

The Carnal & Spiritual Man

by Tony Sargent

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having God feel at home in our lives through hospitality, generosity, and spiritual maturity.

Duration: 39:35

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1

Topics: "Carnality", "Relationship with God", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

Tony Sargent explores the contrast between the carnal and spiritual man through the stories of Abraham and Lot in Genesis. He emphasizes that while both men are saved, their spiritual maturity and relationship with God differ significantly. Abraham is portrayed as a friend of God, demonstrating hospitality and a deep connection with the Lord, while Lot, despite being righteous, lives in a way that embarrasses God and lacks spiritual depth. Sargent challenges the congregation to reflect on their own spiritual lives, asking whether they make God feel at home and how they conduct their affairs in light of their faith. The sermon concludes with a call to avoid the fate of Lot, who, though saved, has little to show for his life in Christ.

Transcript

Father, we've just been asking once again for the voice of your Spirit to re-echo what we've already been hearing, and we just offer our minds again to you, Lord, for some of these dear folk. It's been a busy week, two addresses every night, maybe difficulty in taking any more in. Now, Lord, we just pray for the tuition of the Spirit, that he might move upon our mental faculties and give us an ability to retain even more, but deliver us from merely chasing after addresses.

Help us to turn to reality, what we receive from yourself during these days, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Please be seated.

If anybody wants to give me a charismatic hug after the service, I'm told by the consultant of the Tropical Disease Hospital that the Bilharzia, which I've been suffering from, has now gone. It's not infectious, and I shan't leave any bugs. Though I had wondered whether to preach on, I'm a worm and no man.

I was into Tanzania just a few months ago, and then went to Nepal and to Pakistan before returning back to my home fellowship on the Costa Geriatrica. In wording, I was saying some people feel that the South of England is the Bible Belt. Don't you believe it.

There are more people who attend church in Manchester than attend church in West Sussex. I'm glad to be back in Nottingham. I was born in Sheffield, which is a place where people go and live if they're more affluent than they are in Nottingham.

So it's nice to be here. It gives me a chance to go and see my mum this evening, who still lives back home in Sheffield, and I appreciate that. She thought I was dying a weekend, so I'm glad to prove to her that I'm reasonably well and fairly strong.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 3. I want to try and just home in on what George has been bringing to us and anchor it further into Scripture, and I want to do it by bringing us to 1 Corinthians 3 and then taking you back to Genesis. The New Testament will expound the Old Testament. I hope the Old Testament is not a dusty, dry book to you, because you find illustrated in the Old Testament the biblical principles of the New.

Now here is Paul, 1 Corinthians 3. He's got a problem with his congregation. I'm far enough away from mine to say I have the same problem. I have a church of some 500 folks, and our church membership is full of willing people.

Everyone is willing. Some are willing to work, the others are willing to let them work, and that's pretty typical of things in the UK, but I do thank God that on average our folk are pretty good quality. But here is Paul, and he's got problems.

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

You are still worldly, for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? I'd like to take the whole of that chapter, but there just isn't the time. Let's just home in on two or three more verses. However, later on, Paul is projecting the time when you and I, along with him, and all the people who were redeemed in the Old Testament times and New Testament times, as we stand before the judgment of Christ, not the judgment throne of God, because our sins, thank God, have been eliminated through the blood of Jesus, and we're not answerable for those sins.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, on the most remarkable text in the New Testament, Romans 8, 1. But we will be judged for the way that we conduct our affairs, having committed our lives to Jesus Christ. And here is Paul envisaging that occasion. If any man builds, this is verse 12, I can never read the numbers in the NIV version of the Bible, not with this light.

Anyway, perhaps we could put another shilling in the gas meter in this Methodist church. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burnt up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

I know there are some people who do not believe that there are such things as grades within the Christian community. We're all saved, therefore we're all on the same level of spirituality. But you know, that clearly is not the case.

I've been a pastor now of the Tabernacle Church there in Worthing for 16 years. I'm just into my 17th year. It's the only church that I've ever pastored at all, the only one that ever asked me, and they're stuck with me.

And I've been there for long enough to appreciate that there are differences in spirituality amongst Christian people. There are those who have vision, there are those who have reality, there are those who don't have vision, and don't have reality. The latter category, they're still saved, but they don't really have what the French would say, that *je ne sais quoi*.

I don't quite know what it is, but they've never really committed themselves to be wholly sold out for Jesus Christ. And if there are those in that category this evening, well probably you're not in that category, or else you wouldn't come midweek, would you? But you will know of those who there are within your church fellowships in this category, and here even in this Methodist church this evening, that there are amongst us various grades of Christians, grades as far as our spirituality is concerned. I want to demonstrate and illustrate this to you, by turning you to Genesis chapter 18, and Genesis chapter 19.

Genesis 18 and 19. With Paul's words in our mind, that there are carnal Christians, and spiritual Christians, we find this principle illustrated in a most remarkable way, in these mid chapters of the book of Genesis. 18 and 19.

Now again I'd like to read them, but there isn't time. Here's a summary. In the 18th chapter, you come across a man called Abraham.

He's dominant in that chapter. You hardly read of anyone else, not on the human level. In the 19th chapter, however, you come across another man who's dominant.

Hardly anyone else features in that chapter at all on the human level, and his name is Lot. Now when you start to run a contrast between these two individuals, if it were not for the fact that the New Testament told us that Lot is a righteous man, in Christian theological terms he is saved, we would not have thought from the evidence we get in the 19th chapter of Genesis, that this man would be found in heaven. But the New Testament makes it clear, both Abraham and Lot, uncle Abraham and nephew Lot, are servants of God.

They are redeemed. They are converted. But when you've said that, you've said about all that there is to say as common denominators.

The 18th chapter is a chapter of light. The 19th chapter is a chapter of darkness. The 18th chapter features an account of a man who, when God draws near, the Lord feels so comfortable that he receives his hospitality.

In the 19th chapter, when God or a representation of God draws near to this man, he feels so utterly embarrassed, does the Lord. And so I want to run between these two chapters and just fasten onto certain things that challenge my life, and I trust will challenge your life from Abraham over against Lot. All right, we've got to use speed this evening, we'll have to accelerate.

Whenever I have one of George's tapes in my car when I'm driving, I always go quicker and quicker as he gets more and more worked up. So if you buy any of his tapes, don't have them when you're on the motorway, use mine instead. When you move into the 18th chapter, you find uncle Abraham on the high plain of Mamre.

It's mid-afternoon, or rather it's lunchtime, and he's having a siesta. That means to say that in the hot atmosphere of that rarefied climate, he's by his tent door, and he's looking out, perhaps hoping that there may be some faint breeze that will come across the plain just to cool him. And as he looks out towards the horizon, he suddenly discovers three men who approach him.

Now, one of the things about the Middle East and the Far East is the basic hospitality of those people. And when Abraham sees these three men coming towards him in typical fashion, he rushes out to them and he says in the third verse, if I have found favor in your eyes, my Lord, addressing one of them, do not pass your servant by. And he goes on to extend an invitation to grant them hospitality.

Now, accelerating even more, let me, without giving you a great deal of argument to buttress what I am saying, just take it from me. Let me tell you that these three men who draw near Abraham are what we would call, or at least they represent what we would call in theological terms, a theophany, theosphanio, an appearance of God. That had happened before Bethlehem, but there were times when in the most remarkable fashion, God drew near to people in Old Testament days.

You know that Abraham is entertaining those who are more than just mortal by what happens if we take a sneak look further on in the story. Because if I can just advance a little on the account, you will recall that on one occasion after the hospitality has been granted, Abraham and these three men are engaged in conversation within the tent. And Abraham's wife, I wouldn't say that she was curious or that women are more inquisitive than men.

It's just that she happened to be near the tent door and she was listening to what these men were talking about and they had addressed Abraham and the fact that he was an old man with an old wife and they were yet childless. And when Sarah hears them predicting that that withered womb of hers will come to life and she will conceive a son, she starts to laugh. And although she's not visible to the men, they know what is in her heart.

In other words, they have all knowledge. Omniscience is the word that we describe that. Omniscience is a characteristic that belongs to God alone.

And these men, they had omniscience or knowledge. What is more, they were able to predict that a woman who was almost in geriatric conditions, at least as far as our own terms are concerned today, that she would conceive a child. In other words, that the spokesman was not just omniscient but omnipotent, having all power.

Now, if you put those two characteristics together, omniscience and omnipresence, you can only come to this conclusion that Abraham at lunchtime is entertaining more than just ordinary men, angels unawares. There is an anticipation here in Genesis 18 of what will happen at Bethlehem when God draws near in the form of Emmanuel. Now, my reasoning was hasty, but I want to establish the fact that God came near Abraham during that remarkable lunchtime.

And Abraham says to him, will you stay? Will you take up residence temporally in my tent? And immediately we discover that they agree. The last part of verse 5, very well they answered, do as you say. Now, hastening over to the 19th chapter, there you find Abraham's nephew Lot, and he's now living in Sodom and Gomorrah.

How he came there again, I'm anticipating that you've got some knowledge of this. He shouldn't have been there. He was attracted as a moth is attracted to a light bulb because of what Sodom and Gomorrah seem to hold out in terms of fulfillment and a sophisticated way of living.

And it was to his great discredit that he took up residence in these twin cities. It was appalling that he'd ever left the encampment with Abraham in the first instance. But there he is.

And these two men, they come to Lot, and as they approach Lot, he sees them. And he says, verse 2, my lords, please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night, and then go on your way early in the morning.

When he invites these divine messengers to have fellowship in his house, they respond, no, we will spend the night in the square. They'd rather walk the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah than be entertained in Lot's house. You know, some of us give very poor quality fellowship to the Lord Almighty, who yearns for contact with us in the same way as he did for Adam, when he used to come down in the cool of the day and converse with him.

One of the ways in which you can embarrass God in the New Testament is referred to as grieving the Holy Spirit. I've learned a lot from my wife. She was born in Africa, actually.

And one of the things that she has taught me is to hang very loose to our possessions. And our home is always an open home. It's always been that way in the 20 odd years or nearly that we've been married.

And if you were ever to come to our home, we would want you to feel part of the family. We wouldn't want you to sort of dress in a way that would be pleasing to us or behave in a way that was unnatural to you, simply because you were in our house. We'd want you to feel at home.

How much at home does God feel in your company? Brother George remarks on Paul in Ephesus and the reality of Paul and the vision that Paul had. When you read the Ephesian epistle, which was written from Rome, from a dungeon in Rome, you find that Paul uses a very interesting expression in the Greek language when twice he prays, and the prayer is recorded in the letter. He said, I bow my knee before the Heavenly Father.

And that word bow indicates that he's in the presence of Almighty God, because God is where there is a humble, loving, hospitable heart. And he'll draw near there. Do you know, sometimes I wish I could demolish old church buildings.

We had an old day of prayer, or mainly an old day of prayer yesterday in our fellowship. And I suddenly found myself at 10 o'clock praying, Lord, we got too many church buildings in Worthing. And it's true because there are so many people who seem to think that somehow God resides in these pseudo-gothic buildings.

And they think that that's the church. But the church is not buildings. The church is people.

And where the people of God is, there God should be. And he draws near when he feels comfortable. But there are some Christian people for whom God gets a sense of acute embarrassment.

And they never know that full release of his spirit within their lives. It's not that they're unconverted. I'm not suggesting that.

Lot was converted, but when God was invited into his home, he'd settle for the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot says, or Abraham says in the 18th chapter to, to the Lord, look if I, if I found favor in your eyes, don't pass your servant by. Verse four, let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree.

Let me get you something to eat so you can be refreshed and then go on your way now that you have come to your servant. I like this, you know. You see, men don't change in characteristics down the centuries.

Married men. So many times I'll bring somebody home for lunch and, and my wife Rowena, she's, she's brilliant in the kitchen. And I'll say to them in our church fellowship or whatever, come back to our house and we'll feed you.

What I really mean is my wife will feed you. And so Abraham, he invites these three visitors, verse six, and then he goes to his wife and he hurries into the tent and he says, quick, quick, get three seers of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread and so on and so forth. Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice tender calf and gave it to a servant and hurried to prepare it.

He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set them before them. Now he'd only offer them bread and water and yet she's cooking hot bread and there's a good T-bone steak that's being prepared. They're going to have milk and yogurt.

And it says, while they ate, he stood near them under a tree. You know, one of the things that impresses me about some of our friends, and I'm not saying it doesn't exist in England, I don't want to exaggerate, but our Christian friends out in India and Pakistan and Africa is the way that they share so much. You know, sometimes it's brought tears to my eyes.

I've preached, my record of preaching sermons in any one day is in the city of Ahmedabad where I had 10 engagements on one Sunday and it nearly broke me. But it wasn't so much the preaching, everywhere I went they put on a banquet. Now even if you're a Yorkshire man, there is a limit to the amount of food that you can take in, particularly if it's spicy.

But I remember 10 o'clock one night in a slum village just outside Ahmedabad. All those little, all those Christians had come together. They didn't have a church, it was just between some mud huts where they were living.

And it's the first time that anyone from Europe had ever come to their place. And you know, I felt like royalty. They got a little table and some flowers and they flickering lamp.

I preached to them. Then they took an offering. They gave it me, about five rupees, a trifling sum by our standards.

But for them, I'm going by 10 years, two days work. And I said to my interpreter, I said, I can't take this money. These people live in squalor compared with me.

My garden hut is like a mansion compared to where they're living. He said, please take that money. They will be so offended if you don't.

And the food was there and the drink was there. They gave the best that they had, because that's the way. With a spiritual person whose heart God has touched, he becomes an exceedingly generous person.

But when you go into the 19th chapter and you look at Lot, well, he does insist and he prevails over against these two men's immediate negative reaction about them going into his home. He insists so strongly that they did go with him, verse three, and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast.

And they ate. Now let's suggest in kindness that the whole menu is not written out, that we need the amplified version. But if you had to choose between the Mike Donald's in Sodom and Gomorrah and the one on the plain of Mamre, I reckon that you'd settle for Abraham's management anytime, wouldn't you? The spiritual man, the man whose heart has been touched by the Lord is an incredibly generous man.

It's an incredibly generous woman. And generosity is not correlated with having a lot in the bank. It's really correlated with what's left after you've given, isn't it? What's left after you've given.

And you know, I think that some of us are spiritually dwarfed because we've never understood what it really is to give in the same way that God gives. You see, God is a generous giver. And if you partake of the nature of Christ, then that same generous spirit must be, should be reproduced within your heart, within your life.

So the spiritual man over against the unspiritual has God feeling at home and ministers to God from his substance. There are many other analogies that we can run, but let's just settle for maybe two more, certainly one more. No, two.

I must get these, these to him because they're burning my heart just at this moment. When, when the Lord draws near to Abraham on the plain of Mamre, he has in mind the terrible nature of what is, what the lifestyle is of those who live in Sodom and Gomorrah. Verse 17, Then the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.

For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just and so on and so forth. Why is it that Abraham was known one of the three men alone in the Old Testament as a friend of God? Why is it that God could make Abraham his confidant? Why was the man so spiritually successful on the whole in his life? And the answer is, in his family circle. He will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.

You see, my credibility as a preacher is not really tested by my congregation. If you really want to know what I am like, then you must go to my home. George Whitfield was once asked if so-and-so was a Christian, and Whitfield said, How should I know? I've never lived with him.

And that's wisdom in that. You see, when God looked into the home of Abraham, his relationship with Sarah, the way that he controlled his household, he saw there a man who could be entrusted with his purposes. And Jesus says to those of us who are disciples, I no longer call you servants or slaves.

I call you friends. Why? Because, well, a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. But I'm telling you all things.

You see, the spiritual man is a confidant of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Lord Jesus shares his confidences with those whose lives are consistent, not just their public lives, but their private lives. I find it much easier to perform in public than in private.

But when God takes a man into his service and uses him, he tests him where we don't test people, because he sees what he's like at home. And so he says, I must let Abraham know what's happening in Sodom and Gomorrah. He's a man who's going to be very central to my purposes, and he controls his home well.

Now, you see, this is where Lot pitifully fell down. As many carnal Christians pitifully pitifully fall down. You never read of Lot's wife prior to the 19th chapter of Genesis.

I can't prove this, but my speculation is that that's where he found her. In other words, he brought a principle. He was unequally yoked, because these Old Testament illustrations of New Testament truths are ones that we need to latch on to.

And if you have a deep relationship with someone who is a non-spiritual person, who is not from the company of the redeemed, then you can be in difficulty, particularly if we're thinking in terms of marriage. And when eventually Sodom and Gomorrah's fate is disclosed to Lot, what does he do? Well, he goes and he tells his wife and his children. Look at verse 12.

The two men said to Lot, do you have anyone else? He has sons-in-law, sons or daughters. I'm in the 19th chapter. Or anyone else in the city who belongs to you, get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place.

Verse 14. So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city.

But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. You know, the old man flipped it. He's gone religious.

He's suddenly moved into a dimension that seems to be quite incompatible with a lot that we have known. You see, your credibility is first of all tested amongst those that you are nearest and dearest to. And because of this, Abraham is singled out as the friend of God.

And Lot, though a righteous man, by New Testament definition, cannot be God's confidant. He can't control his own domestic affairs. Do you remember, even his wife is not really under his total influence.

When Sodom and Gomorrah are a raging inferno, she turns and looks back, disobedient to God, disobedient to her husband. You see, if you're going to be truly spiritual, if you're going to know the purposes of God, if you're going to be used as Paul was used in Ephesus and throughout the whole of his ministry, then it's very important for you to look at your personal life. Does God feel comfortable with you? How do you control what God entrusts to you? Can God confide his secrets with you? What about prayer? You get here one of the most amazing illustrations of prayer in the whole of the Bible.

Abraham is informed that Sodom and Gomorrah are to go up in flames and he's concerned. Why? Well, there are a number of reasons, but the basic reason is he's concerned for the glory of God. And incidentally, that's a very important principle in prayer.

Can you say that what you pray for has in mind the glory of God? You see, Abraham is concerned that if God destroys this people of Sodom and Gomorrah, then there are those who might consider him to be unjust because he will be destroying the righteous with the unrighteous. So Abraham prays against what God has declared to him in terms of the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah. Will the judge of all the earth do right? Says Abraham in the 25th verse.

And then he goes on to argue with the Lord. 50 Lord, if there are 50 people, will you destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Then he drops it down to 45, then to 40, then to 30, and so on. You know, sometimes I get very confused by the commentators when I'm trying to understand the Bible.

You see, the commentators here come in and they say, here is an illustration of the sort of Jewish nature of the founder of that race. A sort of Bedouin, he's haggling with God. 50, 45, 40, 30, so on, so on, so on, right down to 10.

And then when he gets down to 10, more commentators come along and Abraham can't win with the commentators. And they say, well, you see, Abraham went wrong at 10. You see, he should have dropped it further down than that.

He should have gone to five. He should have gone to three. Isn't it easy for us in the 20th century to pass comment on people who lived centuries ago as though we're spiritually their superiors.

But you see, Abraham, this great spiritual man is also mentally very cute. You see, he's worked it all out. He's settling for 10.

Now, why is he settling for 10? Well, you see, in Sodom and Gomorrah, there is Lot and his wife. And they've got two daughters. Depending on how you read the Hebrew, they've got already married or about to be married.

If they're already married, then you could at least predict several sons. And Lot is not exactly a poor man. He's equivalent to the alderman of the city.

That's why he's by the city gate when these two divine messengers appear. So if you add them all up, Lot, his wife, the two sons-in-law, the two daughters, possibly the children and certainly the servants, you're home and dry. Abraham's got it all worked out well.

10, that's the basic minimum. The problem, you see, for Abraham was this. He didn't just understand how bad things were with Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah.

But he was very concerned to pray for the glory of God and for the well-being of his nephew. Now, what about Lot? Does he ever pray? Well, yes, he does. If you can call it a prayer.

He has escaped from Sodom and Gomorrah. Look at verse 18 of the next chapter. And he's being redirected to the plain of Mamre where uncle Abraham resides.

But Lot says to them, no, my lord, please, your servant has found favor in your eyes and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains. This disaster will overtake me and I'll die.

Look, here is a town near enough to run to it and it is small. Let me flee to it. It is very small, isn't it? Then my life will be spared.

I, me, my, mine, even with the sulfur of Sodom and Gomorrah smelling from his clothes. Lot still argues with God for his own little Sodom. And the only prayer that is recorded that fell from the lips of Lot is an egocentric prayer.

All right, let's conclude. Here are two extremes, Abraham and Lot. The one is called a friend of God.

The other, the New Testament tells us, is a righteous man. Now, I want to ask you, which chapter reflects you? The 18th or the 19th? Or maybe you live sort of in between, because there are grades in our spirituality. Test yourself in the area of making God feel at home.

Test yourself in the area of hospitality. Test yourself in the area of, can I be God's confident? Test yourself in the area of, how powerful are my prayers? And for what am I praying? I can't prove this, but when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3, he refers to those who are saved as by fire. I can't prove that he had Lot in mind, but it seems to me a very reasonable hypothesis.

Saved, but nothing to show the Lord Jesus for his Calvary love. Saved, but no tracts that were ever distributed could have been put down on your account. No outstanding gift of generosity ever was transferred from you into the accounts of evangelism or what have you.

There was never an hour spent in prayer, never a night spent in prayer, never were you burdened with the sins of humanity and those who are with outside the gospel of Jesus Christ. Saved, saved as by fire, but with nothing to show. No gold, no silver, no precious metal, no gem to place down at the crown, at the feet of Jesus Christ.

What a tragedy. Lot, a man without vision, a man without reality, a carnal man. Saved, but nothing to show for it.

By and by, when I look at his face, face that was marred, brow that was scarred. By and by, when I look on his face, I wish I'd give him more. Far, far more.

More of my life than I ever gave before. By and by, when I look on his face, I wish I'd given him more. The eternal heartache of Lot.

May God spare us from it.

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