not again lapse into the walk "after the flesh", but as long as he gives his mind to the "things of the Spirit", and reckons himself continually "dead indeed unto sin", he, "by the Spirit", steadfastly "makes to die" the "doings of the body" (Romans 8:13, R. V. m.), and walks in newness of life.

* "The word destroyed in the A.V. is rendered 'done away' by Alford, and 'annulled' by Darby. In Romans 3:3, it is translated 'make without effect'; in Romans 3:31, 'make void'; in Romans 4:14, 'made of none effect'; in Romans 7:2, 'loosed'; in Romans 7:6, 'delivered'. Whatever its best translation in Romans 6:6, it is plain that it signifies

that 'the body of sin' is to CEASE TO HAVE ANY POWER TO BRING THE BELIEVER INTO BONDAGE TO SIN .. ." -W.R.N.

The root word means to " leave unemployed, to make barren, void, useless ". Therefore the actual " abolishing " of the " body of sin "which includes practically all that we receive by nature in the first Adamcan only reach its ultimate experimentally when the " body of our humiliation " is " conformed to the body of His glory " at the coming of the Lord from heaven (Philippians 3:21).

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