

Carnal Christians

David said in Psalms 119:11, "*Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.*"

Why do we come to church? Why do we want to be ministered to by God's Word? Because it is our desire not to sin against the Lord who saved us and redeemed us. I never want to view salvation as a fire escape just to get me out of hell so I can live any way you want to in this world. Titus tells us the grace of God was not given so you can live a loose life. The grace of God was given to teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lust that we should live soberly and righteously in this present evil world. God's Word is given to us that we might not sin against God.

David was a man that exploited the grace of God. He did more things wrong than anyone else in the Old Testament. Yet David rose to be a higher and greater man than he had ever been in his life. God doesn't condone his mistakes, and neither does David, which is why he wrote over and over again to Solomon how to stay out of trouble. Even though God's grace was there to pull him out of trouble, it's a whole lot better never to be entangled to begin with to avoid having to be pulled out of a mess. God's perfect best is that we walk free from sin, free from sickness, and free from the curse that's in this world.

There are two extreme viewpoints: One says you can't help but sin. The other says you reach a point in life where you have no more temptations, no more trials, and no more testing. I wish I could find that place because I haven't found it yet. However, I can tell you when that's going to happen. That's the day when you either die physically or you get raptured out of this place!

That's the day you won't have any more problems with the flesh, but until that day you have this treasure in an earthen vessel. That means you're made out of the dust of the ground. Just as the dust of the ground received a curse into it when Adam and Eve sinned, it went into everything made out of the dust of the ground. It went into nature, into animals, into the plants, and into the body of the man and woman. Our warfare is not an internal thing, spirit with spirit. Our warfare is the inside man versus the outside man, the flesh versus the spirit man on the inside. But until the day comes when we get raptured out of here, God promised *greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.* (1 John 4:4) The man on the inside is greater than the man on the outside. If we walk by the spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
(Galatians 5:16)

God's Word is given that we might not sin against Him. That's God's ultimate best. These things write we unto you that you sin not. (1 John 2:1) God doesn't want us to sin. It's not a matter that we have to sin because we have no control, or that we can reach a point where we never have any more problems with the flesh.

When a child is learning how to walk, they fall down. As they get older, they don't fall down as much. Even as adults, we sometime fall down, but we don't say, "Well, that was meant to be. I can't help but fall. You know, it's just part of me. I'll just fall." On the other hand, we also don't say, "I just don't understand this. I've reached a point where I never fall down any more." We all fall down from time to time.

When I was teaching at Rhema, one day I was running up the circular stairs at the main office with a stack of books in my hands and got about two steps to the top and fell down and books went everywhere. There the students stood in the hallway looking at their teacher on the floor with books scattered all around me. I couldn't stand up and say, "I couldn't help that. It was just meant to be. We all fall down." I also couldn't go to the other extreme and say, "I don't know how that happened! I've reached a point in my life where I never fall down." The crazy thing would be to lay there on the floor and say, "Well, I'll just never be what I used to be. I've fallen. I might as well just live with it. I'll never be the man I used to be."

Someone standing there would say, "Idiot! Get up! Come on, get up!"

That is what Hebrews 12 shows us with all those heroes of faith. Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with such a great cloud of witnesses. (Hebrews 12:1) All the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12 are the heroes of faith from Hebrews 11. At one time they were in the race that we're in now, but when they finished the race they went into the grandstands and they are now cheering us on. When we fall down and say, "We'll never be as good as we used to be," Abraham says, "I thought that too." Noah says, "I thought that too." Moses says, "Me too." And David says, "Above anyone I know. Get up! There's no sense in you laying there. Get up!"

Hebrews 12:1:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Christians do fail. All of those heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 failed at one time or another, but they are called *heroes* because they got up, laid aside every weight and the sin that so easily beset them, and they ran with patience the race that was set before them. Every one of them are heroes not because they're perfect; they're heroes because when they fell, they looked up and saw the hand of Jesus reaching down to them and they grabbed His hand and He picked them back up.

The Word of God says that an evil man falls and is consumed; but a righteous man falls seven times, but he gets right back up. So we continue to get up and continue to get up, even though we fail. Some people don't know that. First Corinthians 3 talks about carnal Christians. Many Christians don't even know those two words can go together. How can you put *carnal* and *Christian* together? The Word of God is filled with carnal Christians and how they turned their lives around and became spiritual. Right now, you're either spiritual or you're carnal, depending on whether or not there is sin in your life.

Now some of you are piously thinking, "I have never committed adultery. I have never killed anyone." Wait until you find out what the Bible calls sin. Sin doesn't start when you pull the trigger; it starts with the thought, and God sees the thought as the deed. He didn't say the thought is as bad as the deed. He says the thought *is* the deed. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. (Matthew 15:19) Adultery doesn't begin by the act; it begins with the thought. It begins with the temptation. When you entertain the thought and it becomes a part of you, instead of rejecting it you have accepted it. At that moment it becomes adultery. He didn't say it's as bad as adultery. He said it *is* adultery. *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* (Matthew 5:28) God judges it at that point. When we stop sin in our heart, it will never manifest itself in a deed. When you can control sin inside of you — pulling into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ — that is when your life truly becomes spiritual. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

1 Corinthians 3:1:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

He is talking to believers in the Lord Jesus because he wouldn't call sinners *brethren*. He calls them carnal because there is sin in their life. He calls them *babes* because they have never grown. Christians can be carnal. Churches today are filled with carnal Christians, and pastors and members don't know what to do with them. There are two extremes of thought on carnal Christians. One extreme is they were never saved in the first place, and the other extreme is they lost their salvation. Both are wrong. He calls them carnal. He calls them Christians. He calls them believers. He calls them brethren, but he calls them *babes in Christ*. They are carnal, not spiritual, babies. He calls them *brethren* because they're in Christ. So it's possible to be born again, yet be carnal.

The word *carnal* is an interesting Greek word. It is where we get our word *meat*. The Spanish word *carne* comes from that word. It means fleshly and meaty. What this verse is talking about is that when a person has sin in their life, they are living under the dictates of the flesh. They have the Holy Spirit living in them, but what a waste it is to have the Spirit of God in us, yet not leading us. Wouldn't that be horrible just to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit never had anything to do with our life? You can have the Spirit living in you, leading you and guiding you. That's what makes the Christian life supernatural — the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we equate the Christian life to a system of morality, and that's not what it is. Lots of sinners are very moral. The Christian life should produce morality, but it's a supernatural production not a natural production. The world does it through will power and through its own strength. A Christian lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. What makes the Christian life different from the sinner's life is the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. They that are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. That's something that an unbeliever cannot imitate. Anything an unbeliever can do a believer can imitate, and that's what a carnal Christian does. A carnal Christian imitates an unbeliever; a spiritual Christian imitates Jesus.

He said that when you are carnal, you cannot grow. When you're spiritual, you can grow. Understand that being spiritually in fellowship with God and not having any sin in your life does not guarantee growth. It simply means you are in a place where you *can* grow, because there are two prerequisites for growing: *If you abide in Me* — that's

being spiritual and in fellowship with God — *and my Word abides in you* — that's where growth comes from. (John 15:7) However, when you're not in fellowship with God, you're carnal and it's impossible to grow. When you are out of fellowship with God, you regress, you do not advance, you do not stay in one place, and you go backwards.

In Corinthians, it insinuates that they never grew up. They got born again, just inside the door, but never grew up. But the Hebrews regressed. Hebrews 5:12 says, *you have become as such that have need of milk and not of meat*. The Hebrews regressed back to that point, but the Corinthians never did grow in the things of God.

Babies cannot have meat, they have to have milk. They have no teeth. They don't have the digestive system to handle meat. Physically, they're not prepared for anything more than milk. That's the way it is with a baby in Christ that never grows up. They continue to stay on the milk.

1 Peter 2:2:

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

When a believer remains carnal and out of fellowship with God, they cannot grow and they have to stay on the milk of God's Word.

Besides having to feed newborn babies nothing but milk, they also have to be entertained. Have you ever noticed that when you lean over the crib you can't spend a long time talking to a baby? His attention span isn't very long. He gets bored quickly and starts to cry. That's what happens with many people in church. They're babies, they get bored quickly, and they want to be entertained, but they don't want the Word.

There's nothing wrong with having good music. There's nothing wrong with having speakers who present the milk of the Word, but we can't maintain a steady diet of that. Believers require teaching and the ministering of God's Word. Meat belongs to them that are of full age. (Hebrews 5:14) Babies can only have milk; they cannot take meat.

1 Corinthians 3:2-3:

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, and ye not carnal, and walk as men?

You mention the sins of the Corinthians and most people immediately think about chapter 5 where the man was caught in adultery. But chapter 3 is the real problem with the Corinthian church. Adultery wasn't the problem with the Corinthian church; they had problems in the heart—mental sins. Sins of the thoughts eventually lead to sins in deed, which are exposed in chapter 5.

Usually, adultery does not split a church wide open; it's all the gossip and backbiting that goes on around the adultery. It's the spiritual king of the mountain, looking down his nose at all the other people in the church thinking, "I'm more spiritual than they are. I would never think of doing anything like that." However, God says, "You're guilty of a worse sin — pride."

If I were to ask you today your seven sins that you hate, you would probably mention murder and adultery somewhere in there. We are creatures of habit and we think in terms of outward sins. We think sin is outward, something we can see, but God looks on the heart, not on the outward appearance. However, the Bible speaks of seven sins that are an abomination to God.

Proverbs 6:16-19:

*These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:
A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

*An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,
A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

God puts pride at the top of the list. It was pride that caused Satan to fall. The original sin of the universe came through pride.

The only one of the seven sins that is an outward sin is *hands that shed innocent blood*. All the rest are sins of the thought or sins of the tongue.

Verse 18 says, *A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations*. God hates for someone to sit around and imagine mischief on someone else. Maybe this is you and you have justified it because someone has treated you wrong. The Bible says do not return evil for evil. You may think they deserve it, but they do not deserve it. They deserve the same grace of God that you deserve. Despite all the stupid mistakes you have made, God still blessed you. Thank God there was someone out there praying God's grace for you and not that you would get what you deserve.

Jesus said to pray for them that despitefully use you. (Matthew 5:44) Maybe someone intentionally took money from you, caused your business to go under, took things away from your family, or caused bad family relationships. However, when you walk in love God will restore back to you a hundredfold of what the devil took from you. If that person continues to go on their way, God is going to see to it eventually they fall because God says, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay saith the Lord." (Romans 12:19) You make sure that you continue to walk in love towards them. He doesn't want a heart that sits around devising wicked imaginations.

Verse 18 also mentions *feet that be swift in running to mischief*.

These all tie together. If you're devising wicked imaginations, the next thing that's going to happen is your feet are going to go carry it somewhere.

Verse 19 points out *a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that sows discord among brethren*.

God hates it — abominates it — when people go around sowing discord among brethren. God says these are the seven worst sins of all, and these sins were taking place in Corinth.

Committing adultery in 1 Corinthians 5 was definitely carnal, but carnality doesn't begin with the outward deed. Carnality begins with the inward thought of the heart. He says in 1 Corinthians 3:3, *For ye are yet carnal; for whereas there is among you envying, people being envious of one another*.

"Well, you've got something better than I do."

"Well, did you see the dress Sister So-and-So wore today?"

"They make more money than we do."

Fashions aren't important when it comes to God. If you go to church for a fashion show and want everyone to look at what you're wearing, then you have wrong intentions. If you want to wear nice clothes to glorify Jesus, that's something else; but you don't need to be looking around and being envious of what someone else is wearing. We don't need to be envious of each other because we're all clothed with the righteousness of God. He has clothed his priests with salvation.

Do you remember what David did? There was a day he came into the city and stripped off his kingly robe to expose the linen ephod of the priest, and he danced through the streets. You couldn't tell who David was from anybody else because he had on the same clothes as everybody else. Underneath your outward signs of dignity that you wear, you're a priest just like everybody else. We all have the righteousness of God.

This verse is saying there is envying, strife, and divisions among you. Are ye not carnal and walk as men?

The Greek indicates: *are you not carnal and walk like mere men or natural men?* In other words, the end of verse 3 is saying that when you are carnal, you look and act just like an unbeliever. Unbelievers are filled with strife. Unbelievers try to get to the next position by stepping on somebody else, by envying somebody else, or by causing division. That's how the unbelievers promote themselves, but believers shouldn't do that. We depend on the grace of God because promotion doesn't come from our own strength, promotion comes from God.

That verse excites me. We are not mere men! The moment we became born again, God's Spirit moved inside of us and we became supermen. We can do things the world can't do. We can be led by the Spirit of God. We have the righteousness of God inside of us. The world isn't led by the Spirit of God, and the world doesn't have the righteousness of God inside of them. We have a security in heaven that we know forever and forever we will be with God. The world doesn't have that. God has given us the ability to see our natural circumstances of life and know that circumstances don't dictate to us; we dictate to the circumstances. He promised us in the Word that when we wait on Him we exchange our strength for His. We will mount up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint. We have the ability to go on, even though the world falls around us. We can keep on going because we are clothed with the righteousness of God and strengthened with the Spirit of God.

But when we become carnal, we look like everybody else. When Clark Kent walked down the streets, people around him never knew he was Superman. He looked like everyone else and that's what happens when we as believers become carnal. The Spirit of God lives on the inside of us, but we're living and operating in our own natural human strength. Sin separates us from the power of the Spirit of God inside of us. Although He is there, He can't control us. We are controlled by the flesh. How do we fix this problem? We need to go to the phone booth of 1 John 1:9, *because if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us of our sins*, and we strip off the carnal. We strip off the natural, and we find out that we are Superman. We went walking in; we'll come flying out.

From all outward appearances, Paul couldn't tell if the Corinthians were Christians or not. Based on outward appearances, he couldn't tell if they were saints or sinners. From all natural, outward appearances they walked as mere men. Sin begins as something we would consider to be small. However, God doesn't differentiate between small sins and big sins because the Word of God says that whatever is not of faith is sin. But we know that when we get off a little bit and maintain that course, we're going to be off a long way the further we go.

Our defense system uses computerized missiles so it is extremely important that everything be keyed in exactly right. When that missile is launched, the trajectory has to be perfect; otherwise, the slightest bit off in the computerization would cause it to be hundreds of miles off by the time it gets to its target. That's the way sin is. It begins small in the thoughts. Jesus said in Matthew 5, to think adultery is to commit it, because thinking adultery will eventually lead to the act and the deed. Jesus said that as you have aught against your brother in your heart, you've murdered him in God's eyes. Eventually, the thought will lead to the deed. Murder doesn't start by pulling the trigger; it starts by harboring hatred against somebody. Somebody did wrong to them, they devised wicked imaginations, and it eventually led to the outward act of pulling the trigger. However, any murderer will tell you they pulled the trigger a hundred times in their mind before they ever physically pulled it. An adulterer mentally commits adultery many times before the physical act takes place, which is why we need to judge sin early.

On the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said you are to pluck out your eye and cut off your hand if you sin. Those are pretty drastic measures! What do the two mean? The eye and the hand are both symbolic. The eye represents inward sins, and the hand represents physical sins. How often would we sin if we literally had to pluck out our eye and cut off our hand? Yes, we should ask the Lord to forgive us, but seeking forgiveness should start long before it reaches the outward act. We should ask the Lord to forgive us when we begin to harbor the thoughts and meditate on the sin itself. Every one of us face temptations. The temptation to sin is not the sin, but when we receive that temptation, it becomes a part of us. Then we need to ask the Lord to forgive us of that because the Lord says as far as He's concerned, hatred towards somebody is murder. We need to understand sin as God understands it, because when we hide God's Word in our heart, we will not sin against Him. Therefore, when we have hatred towards somebody in our heart and we find that hatred starting to flare up, we should ask the Lord to forgive us at that moment. Pull every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

David was a man that sinned against God tremendously. When you refer to the sins of David, usually the first thing you think of is Bathsheba. The story of David and Bathsheba is one of the most interesting stories of the Old Testament. The adultery he committed with Bathsheba began long before the time he actually committed the act. It is important to go right to the source of this one and see how David missed it. But remember, sin doesn't start with the outward, physical act.

2 Samuel 11:1:

And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

We often read over these verses of scripture, but don't stop to find out where David really missed it. In fact, his sin is found in verse 1, but it's so slight and so subtle that we often read right over it. Looking at verse 1, the year expires on the Jewish calendar in the month of March, and the new year begins in April. So we know this is the beginning of the month of April. This is springtime and the time when kings go forth to battle. During the winter time, they don't battle because it gets so cold in the area of Palestine. So they go out against their enemies to destroy them in the springtime.

This is when David's troops went to battle; but notice how subtly it's worded. It says in verse 1, *And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle.* It was a command of God that the kings lead their troops into battle, not leave the troops or stay home and send the troops out. But on this particular occasion, David decided to stay home, so he sent the troops out to battle and he openly disobeyed a command of God.

You say, "Well, that's not much of a command. David wants to stay home this time. There's nothing wrong with David staying home." But wait a minute, the will of God was for David to be in Rabbah, fighting with the troops, not staying at home.

So the troops went off to fight and David stayed home this time. It says, *"At the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab.* Joab is David's highest commander. Right under David himself is Joab, the commander of the troops. David probably had a million good excuses but not one good reason for staying home.

"Well, you know, I just need some time to myself."

When time to yourself takes you away from the will of God, go with the will of God. You'll find time for yourself.

"Well, I'm going to stay home and read my Bible."

I've heard that one before. You don't end up reading your Bible, you do everything else but read your Bible.

It goes on to say, *"David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem."*

I'll tell you exactly what the sin of David was. He was geographically out of God's will. He was here and he should have been there.

You say, "Well, that's not much of a sin."

The devil only needs an inch and he can take a mile. In the slightest things, the devil will take advantage, and that is exactly what happened. With each progressing verse of 2 Samuel 11, we can see how David gets more and more out of God's will and pretty soon we're going to see David's life almost destroyed by the devil because he didn't realize the tactics of the devil. Throughout this entire chapter, we find that at any point sin is going to mount on top of sin. When one sin comes in, you're game for the next one. When that one comes in, you're game for the next one. When the devil can get you a little bit, he'll just keep sending it in and sending it in and sending it in. At any time, David could have stopped and returned to where God wanted him to be and the discipline would have been less severe.

If we'll stop where we're at, we will not reap as big a crop as we will reap if we keep on going. At any point David could have stopped and said, "Lord, I am wrong. Forgive me of this." He could have ridden back out to battle to Rabbah, been where he was supposed to be, and the supernatural power of God would have come back into his life to help him turn this thing around. The longer David stayed out of fellowship with God, the longer he stayed carnal. The more bad seed he sowed, the more sin came into his life, and by the time David begins to turn the situation around, he had stayed out of fellowship with God for a year. He sowed so much seed that he had a landslide crop coming to him in the next chapter. Things happened to David that would devastate most believers, but you know what David did? He came out of that situation and went on to be a better king than he had ever been before.

Why does God get so graphic in describing people's failures? To let you know that if God pulled them out of that situation, He can save you out of your situation.

I don't care what you got into. If it's sin, it's wrong! Don't wait for an emotional feeling to come back to the Lord. Today is the day of salvation for the sinner and today is the day of repentance for the believer. You don't need to continue doing what you're doing. People may have told you that you will never be as good as you used to be. That's true — you can be better than you used to be. You can rise to new heights, fly to new heights, because I serve the God that lifts you up out of the dunghill and sets you up with princes. David, through his sin, fell. His life was miserable, and to the natural mind there's no way out of what David got into. That is the beauty of God's grace — with men it's impossible, but with God nothing is impossible. What God did for David, He will do for you. Unstrap those weights of sin. Get your eyes back on Jesus and keep running the race with patience that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of your faith!

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