

Seeking Revival

DAY 5—SPIRITUAL OR CARNAL: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

“But we have the mind of Christ.” 1 CORINTHIANS 2:16

Our Connection (ties) to Heaven

Before we talk about spiritual and carnal (fleshly) Christians, we need to remember that we are not talking about “sinners” and “non-sinners.” All people (spiritual and carnal-fleshly) are sinners and need a Savior. Our only righteousness (doing what is right) comes from Jesus. It is our personal relationship with the Holy Spirit that puts us in one group or the other. God said that we cannot break our relationship with the Holy Spirit without damaging (destroying) our connection (ties) to heaven (Matthew 12:32). Ellen White says, “God uses the Holy Spirit to work on our hearts. If people refuse the Holy Spirit, their repentance (being sorry for sins) and faith are not possible” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 322).

It is important to say again: the only person I should judge as spiritual or carnal (fleshly) is myself. God can work on other people's hearts, and He does not need or want me to judge other people. The good news is that if I do not like what God shows me in my heart, He can change me starting today!

The Spiritual Church Member

The spiritual person is a truly changed and new Christian. Although the person is born as a sinner, he is called “spiritual” because he has a living and growing relationship with the Holy Spirit. Paul writes, “The spiritual person is able to judge all things, but no one can judge him. The Scripture says: ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been able to teach him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:15, 16).

First, some questions: What is the reason for all of our problems? Do we have a spiritual problem? Could not having the Holy Spirit be the reason for our weak Christian experience? If the answer is yes, then why don't we have the Holy Spirit in our lives?

The spiritual person's life is focused on Jesus, and He leads their heart. Jesus leads his heart and guides him to put Jesus first in his life. The spiritual person gives all their heart to Jesus and keeps asking for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). Related to Laodicea (careless), the spiritual person could be called “hot” (Revelation 3:15). In the parable (good story) of the 10 virgins, the spiritual person could be called “wise” (Matthew 25:2-4). The spiritual person experiences life “more abundantly (greatly, more rich)” (John 10:10) and is filled with “everything God has for you” (Ephesians 3:19). The spiritual person is happy to be “saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Although the spiritual person experiences problems and temptations, they keep their eyes on Jesus.

The Carnal Church Member

A carnal (fleshly, sin, lusting) person may have a fake or divided relationship with God. They may not care about the Holy Spirit or may even rebel against (disobey) the Holy Spirit. Paul says: "Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as people who live by the Holy Spirit. I had to speak to you as people who were still following the ways of the world. You are not growing as Christ wants you to. You are still like babies (learning). The words I spoke to you were like milk (a new easy lesson), not like solid food (deep, hard teachings). You were not ready for solid food yet. And you still are not ready for it. You are still following the ways of the world. Some of you are jealous. Some of you argue. So aren't you following the ways of the world? Aren't you acting like ordinary (common) human beings? One of you says, "I follow Paul." Another says, "I follow Apollos." Aren't you acting like ordinary human beings?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

Here we see that our relationship (tie) with the Holy Spirit is what describes (explains) us. *Carnal* (sin, lust) describes a person who "lives by the flesh"; meaning they live by normal human strength, not by the Holy Spirit. The saddest (most sad) part is that this person has not chosen to receive eternal life (Romans 8:9).

Paul wrote to the carnal people as "brothers and sisters," which shows they were church members. He could not call them "spiritual (Christian)" because they were not filled with the Holy Spirit enough. They had not grown in faith as they should have. You can be a church member for many years and still be a carnal Christian. You can know the Bible and still not develop spiritually. Many carnal Christians feel unsatisfied (not satisfied), disappointed, or that they have no meaning (no value) in their spiritual lives. Some are lazy and say, "We are just sinners. We cannot do anything about it."

Other carnal Christians are enthusiastic (excited) and active, they may even be proud of their important positions in the church. Sadly, Jesus says, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord! Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we drive out demons in your name? Didn't we do many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them clearly, 'I never knew you (I don't know you). Go away from me, you who do evil!'" (Matthew 7:22, 23). What was the problem? They had no personal relationship (tie) with Jesus and no connection with the Holy Spirit.

If you think you are a carnal Christian, be encouraged! You can start a new life right now. Many carnal (worldly) Christians do not know they are in this weak condition, and you may already be praying for deeper faith. Jesus desires (wants) "that your joy may be full" (John 15:11), and He invites you to rest knowing you have the hope of eternal life.

Praying God's Word

We are still carnal, but there is hope.

"Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as people who live by the Holy Spirit. I had to speak to you as people who were still following the ways of the world. You are not growing as Christ wants you to. You are still like babies. The words I spoke to you were like milk, not like solid food. You were not ready for solid food yet. And you still are not ready for it. You are still following the ways of the world. Some of you are jealous. Some of you argue. So aren't you following the ways of the world? Aren't you acting like ordinary human beings?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Dear Lord, thank You for including "still" in this text because it reminds (remembers) us that we do not need to stay this way. We want You to change us today. Thank You that jealousy, fighting, and divisions are healed when we live in the Holy Spirit.

Are we asking because of carnal (sinful) reasons?

"You want something, but you do not have it. So you kill. You want what others have, but you cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not have what you want, because you don't ask God. When you do ask for something, you do not receive it. That is because you ask for the wrong reason. You want to spend your money on your sinful pleasures" (James 4:2, 3).

Dear Father, we are spiritually poor because we do not ask, or we ask with selfish, human desires. Please change our prayers and lead us by the Holy Spirit.

More Prayer Suggestions

Thanks and Praise: Give thanks for specific (exact) blessings and praise God for His goodness.

Confession: Take a few minutes for private confession (admit your sins/wrongs) and thank God for His forgiveness.

Guidance: Ask God to give wisdom for current challenges (now) and decisions.

Our Church: Ask God to bless the work of our local, regional, and world church.

Local Requests: Pray for the needs of church members, family, and neighbors.

Listen and Respond (answer): Take time to listen for God's voice and respond in praise or song.

Song Suggestions

SDA Hymnal: Amazing Grace (#108); Blessed Assurance (#462); Whiter Than Snow (#318); Redeemed (#337); The Savior is Waiting (#289). Other Songs: Change My Heart, O God; Unto Thee, O Lord; I've Been Redeemed.