

disciples. Discipleship is not essential to salvation, security, or assurance. The following words are from a professor of theology of Dallas Theological Seminary:

You accept Christ as your Savior and you are ready for heaven regardless of how you live. You accept Christ as your Lord and you are ready to live the Christian life. Carnal Christians are ready for heaven but not ready to live the Christian life.

(5) The two classifications of Christians are clearly distinctive and opposite. It is a simple matter to know (1) whether you are in the spiritual category and (2) if you are in the spiritual category exactly when and how you got into this group.

### Where Did The "Carnal Christian" Doctrine Originate?

The basic idea goes all the way back through church history. However, this doctrine is being defined in different terms and has taken on new strength in our generation. The *Scofield Reference Bible* (published in 1909) gave the teaching creditability and was probably the most significant factor in its spread. A single footnote in that Bible (first edition, p 1213) provides the supposed foundation of the whole Carnal Christian concept.

Paul divides men into three classes: *psuchikos*, "of the senses" (James 3:15; Jude 19), or "natural," i.e., the Adamic man, unrenewed through the new birth (John 3:3,5); *pneumatikos*, "spiritual," i.e., the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God (Eph 5:18-20); and *sarkikos*, "carnal," "fleshly," i.e., the renewed man, who walking "after the flesh," remains a babe in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-4).

The phrase "after the flesh" used to describe a Carnal Christian is obviously lifted from Romans 8:4,5,13. However, Scofield's use of it makes it say the *opposite* of what Paul intended in Romans 8. Paul emphatically states in those verses that any man who "minds," "walks," or "lives" after the flesh *will perish*. He said plainly, "**if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die**" (Rom 8:13). Does that sound like a "renewed man...walking after the flesh"? No. It's an unregenerate man, a natural man, a lost man! Another footnote of Mr. Scofield on Romans 7:14:

"Carnal" = "fleshly" is Paul's word for the Adamic nature and for the believer who "walks," i.e., "lives under the power of it."

What is a Carnal Christian according to the *Scofield Reference Bible*? A Carnal Christian is a renewed man who "walks after the flesh." What does "walks" mean? It means nothing less than "living under the power" of the Adamic nature. Stated another way, a Carnal Christian is a Spirit-born, blood-washed, justified, adopted child and saint of the most high God who walks, that is, he lives, under the power and control of the Adamic nature. That is no caricature. That is precisely what the Carnal Christian doctrine says. A man can be totally

committed to obey the Adamic nature and still be born again and secure in Christ. Seriously, *what kind of salvation is that?* Where is the freedom and liberty won by the Redeemer in His battle with sin and Satan (John 8:32,36)? Where is the power and life infused by the Holy Spirit in His mighty work of regeneration? This is not a salvation *from sin*. It's a salvation *in sin*. The very essence of biblical salvation is expressed in the angel's announcement that Jesus would "save His people *from their sins*" (Matt 1:21). Carnal Christian salvation is security and assurance *in sin* and makes Christ a minister of *unrighteousness* instead of righteousness.

It will do no good for those who teach this doctrine to cry, "*You grossly misrepresent us. We never teach that Christians should be carnal, in fact, the whole purpose of our preaching is to plead with them to accept Christ as Lord of their lives so that they will become spiritual. We promote spirituality, not carnality.*" No, my friend, you don't! You may think you promote spirituality, and it may be your sincere desire to encourage more holy living, but you are still *apostles of carnality*. Whatever the intention may be, the result of this most unbiblical doctrine has been disastrous. The Catholic Church may say that the confessional box and indulgences are an attempt to restrain sin, but history proves she has actually encouraged sin and hindered holiness by those awful practices. The modern Carnal Christian doctrine is just as wicked as Tetzal selling indulgences for sins before they were ever committed. The Carnal Christian doctrine gives the same license to sin.

Some true saints may have been raised to a new joy in Christ by elements of truth in the "higher life" teaching, but hundreds of others have been given carnal security to continue in sin. It is impossible to plead for a second type of Christian without protecting the assurance and security of the first type. Practical sanctification and holy living cannot be preached as "optional" without giving iron-clad assurance that *unholy* living and true salvation are perfectly compatible as long as an individual has mentally "accepted Christ." Hear a famous advocate of the Carnal Christian doctrine:

If you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, then the Holy Spirit, as we have already seen, has come to take up residence within your spirit, and you have been born again and God has set His seal upon you as His child. But if that old Adamic nature, the flesh, still dominates your soul and monopolizes your personality by coloring your thinking, sparking your ambitions, capturing your affections and subtly persuading your will into submission to its claims upon you, then you are a Carnal Christian (Major Ian Thomas, *If I Perish...I Perish*; Zondervan Publishing).

There is no possibility that the Carnal Christian was never really saved. There is no suggestion that he

should examine himself to see if his professed conversion was real. There is no warning or admonition that to continue in a carnal state may be disastrous. They say that to do this is to preach salvation by works.

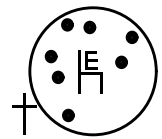
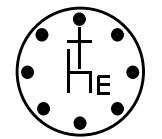
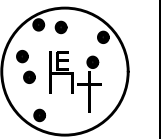
Major Thomas assures us that sin can "dominate our soul and monopolize our personality," but that in no way means we are to question our salvation. Don't let bondage to sin cause you any alarm about your soul's security. You have "received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer" (*True, He is a Redeemer that leaves you a victim and slave of sin!*). "The Holy Spirit has taken up residence in you" (*True, He never made one bit of difference in your heart and life!*). "God has set His seal upon you as His child" (*True, no one can see any evidence of it at all!*). How glorious! Redeemed by the Son of God, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, justified and adopted by the Father - all of this and not one whit different than a *lost sinner!* A slave of sin but nonetheless sure of God's stamp of acceptance! Dominated by the Adamic nature but assured of being the temple of the Holy Spirit! Again, those who teach this Carnal Christian doctrine may not deliberately intend to encourage this, but that is what they are doing whether they realize it or not.

The illustration below is taken from: *Have You Made the Wonderful Discovery of the Spirit-filled Life?* (Campus Crusade). It graphically sets forth the basic premise of the whole

**The Bible says that there are three kinds of people:**

*"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Cor 2:14-3:3).*

<b>Natural Man</b>	<b>Spiritual Man</b>	<b>Carnal Man</b>
Fear, Worry Gross sin	Peace, Power Joy, Purpose	Fear, Worry Gross sin

† = Christ                      H = Throne or Control Center  
 E = Ego or finite self        ● = Various interests in life

Which of these three diagrams represents your life? Would you like to know how you can become a Spiritual Man right now? There are four basic truths involved in understanding how to become a Spiritual Man, filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Carnal Christian doctrine. As you can see, "The Bible says" refers to one text of Scripture (1 Cor 2:14-3:3). This is their "biblical proof" for this doctrine. This one portion of the Bible supposedly identifies *three* classes of people.

A careful examination of the three circles depicting the three classes of people demonstrates the basic error of the whole doctrine. The circle depicts one's life. The chair in the center of the circle represents the throne or control center of the individual's life. The "E" is the real person - the "ego or finite self." The cross is the symbol for Christ. The dots are the various interests, goals, and pursuits in life. Notice that Christ bears three distinctly different relationships to the three kinds of people.

**The Natural Man:** Christ, represented by the cross, is outside of the life of the natural man. This man is unsaved. He is under the control of "E" or self. Scattered around the circle in a disorganized manner are dots that picture the meaningless, disorganized life of the man who has rejected Christ and has chosen to run his own life.

**The Spiritual Christian:** The second picture shows all the dots placed in perfect symmetry. Christ is on the throne. "E" is still part of the person (it is inside the circle), but has been displaced as ruler.

**The Carnal Christian:** It is no accident that the third circle is identical to the first circle in every detail except one. One may be tempted to think the artist was lazy or the layout person wanted to skimp by using the same figure twice. Such is not the case. The dots are identical and in the same position in order to show that the life, habits, desires, etc., of the Carnal Christian *are the same as the natural man!* What is being shown is that the specific characteristics of both the natural man and the carnal man *are identical*. The only difference in these two circles is the position of the cross. In the first circle Christ is outside of the life, and in the third circle Christ is just inside the circle but "E" is still on the throne. In other words, there need be no basic change in a person's mind, heart, will, or life as a result of being born again. Both the natural man and the Carnal Christian are controlled by the same sins. Here is a list of the attributes or characteristics of a Carnal Christian:

Fruitless witness for Christ, poor prayer life, no desire for Bible study, disobedient to God, legalistic life, impure thoughts, jealousy, worry, controlled by self, self seeking, doubt, critical spirit, defeat, wrong doctrine, frustration, aimlessness and envy (Bill Bright, *Have You Made the Discovery of the Spirit-filled Life?*, Campus Crusade, p 7).

The only difference between the person described in that quotation and a lost man is that the "Carnal Christian" has made a mental decision to believe that Jesus

is a real person who died on the cross. That is what it means to “accept Jesus as your Savior” and be “eternally secure in Christ.”

It would be impossible to build a better bomb shelter for carnality and give a sense of security to men in sin. Carnal Christians who “live under the power of the Adamic nature” cannot be encouraged to become Spiritual Christians without condoning carnality. Whether they admit it or not, the preachers who set forth this Carnal Christian doctrine are directly responsible for the arrogant assurance of many lawless *professing* Christians who have *no* marks of grace. They are teaching that carnality can rule in a man’s life as *king* while that man *denies* Jesus as King, and in spite of that, that man is still saved, secure, and certain of heaven. They are teaching that Jesus is willing to be your Savior from the penalty of sin and at the same time He will allow you to reject Him as rightful Lord and King. That kind of a message cannot be preached without many people believing and living out in practice such a monstrous contradiction! The Carnal Christian is bound for heaven even though he lives like the devil! These Carnal Christian preachers are producing a generation of people who sincerely believe they can *serve sin* in this life and still have glory and happiness in the next!

### Why Do We Reject The “Carnal Christian” Doctrine?

It hardly seems necessary to list specific reasons for rejecting such a non-biblical doctrine. Nonetheless, the following are some of the more obvious objections to this false teaching.

(1) It directly opposes what the Scriptures teach on the subject. Nowhere in the Bible is there a suggestion of three kinds of people (except 1 Peter 4:18, but there the sinners are divided into two classes). The Bible divides men as righteous and wicked, saved and lost, believer and unbeliever, sheep and goats, children of darkness and children of light, etc. God’s Word knows nothing of a creature that looks and lives like those in one category but possesses the nature and benefits of those in the opposite group.

(2) It breaks an important rule of biblical interpretation. A passage of Scripture must never be used as a foundation for a doctrine unless that passage is specifically dealing with that doctrine. Most certainly a non-doctrinal passage cannot be used to contradict a passage where that specific doctrine is the subject of discussion. 1 Corinthians 3 is not a doctrinal passage and by no stretch of the imagination can it be thought of as providing the foundation of the doctrine of sanctification. Yet this is exactly what the Carnal Christian

teachers do with these verses. Examine Romans 8, where security and sanctification are the subjects being dealt with, and see what happens to every person who is dominated by carnality.

(3) It leads to “security in sin” and spiritual pride. The moment you are sure you are a Spiritual Christian, you can be sure you are not. Where is the dividing line between the classes? How does one test his heart in this classification? Can one be proud that he is no longer a Carnal Christian and still be a Spiritual Christian?

(4) It denies what is (1) recorded of every Bible hero, (2) imprinted on the heart of every honest Christian, and (3) the uniform experience of the greatest saints in history; namely, that every Christian is carnal and every Christian is spiritual, and that no Christian is sinlessly perfect. It may well be that a believer is the most spiritual when he feels the most carnal, and vice versa.

(5) It divides what God has joined together by separating justification from sanctification. These two are most certainly different. They may be isolated in order to be better studied and understood, but they cannot be separated in experience. He whose justification does not lead to practical sanctification has never been justified; and he who attempts to earn, or keep, his justification by means of sanctification knows nothing of the free and sovereign grace of God that “justifieth the ungodly” (Rom 4:4,5).

The heart of this awful error is what may be called “optional” sanctification. They say that living a holy life to the glory of God in obedience to Christ is merely an option. But the Bible teaches no such thing. God’s Word teaches that every person born of God’s Spirit possesses a holy heart (not a sinless life) that desires to please God. “Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). This is not an option for Christians; it’s a command that’s obeyed by every saved person. It depicts the character of all of God’s children. “Sin shall not have dominion over you” (Rom 6:14). This is not a promise to be claimed by faith; it’s the actual experience of every child of grace. Sin doesn’t rule and reign over them because of the promise and power of Christ to deliver every sinner who trust in Him for salvation – “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

What is being taught by these Carnal Christian teachers is that the Lord *desires* His people to live holy lives, that God *wants* you to please Him, and that you will be better off if you do please Him, *but it’s optional*. It has nothing to do with your salvation or security. Living a holy life is like a CD player or air conditioning in your

car. It’s “an option.” It’s not essential as far as the car getting you where you want to go. It merely makes the trip more enjoyable. Even so, God desires you to be a Spiritual Christian because you’ll be happier now and you’ll have more rewards when your “works” are judged at the judgment seat of Christ, but it’s optional and has nothing to do with whether you get to heaven or not.

The Bible teaches just the opposite – “**To be carnally minded is death...If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die**” (Rom 8:6,13). That doesn’t sound very optional to me. How dare anyone say that what Paul really means is: “To be carnally minded is to lose all your rewards and still be saved yet so as by fire.” I say again, these Carnal Christian preachers, regardless of their sincerity, are *apostles of carnality*. God speaks plain in His Word about all of those who are called by His grace, born of His Spirit, washed in the blood of Christ, and bound for glory:

- “**He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him**” Hebrews 5:9
- “**But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me**” Luke 19:27
- “**They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts**” Galatians 5:24
- “**He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him**” 1 John 2:4
- “**Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven**” Matthew 7:21
- “**Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure**” 1 John 3:3
- “**As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**” Romans 8:14
- “**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish**” John 10:27,28

—Adapted from the writings of John G. Reisinger

## “CARNAL” CHRISTIAN?

According to the Carnal Christian doctrine, there are two types of Christians – the *Carnal Christian* and the *Spiritual Christian*. These have different characteristics that are clearly seen. Every Christian is in one of these two categories, and according to those who teach this doctrine, it is not difficult to know whether you are a *Spiritual* or a *Carnal* Christian.

One of the strange things about this teaching is that it is far easier to see the difference between a *Carnal* and a *Spiritual* Christian than it is to see the difference between a *Carnal Christian* and a *lost person*. This amazing fact alone ought to be enough to warn any thinking person that something is wrong. There are several other things that are basic to the Carnal Christian teaching that should cause us to be skeptical.

(1) Both the Carnal and Spiritual Christians are genuine believers even though the Carnal Christian acts exactly like a lost person. The Carnal Christian is just as “eternally secure” and sure for heaven as the Spiritual Christian in spite of the fact that their lifestyles are radically different.

(2) The Carnal Christian’s assurance and safety is not connected to, or to be examined by, the fruits of a holy life. He knows for sure he is saved because he has “accepted Jesus as his Savior,” which actually means he has *professed* to have accepted Christ. Regardless of how the man may live, he is to be assured he is “eternally secure” if he has “asked Jesus to come into his heart.”

(3) A man may live and die as a Carnal Christian and still go to heaven, even if he has never bowed to Christ as *Lord*. This person will suffer losses of rewards (either in heaven or the “millennium”) of a greater or lesser degree, but he need not fear for his soul’s salvation.

(4) A whole-hearted turning from all known sin is not demanded. The necessity of repentance is not to be preached to lost sinners, since doing so would deny grace and bring in works and merit. Christ as “Savior” is the message to sinners, and this must not be confused with Christ as “Lord” which is the message to believers in order for them to become disciples. In the Carnal Christian doctrine, being a Christian and being a disciple is not the same thing. Becoming a true Christian does not involve a person bowing to Christ as Lord. When a Christian “accepts Christ as his Lord,” which is usually at a later date, it is at that point that the Christian becomes a disciple of Christ. Not all true Christians are

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