

Houston Colonial Hills Conference 1995-02

Marks of a Carnal Christian

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and making faith judgments, warning against carnal behavior and prioritizing the things of the world over the things of God.

Duration: 37:33

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1

Topics: "Carnal Christian"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of not being entangled in the affairs of the world. He emphasizes the need for believers to prioritize their relationship with God over worldly distractions. The preacher also highlights the significance of every action and service done in the name of God, stating that even mundane tasks will be rewarded in the future. He encourages listeners to make faith-based judgments and to dedicate their lives to God, putting away worldly toys and focusing on the things of eternal value.

Transcript

Chapter 3, and we'll read the first nine verses, 1 Corinthians 3, verses 1 through 9. The subject this morning is the marks of a carnal Christian. The marks of a carnal Christian. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able, for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal in behaving like mere men? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Now, he who plants and he who waters are one. Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, you are God's building.

The word carnal has to do with the idea of flesh. It's used in both a literal sense and a figurative sense. Chili con carne, well that's chili with flesh in it, isn't it? Chili with meat in it.

The Mardi Gras is a carnival where people go and booze and fornicate for several days before Lent, when they're supposed to live holy lives. That all in the name of God. What a monstrous system that people should ever be involved in something like that.

It's a carnival. Carnival. Flesh.

Hoping to erase it all by fasting and prayer. But of course it's used in a spiritual sense too. A carnal act or a carnal person is one where the flesh, the old, evil, corrupt, Adamic nature is showing.

And for Christians there are degrees of carnality. A person can really be as carnal as a goat. Or a person could really be a spiritual person with an occasional manifestation of carnality.

Fleshly behavior. It's not the purpose of this message today to enable you and me to be able to look around among the audience and decide who's carnal and who's spiritual. It's not the purpose of it at all.

Makes me think of Robert Little. I was with him one time in Chicago and he preached rather a searching message. And a sister came up to him and she said, there were several people in the audience tonight who really needed that message.

And he said, yes, and you needed it too. And she disappeared into the woodwork. Well, in this chapter you have some of the marks of carnality.

First of all, there's a state of protracted infancy. These people were still on milk instead of on solid food. They hadn't really grown very much in the things of God.

It's rather searching, isn't it? There's something similar to that in Hebrews chapter 5 you might like to look at. Hebrews chapter 5, at the end of the chapter, it says in verse 12, for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. You have come to need milk and not solid food.

Let me just stop there and say, let me take out a few words there and apply them to our hearts today. You ought to be teachers. So easy to read that verse and be comfortable, isn't it? But you know, that's what the Lord's saying to us here.

You ought to be teachers. You've been saved long enough. You've been studying the word long enough.

You ought to be teaching others. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he's obeyed that solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. I think of a man I met years ago, and he said to me, Brother, he spoke with kind of a stained-glass cathedral voice.

Brother, I'd like to share with you something I got from the word today. Psalm 12.1. Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases. You know, I met that man 20 years later.

You remember what he said to me? Brother, I'd like to share something with you that I got from the word of God today. Psalm 12.1. He thought I didn't remember. Listen, he hadn't got beyond Psalm 12.1 in 20 years.

Now, that's sad. That's what Paul is talking about here when he writes to the Corinthians. A state of protracted infancy.

They weren't growing in the things of the Lord. And, you know, this is the state of evangelical Christianity today, and a lot has to do with the clerical system. The clerical system keeps people in a state of infancy where one man is expected to do all the work and the others sit there.

Think of the stifled gift in the average Christian congregation today. It's enough to make angels weep. But I want to tell you, dear friends, this world will never be evangelized in the way God intended it to be evangelized as long as we have a clerical system.

It's just as easy as that. Notice some of the marks of carnality. Envy, strife, and divisions.

Verse 3. You are still carnal for where there are envy, strife, and divisions among. Envy. Wishing you were someone else.

How common that is in life, you know. You look at other people and say, I wish I were like him. Actually, you're insulting God when you wish that.

God knows what he's doing. He hasn't made his first mistake yet. And he's not going to make any either.

And instead of going around looking at what other people are or what other people have, I should be able to say, by the grace of God I am what I am. And I'm going to use what I have for his glory and not go through life with a sour puss, which so many do. Strife.

Well, there is a place where strife is necessary. I think there's a place for strife today. That is godly strife.

Striving for the truth of the word of God. But that's not what this is speaking about. We should earnestly contend with the faith, but we shouldn't contend for minor matters, which is where most of the contention takes place today.

Strife. Let me say this. Outbursts of temper have never been considered a mark of deep spirituality by the Christian church.

And, dear friends, if you yell at your wife, that's carnality. And if your wife yells at you, that's carnality too. It works both ways.

And when you feel anger coming on and you're tempted to ask the Lord to just let you off the hook for five minutes, don't ask him because the answer is no. He's not going to let you off the hook. You'd just like to get a few words off your chest, wouldn't you? A few well-chosen words.

Don't do it. Divisions. Divisions.

John MacArthur in one of his recent things he sends out was telling about a church. This is true. A church.

And they divided over the color of the tiles that were to be used on the roof. Can you believe it? A church dividing over the color of tiles to be used on the roof. Some wanted red, let's say, and some green.

I don't know what the colors were. But they couldn't come to an agreement. So they decided this half of the roof is going to be red, and this half is going to be green, and you sit under the color you prefer.

You can't believe it. It happened. It happened.

Paul says, come on. Give me a break. You fellows are carnal when you act like that.

That's what it is. You're acting in the flesh. The Spirit of God isn't leading you to act like that.

Carnality. Well, there are a lot of other evidences of carnality about us today and in our own lives as well. The Corinthians were followers of men.

Well, when one says, I am of Paul and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? They were dividing over human leaders. It's a big, big mistake. I don't know if people will ever learn.

God is not going to share his glory with another. And, you know, the evangelical world had some sad scandals during the last years. People putting men on the pedestal.

Gathering to men instead of to the Lord Jesus Christ. And God won't have it. That's all there is to it.

He just won't have it. And an awful lot of Christians have been sadly disillusioned over the last months and years when their evangelical idols toppled one by one. It's interesting how Paul handles it here.

I think it gives me a chuckle. He says, don't divide over these men. They're just servants, ministers.

I wish that word had never been translated ministers. I wish they had translated it servants. Of course, that's what it means.

And the idea is, here's a wealthy family and they have all kinds of servants in the house and here's a cook and here's a chambermaid. And the family starts to divide over which they like best, the cook or the chambermaid. That's so nonsensical.

Wealthy family doesn't act that way. That's what Paul's saying here. How foolish it is.

These men are just servants. And you don't divide over them. And not only that, they count too many.

It's God who gives the increase anyway. Give Him the glory. Give Him the credit.

And then in the latter part of the chapter, he brings out something very interesting too. He says, you don't have to say, well, John MacArthur is my favorite or James Kennedy is my favorite or somebody else. He says, you don't have to say that.

If you're a Christian, you can say they're all mine. Did you notice that down in verse 21? Therefore, let no one glory in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come. All are yours and you are Christ and Christ is God.

You don't have to say, well, I like Bill's preaching better or I like Steve's preaching better. Thank God, they're both mine. That's a spiritual way of looking at it.

The other is the carnal way. God hates the one who sows discord among his brethren. The carnal person uses carnal weapons to fight a spiritual warfare.

He tries to do by money, for instance, what he thinks the Lord would have done. Money is a great curse in the work of God. Did you know that? I don't know anything that has done more harm on the mission field than the American dollar.

It'd be wonderful if we could just take the dollar out of things. If we could do that, what really is of God would still go on tomorrow. It really would.

It's worse than you know. Let me tell you that. It's worse than you know.

There's nothing like the life of faith. I'll tell you what. In the life of faith, I look to the Lord.

He tells me what he wants to have done and then he provides for it. That's a thrill. That's a thrill.

I don't like to use human illustrations. But when the commentary came out first, we published the first edition of the commentary. And that year we needed, I think we needed \$10,000.

I never breathed that to a single soul. We needed \$10,000 to pay the printer. I don't get gifts for \$10,000 and I don't need them and I don't want them.

You know what I mean? That year \$10,000 came rolling in from people who didn't even know of the need. The next year it didn't come in, praise the Lord, because we didn't need it. Do you think that? Does it work? I tell you, after you talk to the average person in the denominations, it's a trick.

It's done with mirrors. It's not a trick. It's not done with mirrors.

It's real. They say it would never work. It works.

You can't argue against a fact. When I really am serving the Lord by faith, He delivers me from doing things that might be my idea but might not be His idea. I like what Hudson Taylor, he said, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's resources.

That's right, too. God's work done in God's way will never lack God's resources. So when Paul uses the expression carnal weapons, he's not talking about guns and bombs and rockets and all the rest.

He's talking about money and manipulating people. A lot of that goes on. Manipulating people.

Psychological manipulation of people. The prosperity doctrine. You send \$1,000 to my program and God will send you \$2,000.

The carnal person makes time judgments instead of eternity judgments. He's thinking of time. He's thinking of this world all the time.

And the use of his possessions and the use of his time. They say the man who has the most toys wins. I say it's time to put away the toys.

Get serious about the things of God. And that's what Steve was saying, chapter 3 and 4. Time to put away the toys. And the use of his leisure time.

Years ago I was asked to take the funeral of Fred Elliott up in Portland. Fred Elliott was the father of Jim Elliott, one of the martyrs of Ecuador. He's a man of God.

Jim said he didn't know what deism meant, but he knew God. And I'd rather know God than know what deism means. Wouldn't you? Anyway, as Fred's body was laid out there in the casket, his Bible was here.

His hands were clasped over the Bible. Very appropriate. Very appropriate.

He's a man of God. Dear friend, when your body is laid out in the casket, what would you like to have in the casket with you? It's a good question, isn't it? Would you like to have a bank book? Would you like to

have a golf club? We could arrange that. Would you like to have a remote control? We could arrange that.

It would be very, very good. Very good to do this. What a testimony, huh? I like that Bible.

You can put that in my casket if the Lord doesn't come. This man makes time judgments instead of eternity judgments. And I ask you today, a lot of the judgments we make, what difference will it make a hundred years from today? Here's a man that he can tell you about a baseball player.

I don't even know how to pronounce his name. Onus Wagner or Onus Wagner. What is it? Onus? Onus Wagner.

Okay. And people know this by memory. Lifetime batting average of .327. Lifetime on base percentage .391. Wagner led the league in a major offensive category 37 times in his career.

He led the league in fielding average four times in his career. He's the best player in the league nine times in his career. I say, what difference does it make? And people memorize that.

They can tell you scores ten years ago. Carnality, really. To be occupied with those things in a world where millions of people die daily of starvation and half the world has not heard of man's only hope.

I'm having kind of a spiritual battle with a young fellow right now. He's giving his life to Semitic languages, Akkadian. And I say, what difference? And he was speaking, preach the word.

He didn't say preach Akkadian languages. Preach the word. That really counts.

Plenty for pleasure but little for Jesus. Time for the world with its troubles and toys. No time for Jesus' work.

Feeding the hungry, lifting lost souls to eternity's joys. His perishing, perishing heart, how they call us. Bring us your savior.

Oh, tell us of him. We are so weary, so heavily laden. With long weeping, our eyes have grown dim.

It's about time we got serious other things going on. I think of a conference like this. A lot of work to be done in a conference like this.

Would you like to help? I want to tell you something. Everything that's done in a conference like this is tabulated in heaven. Some very mundane work.

And it's all going to be rewarded in a coming day. People think only platform work accounts. What nonsense.

Absolutely nonsense. My God is a good record keeper. And nothing ever done in his name and is unto him will fail to lose its reward.

This man, Kyle Mann, makes sight judgments instead of faith judgments. It's quite a difference, isn't it? When you're looking through the human eye and looking through the eyes of things. Which is more exciting? A game in the Astrodome or a prayer meeting? Well, I guess you know which is the most exciting.

Where the people are, huh? Only if you look through natural eyes is it more exciting. Who is greater? Presidents of the United States or the elder in your local assembly? That depends on what kind of eyes you're looking through. If you're looking through the eyes of faith, the elder in the local assembly is far more important.

Far more important. Which is greater? The greatest kingdom or country in the world or the smallest, most despised gathering of God's people? It depends on what kind of eyes you're looking through, doesn't it? A carnal man looks through the eyes of flesh. He makes his judgments on that basis.

Paul said, we walk by faith and not by sight. We see things the way Christ sees them, not the way our fellow men see them. The carnal man makes appearance judgments instead of character judgments.

I don't know. I'm sure you've all followed the O.J. Simpson case and you've seen pictures of a fellow named Mark Furman. What a handsome man.

Every hair in place. Immaculately dressed. I'd like to have that guy for a friend, you know? Would you? Would you? Read about the tapes.

Some of the conversation in there. Someone for a friend. I'd like him to witness to him.

So, Jesus said, judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment. You can't judge a book by its cover. It might not even have a cover and yet be a great book.

And you can't judge a used car by the paint job either, can you? Some of you found that out. I did. The carnal person makes body judgments instead of spirit judgments.

The carnal person emphasizes the body. A carnal person might be better known in the beauty salon than in the prayer meeting. I think of food.

When I think of that, I think of Esau. Poor guy. Comes in from the hunt and he's starving.

He's not going to die if I don't get something to eat. Well, I guess some of us have said that too. It's a slight exaggeration.

It's a figure of speech known as hyperbole. He wasn't going to die. He was so hungry that he was willing to give up the birthright for a bowl of chili.

And he got his chili. He lost the birthright and he was hungry two hours later. What a stupid decision, if you don't mind my saying so.

If he had had the birthright... The birthright is a spiritual thing, you know what I mean? It's a spiritual thing. He would have been the head of his tribe. He would have been an ancestor of the Messiah.

He would have been the line of the Messiah. He would have had a double portion of the inheritance. It's a spiritual thing, mostly.

He didn't care for spiritual things. That's why in Hebrew he's called a profane fellow. A profane fellow.

He made body judgments. A bowl of chili worth more than a spiritual reality. The carnal person, for him or her, life revolves around food and clothing.

His life is all kitchen and no chapel. He caters to the body, which in a few short years will be eaten by worms. The Lord hasn't come.

That's all he cares about, the body. He feeds his body that starves his soul. He's careful to brush his teeth three times a day.

Too bad he didn't pray that often. It would do a lot more good for him. The carnal man makes self-judgments instead of others' judgments.

He's not interested in others. So the world is perishing. It doesn't seem to affect him at all.

He's not interested in the salvation of others. He just coops himself up in his own little world and doesn't want anything to interfere with his comfort or ease or pleasure. It wasn't the spirit of the Apostle Paul.

It certainly wasn't the spirit of our Savior. It certainly wasn't the war cry of the Apostle Paul. Others, Lord, yes, others, let this my motto be.

Help me to live for others that I might live like thee. That's the speech of the spiritual man. If the carnal man doesn't witness, he doesn't try to win others to the Lord.

I'd be ashamed. Ashamed of Jesus. Ashamed of Jesus.

Can it be a mortal man ashamed of thee? Is he ashamed of thee whom angels praise and whose glory shines through endless days? Ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend. And know when I blush, be this my shame, that I no more revere his name. How recently have you spoken to somebody about the Lord Jesus? Try it.

Carry some cracks in your pocket. Have them there for ridiculous, you know. Maybe you can't say very much.

Maybe it's not an opportune time to say a great deal, but at least give a crack or a piece of Christian literature. A carnal person, of course, he doesn't have victory over sin. When I say he, he or she, you know, I haven't found a pronoun yet that does for either, you know, for both sexes.

The Germans have a good word, Geschwester. It means brother, sister. It can be used for either, you know.

Doesn't have victory over sin. Likes to flirt with temptation. You know, likes to get that idea in his mind and likes to just turn it over as a sweet morsel, you know.

Insensitive to sin in his life. I was really... It's funny how you can read passages of Scripture and not realize what they're saying. And in that connection, I was reading in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 15.

Would you all turn to that, please? 1 Corinthians 6, verse 15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Boy, that's terrific, you know. Your bodies are members of Christ.

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, he says, shall become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body. But he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Do you know what Paul is saying there? You'll have to shock you out of your puke today.

He's saying, you say you're a Christian? You say you're indwelt by the Holy Spirit? When you're committing immorality, what's the Holy Spirit doing? You say you're indwelt by Christ? When you're committing sin, what's Christ doing? That's really what that passage of Scripture is saying. Sometimes we get so used to it, we don't get the force of what Paul is saying. It's rather solemn, isn't it? Turn it to prayer.

Lord Jesus, help me to remember every moment of the day that my body is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Do you do that? Have a life of purity. Have a life of purity.

I can see that you're all solemnized by that. We should be solemnized by it. Or maybe there's somebody, and I'm proud that I've never committed adultery, you know.

No? Look on a woman with lust in your heart. You've already committed it in your heart. I'm proud that I haven't committed murder.

No, don't be too proud. Anger is murder. Anger is murder in germ form.

It really is. I was in Scotland in August, and years ago in Scotland there was a man known as the Duke of Hamilton, and he was a vicious guy. He cleared people off the land.

He would just drive peasants off their land, and he took over the land. And strangely enough, there's still a statue of the Duke of Hamilton somewhere in Scotland, and there's been a great agitation to wreck the statue, get it down. One man said, no, leave it there.

He said, I want it there as a reminder of how much I hate the man. Well, you don't have a statue to nurse anger in your heart. You don't have to have a statue to nurse anger in your heart.

And it's there much of the time. You know, the carnal person doesn't have the resources to stand in the trials and testings of life. He really doesn't.

He's lived his life for himself, for the body. He's made all of these time judgments instead of eternity judgments. And then the storm comes, and the winds blow, and the rains come down.

This house is built upon the sand, and it crashes. He has to have entertainment. He's a real couch potato.

This poor man, he knows TV personalities better than he knows his own family. What a tragedy. And he doesn't practice separation from the world.

He's what Macintosh called a world-borderer, like Lott. What a tragedy. No soldier on active duty entangles himself in the affairs of this life.

The key word there is entangles. You have to be occupied with some of the affairs of this life. I mean, you have to go to the grocery store, to go to the butcher.

He may be an adulterer, but you can't help that. You still have to have some contact with the world. The idea is entangle himself in the affairs of this world.

A sister came up to me at the end of a meeting in Pennsylvania, and she said, you'd be a better Christian if you vote for Bush. I call that entangling yourself in the affairs of this world. I said, dear sister, I gave up on politics years ago.

If politics could solve the world's problems, why didn't the apostles resort to politics? Why didn't Jesus resort to politics? Politics, by its very nature, is a system of compromise. That's all it is. You can't go by divine principles and be a politician in this country.

You see, Christians are involved in the politics of this world. Lord, deliver us. There are more important things to be done than that.

The carnal person doesn't practice separation from the world, which makes me ask this question of myself. You might like to ask it too. How is my life different from the lives of my neighbors? They're watching me.

They're looking at me all the time. If they say, well, you're no different than we are, why should they want to become a Christian? It's really the life that counts, isn't it? Now, what a wonderful thing it is to see a life of purity. We had a young fellow in our assembly recently, and he worked for a big ice cream company, and they wanted him to fudge on some of the tests that were made, and he wouldn't do it.

Of course, the Lord provided him a better job. That's typical of the Lord, isn't it? Provided him a better job than that. But he would not compromise when an ethical principle was at stake, and he had to go.

I'll tell you, it's wonderful. I think it's a great thrill when a Christian can do that, because we don't have tomatoes thrown at us. We don't have stones thrown at us.

It's wonderful to be able to do something like that in the name of Christ. I think it's a wonderful, wonderful privilege. The carnal man has a shallow prayer life.

A shallow prayer. Probably just has a ritual prayer that he prays constantly. This man talks big, but his life doesn't correspond.

He talks cream, but his life is skimmed milk. He tends to be critical and complaining. Do you have a problem with that? Critical and complaining.

Some people feel they have a talent for criticism. Well, that's a talent that God would like you to hide in the ground. It really is.

Just hide that one in the ground. I want to tell you, friends, it's a sin to complain. Really, it's a sin to complain.

I remember Mr. Sheldrake saying, whenever I'm tempted to complain, I just thank the Lord I'm not in hell, because that's where I ought to be. Yeah, that's a good solution, isn't it? Just thank God you're not in hell. That's where you should be.

In Scotland, there was an old man there in the assembly in Motherwell. One day I went in and he said, How are you, Brother Waddle? He said, Should a living man complain? I said, Where'd you ever get that?

He said, In the Bible. Sure enough, it's in the book of Jeremiah.

It's not the whole verse, but he took a little out of context. What it really says is, Should a living man complain when he's punished for his sin? But he put the period in a little ahead of time. That's okay.

I think that's fine. Should a living man complain? We had a brother in Chicago years ago, Jim Humphrey. If you said to him, How are you, Brother Jim? He'd say, Be a sin to complain.

Be a sin to complain. We had a dear brother, a young brother in our training program one year. He had melanoma.

We used to go over every noon to his place, sing with him, pray with him, have a time of fellowship with him. I remember going in one time, and I knew he was suffering. I said to him, How is it, Rob? He said, I don't want to complain.

And he didn't. He didn't. From the time that the Lord took him home to heaven, he didn't complain.

When you're tempted to complain, think about what other people are going through. I tell you, no matter what you might be going through, there are other people going through a lot worse. This carnal man is a self-centric man.

He may be very gifted. He may have great gift, yet he parades it ostentatiously, proud and arrogant. As you know, one of the things you can be sure with a carnal man, things don't click in his life.

They don't click. The gears don't mesh. He buys a car, it's a lemon.

He buys a house, the roof leaks. No matter what he touches, problems connected with it. Life just seems to go from one crisis to another, and he's depending on other people to bail him out.

Often times he mooches off other people. Is there any hope? Of course there's hope. Hope and confession.

Getting before the Lord and saying, Lord, this is me. This is a full-length portrait of what I am, what I've been doing. But I confess it as sin, and I turn my back on it, and I just want to rededicate my life to you.

Take this life. Let it be consecrated, Lord. You start making eternity judgments.

You start making faith judgments. You start judging everything by how it appears in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ. This afternoon in the will of God, we'll talk about the marks of a spiritual man.

Of course, in some cases, in many places, it's just the opposite of what we've been talking about this morning. May the Lord bless his word to our hearts. Shall we pray? Father, we feel so keenly today how your word is a sharp two-edged sword.

How it does expose the inmost thoughts of our hearts. No book has ever exposed us to ourselves like your word. I would just pray that you'll speak to all of our hearts today, speaker included, to deliver us from these foolish judgments that we make in the flesh and help us, as we've said, to see things through the eyes of Christ.

We know it will make all the difference in the world. We ask it in his worthy name, giving him the glory. Amen.

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