



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

Vol. 12 No. 30

LORD’S DAY 27 JULY 2008

CARNAL CHRISTIANS; DO THEY EXIST?

The term ‘carnal Christian’ was popularised by Bill Bright in the 1970s and is a familiar concept specially emphasised by certain well-known ministries. But what does it signify? The essence of the ‘carnal Christian’ theory is that after you become a Christian you have another choice. You can either grow in grace, follow the Lord and become a spiritual Christian; or you can remain a babe in Christ and live like natural unregenerate men. This theory implies that everyone belongs to one of three categories, as follows: First, there are those who are not spiritually regenerate, who can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God (John 3:1-8). Second, there are born-again Christians who are not walking with the Lord but are ‘still carnal’ (1 Corinthians 3:3) and walk ‘after the flesh’ (a mis-application of Romans 8:4). Third, there are born-again Christians who are in Christ, who walk in the Spirit and enjoy full communion with God. According to this teaching, therefore, there are two categories of Christians — those who walk after the flesh and those who walk in the Spirit.

Behaving like the unconverted

Clearly we should have no problem with the first category — the unconverted. Not being believers, they do ‘the works of the flesh’ and cannot bear ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:17-24; Romans 8:1-9). The problem arises when we divide born-again believers into two categories — converted sinners who are spiritual and those who live as ‘carnal Christians’. This teaching arises from a wrong understanding of 1 Corinthians 3 — ‘For you are still carnal. When there is envy, strife and division among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?’ Let us understand that Paul’s concern here is not to describe two *kinds* of Christian, carnal and spiritual, but rather to show the ‘carnality’ (unspirituality) of division in the church. The wider aim of this chapter is to teach the members of this young church that believers ought not to conduct themselves carnally like those who are unconverted. In chapter one of this epistle Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus’ (v.2); are recipients of ‘the grace of God’ (v.4); and ‘are enriched by [Christ] in all utterance, and in all knowledge’ (v.5). That being so, how can they act like babes and unregenerate men? Accordingly, Paul rebukes them sternly in chapter 3. We must note that every true believer may behave carnally in times of spiritual weakness and unwatchfulness. This is the result of the sin that still indwells the believer (Romans 7:14-24; 1 John 1:8-9). But this is not the same as saying that there are two different *kinds* of believer in the kingdom of Christ. What harm will the ‘carnal Christian’ theory do to us? Let me mention five things.

Misinterpreting Scripture

Firstly, it encourages the misuse of Scripture. To accept this teaching ‘is to violate a...

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cardinal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, namely, that each single passage must be interpreted in the light of the whole' (E. C. Reisinger, *The carnal Christian*, p.12).

Going back to 1 Corinthians, Paul has only two distinct groups in mind — the 'natural' and 'spiritual'. He defines these clearly in 2:14-15: 'The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him: nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things ...'

The 'natural man' here refers to those who are outside Christ's kingdom, who do not have the Spirit of Christ. The 'spiritual man' is the one in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells. That is all. You will not find a *class of believers* called 'carnal Christians' in any of Paul's epistles, nor anywhere else in Holy Scripture.

Denying the new covenant

Secondly, to teach that there are two kinds of believers is to tear apart the basic blessings of the new covenant. The new covenant is that 'better covenant' which Christ has established (Hebrews 8:6-12) and it has two inseparable parts — the forgiveness of sins and a changed heart *on which God has written his laws* ('a heart of flesh', Ezekiel 36:24-27). Forgiveness comes through justification by God and faith in Jesus Christ, and is accompanied by sanctification, which can be expressed as 'walking in the Spirit'. Scripture teaches that salvation and sanctification go hand in hand. This is a cardinal feature of the new covenant in Christ's blood — and to deny it is to do violence to the gospel.

Blurring distinctions

Thirdly, 'carnal Christian' teaching blurs the difference between true saving faith and the spurious belief against which we are constantly warned in Scripture. This confusion can lead people to believe that as long as they have 'invited Christ into their lives' or 'accepted Christ as their Saviour', they necessarily possess saving faith. Simon the sorcerer is a good example of one who believed but whose faith was later found to be hollow — he had 'neither part nor portion' in God's Holy Spirit. This can be seen in his request for prayer (Acts 8:24) when he asks to be spared the consequence of sin rather than for pardon of his sin. Professing believers who lack saving faith are revealed by the way they live and act. True faith will be accompanied by repentance — 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin, live any longer in it?' (Romans 6:1-2).

Lacking assurance

Fourthly, it will give rise to a lack of assurance of salvation. Those who rely on this theory to justify a carnal lifestyle can never be sure whether they are saved — because the Bible teaches that Christian conduct has everything to do with assurance of salvation.

The apostle John, for example, stresses that the avoidance of sin is a mark that accompanies the new birth (1 John 2:15-16; 5:18). He shows us that those who are true believers will not be comfortable with the ways of the world. Jesus himself makes it clear that there is a close relationship between assurance and obedience — 'If anyone loves me he will keep my word' (John 14:23). The writer to the Hebrews declares likewise, 'Pursue ... holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14).

Robbing Christ of lordship

Finally, 'carnal Christian' teaching robs Christ of his lordship, because it allows professing believers to take Christ as Saviour but not submit to him as Lord. It is impossible for true...

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believers to have Christ to save them from sin but not to direct them in the path of holiness and righteousness. We cannot separate Jesus' roles as Saviour and Lord, for the Scripture declares, 'there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11). When sinners truly receive Christ in their hearts, they do receive him as Lord. Paul reiterates this truth in Colossians 2:6: 'As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him'. Further scriptural proof is found in Acts 2:36: 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ'. So those who desire to have Christ as their Saviour must have him also as their Lord. The Lord Jesus will either have all of your heart or none of it. He will not settle for half-hearted Christians. As for those who think they are 'spiritual', this teaching will bestow on them a false sense of spirituality. Someone aptly wrote, 'In the life of the most perfect Christian there is every day renewed occasion for self-abhorrence, for repentance, for renewed application to the blood of Christ, for application of the rekindling of the Holy Spirit' (*The carnal Christian*, p.22).

Conclusion

'Carnal Christian' teaching has been around for a long time, but Satan cleverly continues to use it to deceive. Some may hide behind a cloud of 'easy-believism' which demands nothing but an outward profession of faith; but they should beware. The cloud that conceals their empty profession will be blown away on the day of judgement — when our Lord Jesus and Saviour will say, 'Not everyone that says to me, "Lord, Lord", shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven ... I never knew you: depart from me, you who practise lawlessness' (Matthew 7:21-23). May the Lord help us to return to the Christ-centred and Spirit-empowered gospel, which not only saves but brings about a changed heart.

Pr Mok Chee Cheong

With acknowledgements to Ernest Reisinger's booklet The carnal Christian? (Banner of Truth Trust, ISBN: 9780851513898).



Family Worship at Sis Evelyn's Place

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 27/07/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 03/08/2008</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Joey Seow & family to our morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Are You Earthly Minded or Heavenly Minded?	Looking for the Saviour...	
<i>Text:</i>	Philippians 3:18-21	Philippians 3:20-21	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	
Evening			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Chairman:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mark Chen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray for Journey Mercies: Jonathan (Jul/Aug, US), Josh & Hannah (Jul/Aug, UK & Europe), Evelyn (Jul/Aug, Ghana), Sophia & Grace (Jul-Sep, Singapore), Rachel (Singapore & China), Constance (Aug/Sep, US), Daniel & Maureen, Anthony & Helen (Aug/Sep, Malaysia & Singapore), Chin Kiong (Aug, Singapore), Esmeralda (Aug, Singapore), Mok & Carol (Aug/Sep, Israel & Singapore). • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Mr Morton (infection), Constance (shoulder pain), Josh's grandma (stroke), Hazel (wrist injury), Ming Yann (broken rib). • Book Table: Please feel free to browse the book table for materials that are of interest to you, especially the newly-arrived <i>August issue</i> of the <i>Evangelical Times</i>. Please note that materials without price tags are free. • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok.
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	God is not Mocked	Wounds from a Friend	
<i>Text:</i>	Proverbs 24:30-34	Proverbs 27:5, 6	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Hubert	Joy	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 27/07/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 03/08/2008</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Josiah / John	Daniel / Yetta	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Carol	Hui Min	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	Catechism Class	Catechism Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 01 Aug	7.30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Prayer Meeting	
Sat 02 Aug	4.00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering:	£273.94	Lunch:	
Hospitality:	£225.00	£38.50	
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<i>Last Week (July 08 Wk 3): Psalm 139:12</i>			
Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.			
<i>This Week (July 08 Wk 4): Psalm 139:13</i>			
For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.			