

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Andrew Murray

Whitaker House



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All Scripture quotations are from the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Bible.

## **THE SPIRITUAL LIFE**

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## Chapter One

# Carnal or Spiritual

**T**hroughout the church of Christ there is a universal complaint about the Christian life, and there are thousands of souls longing to know how to lead a better life. They find in God's Word promises of perfect peace (Isa. 26:3), of a faith that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4), of a joy that is unspeakable (1 Pet. 1:8), and of a life of ever-abiding communion with Christ (John 15:4), hidden in the hollow of God's hand (Isa. 49:16) and in the secret of His pavilion (Ps. 31:20).

But, sadly, thousands say they do not know how to obtain it. In the following pages, I hope to explore the possibilities of the Christian life as God has revealed them in His Word, the hindrances that keep the majority of believers out of that life, and the steps by which we may come and take possession of it.

I want to begin by first investigating the two stages of the Christian life: the lower stage under the power of the flesh, and the stage of the true life in the power of the Spirit. Let me direct your attention to our text for this chapter:

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*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? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?* (1 Cor. 3:1-4)

In this passage you have two categories of Christians; some are spiritual and some are carnal. Paul said it was of the utmost importance, when he taught people, to find out which of the two they were; for if he gave spiritual food to the carnal it would not do them any good. “*I...could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*” You are in Christ; you are real Christians; but, unfortunately, you are feeble Christians, just like infants. “*I have fed you with milk, and not with meat.*” Some truths are just like milk, suitable for carnal Christians; other truths of God’s Word, deep spiritual truths, are for spiritual people. “*For hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal.*”

Notice that the word *carnal* appears here again. Paul said plainly, “I want you to know that you are carnal—you are believers, but you are also carnal believers—and here is the proof: ‘*for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*’” He asked the Corinthians to answer that question. The word *carnal* comes from the Latin word meaning “flesh.” If you

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do the works of the flesh, this proves that you are carnal, that you walk as men, not as children of God who lead a heavenly life. *“For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”* For the fourth time you have the word *carnal*, and for the second time, the very pointed question for them to answer: “Tell me, are you not carnal?”

In this chapter I will expound upon two points: first, what it means to be carnal instead of spiritual; secondly, the way from carnality to spirituality.

### NOT SPIRITUAL, BUT CARNAL

“You are not spiritual; you are carnal,” the apostle said. Ask yourself the question, “Am I still carnal, or am I spiritual by the grace of God?” You know a doctor cannot do you any good unless he first thoroughly diagnoses the case. He asks a number of questions, examines your lungs and heart, finds out what is wrong, and prescribes the proper medication. Likewise, until you find out what is wrong in your spiritual life, all the preaching of the most heavenly truths will do you no good. You must be brought to realize your carnal state before the knowledge of the spiritual life can be of any real benefit.

I pray that God will unveil to us the mystery of the divine truth, the mystery of our own hearts and the carnal state, and the mystery of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual life. May He give us grace to say, “Lord, search me; and if I am carnal, reveal it to me today; and open up to me the way into the spiritual life, to live as a spiritual man.”

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If we look carefully at our text from 1 Corinthians, we will find four principal marks of the carnal state. The first is that it is a state of protracted, or prolonged, infancy. It is, secondly, a state of sin and failure. The third mark of the carnal state is not the lack of spiritual gifts, but the lack of the graces of the holy life. And, fourthly, the carnal state brings an incapacity for receiving spiritual truth.

### A STATE OF PROTRACTED INFANCY

First, the carnal state is a state of protracted infancy. If I were to show you a beautiful little child, six months old, with its chubby hands and feet, you would say, "What a perfect child." But, if in three years' time that child had not grown an inch, you would conclude that something was wrong. If after six years we again found no growth, you would immediately say that the child has some terrible disease that prevents its growth, for where there is health there is growth.

Paul said the same thing to the Corinthians: you are babes in Christ. At first a Christian may be carnal, for he is young and does not know what sin is. However, when a man has been a Christian for some time, say six months, a year, three years, or even ten years, and he does not grow but remains at the same place where he started from as a babe, there is something wrong; there is some terrible disease; that disease is the carnal mind.

A Christian under the power of the flesh is in a state of protracted infancy. In the epistle to the Hebrews, it is said that after they had been Christians

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for so long, they should have been teachers, helping others, yet they still had to be fed with milk and were not able to take the meat of the full grown man (Heb. 5:12). This is a state of protracted infancy, and it is the state of the greater part of the Christian church. Many will testify that the best time of their Christian lives was the first three months after conversion. After that they began to go back; they lost their joy, and, sadly, they have never had such joy since then. They have lost their first love (Rev. 2:4). At that time they used to conquer sin, but now sin has the mastery.

What are the marks of a babe? One is that the babe cannot help himself; he has to be helped by others. The other is that he cannot help anyone else. A little baby always needs to be helped and cared for. That is how it is with many Christians. They go to church, to prayer meetings, and to conferences, and are ever seeking help from others. A Christian who cannot really help others by his spiritual experience is like a little infant, six months old, who cannot help another. Dear friends, let us test ourselves with this first mark of the carnal state, and if there is no healthy growth let us bow before God in shame.

### A STATE OF SIN AND FAILURE

Secondly, the carnal state is a state of sin and failure; it holds no victory over sin. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said, "*There is among you envying, and strife, and divisions*" (1 Cor. 3:3). Such are the works of the flesh, and their quarreling was the reason that he had to write the thirteenth chapter to them. One exalted Paul, another thought Apollos

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was the more eloquent, and another thought that Peter was older and better than either; they were divided into religious parties. They were just squabbling among themselves and had strife, division, and envy.

The fifth chapter of Galatians cites these as the works of the flesh (vv. 20–21). Many Christians have a good measure of the grace of God, yet they have never really conquered their tempers, and so when another says a sharp word to them, they give a sharp reply. How many Christians have never learned to love as God wants them to love—to love the unlovable? What does this mean except that they are still in the carnal state? The flesh has more power in them than the Spirit has. Until we confess with shame, “I am carnal,” we will not have the life of the spiritual man. May God search us and reveal our true state.

If you ask, “What is it that hinders the brightness of my life?” you will get the answer from God. Two powers are striving for mastery over you, the Spirit and the flesh; and if the Spirit is not ruling you, it is because the flesh is ruling. This is why a man gives way to pride, self-conceit, worldliness, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16): he is still in the carnal state.

Things typically get their names from their most prominent characteristics. A spiritual man gets his name from the fact that the Spirit rules in his life, even though there may still be some evidences of the flesh. You cannot be in communion with Him without feeling that the Spirit is leading, guiding, and controlling. A man is called spiritual when spirituality is his chief characteristic. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy*

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*Ghost which is in you?*” (1 Cor. 6:19). There was some evidence of the Spirit in them, but they had allowed the flesh to rule. The question comes to us, as a voice from heaven, “*Are ye not carnal?*” (1 Cor. 3:3). Worldliness, unfaithfulness, and neglect of God’s Word are but the mark of one thing—you are carnal, and you have not given yourself over wholly to live the spiritual life.

### LACKING THE GRACES OF THE HOLY LIFE

My third point is that spiritual gifts may still be found in the man in the carnal state. This is a very solemn thought, for you would think the carnal man lacks all spiritual gifts; but, in actuality, he lacks spiritual graces. This is illustrated in the case of the Corinthians. In the first chapter Paul said, “*I thank my God...that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge*” (1 Cor. 1:4–5). There were spiritual gifts among the Corinthians: gifts of prophecy, tongues, and many other remarkable gifts. Indeed, the gift of tongues was so remarkable that Paul had to warn them to be careful in their use of this gift. Yet, Paul wrote the whole epistle with one idea: that they were full of quarreling, pride, and selfishness.

A man might have the spiritual gift of preaching or be able to speak with power, and yet his private life could be filled with pride until the world says, “We don’t believe in that man. Where is his humility?” A man might be an evangelist and lead hundreds to Christ, and yet you will hear it said of him, “How selfish he is.” The world says, “We don’t believe in that man, for he is too full of himself.”

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Can it be that a man who is a powerful man in the service of God is also carnal? It can be. That is what I want to make clear to you. A man may claim the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and he may have been baptized in a Spirit of power and a Spirit of zeal, and yet that man could be terribly lacking in the graces of a holy life—in humility, gentleness, tenderness before God and man, and the meekness of the Lamb of God, which is the chief grace of the Christian life. Look at the Corinthians: they had spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, and more, yet they were unwilling to be subject to one another, and there was strife as to who should speak first.

Keep in mind that the carnal state is not reserved exclusively for those in whom there is no good. A man may be a preacher, evangelist, or Sunday school teacher, yet God may say to that man, "*Are ye not carnal?*" (1 Cor. 3:3). Yet, in the end, does his work not produce the same results as it would if he were spiritual? No. He may help another to the Christian life, but the Christian life he helps him to is so disordered that it is feeble and does not stand. The man whose inner life is under the rule of the Spirit, who is himself spiritual, will lead others to a truly spiritual life; he will impart the life of God in power. Being able to exercise spiritual gifts does not necessarily prove that we are not carnal.

### UNABLE TO RECEIVE SPIRITUAL TRUTH

Lastly, the carnal state brings an incapacity for receiving spiritual truth. Just note how distinctly Paul said this in writing to the Corinthians. In the first and second chapters he had been writing about

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himself, that Christ sent him to preach the Cross, not with human wisdom, but in the power of the Spirit. Then in the third chapter he wrote about the church, saying, "I have received the mystery of God, but I cannot tell you." (See 1 Corinthians 3:1.) Why not? Were the Corinthians stupid? No, they diligently sought wisdom, and they prided themselves in their knowledge. They were a cultured, thoughtful people, "*enriched...in all knowledge*" (1 Cor. 1:5). The wisdom of the world was beautiful in their eyes, and yet Paul said, "All your wisdom will not help you. If I were to speak spiritual truth, you would take it into a carnal mind and intellect, and it would be an injury to you."

A terrible mistake is often made at this point. Before he could write to the Corinthians, Paul had to determine if they were carnal people. He thought, "I must let them know that they are carnal and bring them to the point of realizing that they are carnal." How often in the church of Christ we preach deep spiritual truths to people who are carnal. Then these people say, "What a beautiful sermon," even though it does them very little practical good. Was the sermon not true? Was the truth of the Bible not in it? Yes, but we preached spiritual truth to carnal people. As long as a Christian is carnal, do not give him spiritual truth. You must first bring him to the point where he recognizes that he is carnal. The carnal state is incapable of receiving spiritual truth.

### FROM CARNAL TO SPIRITUAL

Paul did not want the Corinthians to rest in the carnal state. No! He wanted them to pass from carnal

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to spiritual. That is what we need, too. And the question arises: How are we to get from the one to the other? Let us note four principal steps.

### CONFESS THAT YOU ARE CARNAL

The believer must, first of all, be convicted and brought to confess that he is in the carnal state. Now, you know how a sinner must be convicted of sin before he can be converted; he must know and confess his transgressions. Likewise, before they can get into the spiritual life, believers must see that they are in a wrong state; they must be brought under conviction of the shame and evil of the carnal state. There is a great difference between the two instances of conviction. Before conversion the sinner thought, "I am lost, I am under condemnation." He was overcome with the magnitude of his transgressions and the desire to have them pardoned. However, there were two things that he was not convicted of: that his nature is utterly sinful, and that there are many sins, hidden in his heart, that he has never known.

### An Utterly Sinful Nature

This is why God brings a believer into what might be termed a second conviction. Here, he must be fully convicted of two things: the utter powerlessness of the flesh to do any good, and the mighty power of the flesh to work evil. He has the Spirit of God in him, so why does he yet do these things? Because the flesh is ruling him. It is as Paul said in Romans: "I am

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struggling to do right and I cannot.” (See Romans 7:19.) Oh, friends, when a man is brought to realize the utter powerlessness of the flesh to do good, he will finally understand why he loses his temper, why pride comes up, and why he speaks wrong words. The flesh takes him captive; the law of sin in him binds him hand and foot.

### Sins Hidden in the Heart

Then come those great hidden sins that the world so easily disregards, which are seen to be works of the flesh. The Holy Spirit convicts us of pride, unloving thoughts towards a spouse or a child, and self-pleasing before God and man. All are seen to be works of the flesh; and so a man needs an entire deliverance, different from that at conversion. At that time, he was delivered from the curse of sin. Now, he needs deliverance from the power of sin. Many in the church of Christ will have to cry, “Woe is me, wretched man that I am, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” (See Romans 7:18.) You sin simply because the flesh has power. You must find deliverance, and there is no deliverance except by becoming an entirely spiritual man.

### BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY

The second step in getting from the carnal state to the spiritual state is to believe that the spiritual life is a possibility for you. A great number of people will say that they believe in the Holy Spirit. They have no doubt about the existence of the Holy Spirit,

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and they know that He is the third person of the Godhead. They are orthodox on all these points. However, their belief is entirely intellectual. They do not believe completely in what the Holy Spirit can do in a believer every day of his life. A man must be brought to see that there is a spiritual life within his reach—a spiritual life that it is his duty to live, and a life that he needs and may claim.

There is life in the Spirit. Note such expressions as “walk in the Spirit” (see Romans 8:1), “live in the Spirit” (see 1 Peter 4:6), and “*through the Spirit...mortify the deeds of the body*” (Rom. 8:13). Just take Romans 8:1–16, in which the Holy Spirit is mentioned, and you must begin to see that God wants you to be a spiritual man. In fact, God commands us to be spiritual because He cannot bear to have us remain carnal. “*The carnal mind is enmity against God*” (v. 7). By the grace of God, just as certainly as Christ’s blood flowed for my sins, so Christ’s Spirit can lead me down into the place of absolute helplessness, where He will live in me in His divine power and renew my whole nature into the spiritual.

Brother or sister, take this step before you go further. Reach out at once, and begin in a simple act of faith to obey God’s call. Say, “O God, I believe that a spiritual life is possible for me, that I can become a spiritual man.” Let us believe that the God who gave the Holy Spirit delights in nothing more than to give the Holy Spirit to each of us to live this life. When a man is convicted of a carnal life and believes in the possibility of a spiritual life, he comes to the third step, which is to give up everything to God.

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### GIVE UP EVERYTHING

Are you willing to give up everything to have the spiritual life? This is a struggle, of course, but it must be done. Many people like simply to read about the spiritual life, but that is not enough. You must sell all that you have in order to buy the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46). Come with every sin and every folly, all your temper, everything you love, your whole life, and place it all in the possession of Christ. Die to everything, and be fully given up to God. It is only in the vessel that is fully cleansed that the Holy Spirit can do His work.

The question is often asked, "Will there be any profit in this?" Men will undertake anything that produces a return. If there is one thing that will pay, it is to give up everything for God—everything of the flesh—to become a truly spiritual man.

### COME IN FAITH AND CLAIM IT

The fourth and last step in going from carnality to spirituality is to claim, by faith, the spiritual life. When a man says, "I am willing," then he must come in faith and claim it. Faith is the key ingredient from beginning to end. When a man gives up all, he must look up at the Lord Jesus to whom the Father has given the Holy Spirit, claim the promise, and believe that he receives it. Come, bow in deep humility and submission before God, the Holy One. If you have faith in His promise, His power, His great love, and His near providence, God, who is a Spirit (John 4:24) and gives the Spirit, will make you a spiritual man in fellowship with Himself.

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May God in His mercy open your eyes to discern the two states of carnal and spiritual. If you are yet in the carnal state, may He bring you to full conviction and confession. And through you may He bring others to the acceptance of the full spiritual life, which He has provided in Christ Jesus.