

## Alarm to Carnal Christianity 1

Red lights are already flashing. Carnal Christianity? Carnal Christians? Nonsense! There is no such thing! Out with it.

As little as twenty years ago, the informed evangelical world would have had no trouble with this sort of terminology. C. I. Scofield, by way of his Reference Bible with notes, had taught us all that it was possible for a person to be a Christian, yet totally unchanged so far as his affections and life were concerned; that one could be justified and know nothing of sanctification. Such were called "Carnal Christians". This was a low state of grace, but grace nonetheless, and such persons were urged to "Make Jesus Lord", "Get the second blessing", "Get filled with the Spirit", "Enter into the faith-rest", or do whatever the particular deeper-life terminology dictated and become a "Spiritual Christian", rather than a "Carnal Christian". Thus Christians fell into two major categories, Carnal and Spiritual.

This theory has been effectually abolished by certain preachers of the grace of God who have pointed out that a person who is carnal in every area of his life knows nothing of the grace of God, has no spiritual life whatever, and is lost. He is simply flesh. His life is no more than the Old Man, Adam's life. On the other hand, a person who has died to the flesh in Christ is not "in the flesh" but "in the spirit" (Romans 8:9), and is called spiritual.

The fall of Scofield's "Carnal Christianity" is heartily welcomed by us who have had great difficulty of ascribing grace to those who evidence no appetite for God and holiness. But our delight with this truth, and the deliverance from this lie has generated a "knee jerk" mentality that sets off alarm bells and red lights the minute carnality is imputed to anyone who is reputed to be Christian.

Very well, we will defend our title "Alarm to Carnal Christianity". *"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 Corinthians 3:14). Here we have the apostle Paul undeniably using that odious terminology: "ye are yet carnal", "are ye not carnal?" And we may not be mistaken as to whom he is addressing: "And I, brethren", "babes in Christ", "I have fed you with milk" (can unbelievers ingest even "milk of the word of God?"). No, we cannot avoid the conclusion that Paul was directing this letter to those whom he believed Christian, but whom he also believed to be babes in Christ and carnal.

Thus we do have a scripturally valid sense in which some believers may be called carnal. It is certainly unscriptural to say that these Christians were under the power of the flesh so far as their lives were concerned in an absolute sense, so that they represented an entire *class* of justified persons. There are senses in which they were properly called spiritual: They were the "church of God", "sanctified in Christ", "called saints" (1 Corinthians 1:2), recipients of the grace of God (1:4), "enriched by him, in all utterance and knowledge" (1:5), the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them (1:6), excelled in spiritual gifts (1:7), called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord (1:9). These are no second-rate Christians who need a second touch to put them on the plane of spiritual Christians.

But they were characterized as carnal, not only while they were saying, "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ", but in many other areas as well. They had a superiority complex, glorying in their knowledge and wisdom and "Christian Liberty" . . . so much so that they could tolerate within the pale of acceptable Christian lifestyle. They could eat meat sacrificed to idols as meat sacrificed to idols, running roughshod over the conscience of a weaker brother who was not as "enlightened" as they. They challenged the validity of Paul's apostleship and his ministry. They were so ignorant of spiritual gifts that they thought that speaking in tongues was a sign of spiritual superiority. They sued each other before civil courts. They came to the Lord's table with nothing on their minds but filling their bellies. They bickered over whether a man ought to marry, whether a Christian spouse ought to continue to live with an unconverted one, whether a father ought to allow the marriage of a Christian virgin daughter, whether ministers ought to be paid, ought to have a wife, ought to carry her with him in his ministerial travels. There were even those among them who questioned the bodily resurrection of, not only Christians, but Christ Himself.

The Holy Spirit deals with some principal issue in each of the church letters. In Romans, it is the gospel. In Galatians, it is Judaistic legalism. In Ephesians, it is the eternal purpose of God in all the Redeemed brought into one body. In Philippians, discouragement and spiritual depression is dispatched. In Colossians, Gnosticism is exposed and repudiated. In the Thessalonian letters, a spirit of worldliness, and carelessness is dealt with. In Hebrews, the burden is Judaistic apostasy. The second letter to the Corinthians gives us the most vivid and intimate picture in the Bible of the person, life and ministry of the apostle Paul. The reason for this could well be a continuing burden to rid the Corinthians of the sins which are dealt with so urgently in the first letter . . . rampant carnality in their lives and ministry. This carnality is so stark that the Apostle warns them in a number of cases that many of them give strong evidence that they are not Christians at all (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 10:1-12, 21, 12:3, 11, 13:5).

The urgency with which Paul addresses this alarming propensity of the Corinthians to fleshiness, to thinking and behaving after the manner of natural unregenerate men of this world rather than regenerate spiritual men, is revealed in his use of a rhetorical question, "know ye not?". This is a literary device employing a primitive verb, *eidō* (know), always used in past tenses. It is not an informative word for know, as *ginosko*, but a reminder of something in view. It expresses the thought, to behold, to be aware of, along with wonder and incredulity. When Paul uses it, he is not telling them something that they do not know; he is not addressing their ignorance, as in the matter of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:1, but their knowledge. He is reminding them of something they already know. The idea is something like this: "In view of your knowledge of this, how could you behave in such a manner?" He is

giving them an imperative reminder of something they already know, and using their unquestioned knowledge of this fact to underscore the absurdity of their behaviour.

The suitability of this phrase to deal with carnality is strongly implied in its peculiar use in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul uses it only one other time in all his epistles, "*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are . . .*" (Romans 6:16). He is clearly addressing carnality here, as well. The only other times the phrase is employed in the New Testament is the Lord's use of it in Matthew 4:13 and John 19:10.

There are ten "know ye nots" in First Corinthians. We maintain that the carnality, the fleshiness in thinking and behaviour that takes its cue from the world of natural men, is every bit as alarming a problem in today's churches as it was in Corinth. Accordingly, we will attempt to address the same problems today as Paul did then, under the heading of ten urgent reminders for carnal Christians.

### **You Are the Temple of God**

"*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16).* God's temple here is said to be the church, not the believer's body, as in 1 Corinthians 6:19. It is the aggregate body of believers in view in a particular locality, the local church, not the church universal. This is clearly established by the context. It is the particular church that is the subject under discussion: "*I have planted, Apollos watered*" (verse 6), "*we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*" (verse 9), "*I have laid the foundation*" (verse 10). We know that Paul laid the foundation for the church at Corinth, not the church universal.

When the church is referred to as a building or a temple, we should never confound it with the literal building in which it meets. "*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).* The church is the temple of God on earth, not in the sense in which He is **bottled** up there and is nowhere else. He transcends the entire Universe. It should be evident that His occupation of the local church . . . all the local churches combined, has not vacated His presence from the rest of His creation. The church is the temple of God, in that it is where God is present in sensible power. He is identified with it; and the true church is known for God's presence in the midst of it.

This is the distinction of the true people of God. This is established in the beginning of God's taking out a covenant people. "*For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? Is it not in that thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and thy people, form all the people that are upon the face of the earth (Exodus 33:16).* It is confirmed again in the last book of the Bible where the Lord is seen among His churches, the golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12-20). Paul uses this truth in arguing for true worship and order in the church: "*But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*" (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

How shall we identify the true church of God today? According to the scripture, when unbelievers come into our midst and are so smitten with a realization of their sins and just judgment through the unanimous, clear, understandable speaking forth of the true word of God by all our members, that he falls down on his face to worship God, and then runs out and reports that "*God is among those people*", then we can say that we are truly the temple of God. Try that for an outreach public relations program! The fact that such a thing rarely happens is testimony of our low carnal state. The fact that it does occasionally yet happen is the testimony that the church is still the temple of God.

### **He Who Corrupts the Church Will Be Likewise Corrupted by God**

"*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are*" (1 Corinthians 3:17). Both "defile" and "destroy" are translated from the same word which means to corrupt or ruin, to render useless and unprofitable.

We must bear in mind, at this point, that no immorality, no gross sin has yet been mentioned in the letter. What, then, is this "defilement" of the church which he speaks of? Surely, it can be none other than that which caused the divisions, the strife, the contentions addressed. Let us examine the nature of these divisions more closely. It cannot be divisions alone that are so evil, for God Himself is a divider of men, of darkness and light, good and evil, false and true. Everywhere Christ went, men became polarized over Him. The gospel is never preached without causing splits, even in families. Nor would it be strictly correct to say that this evil consists of the Corinthians being followers of men. Does not Paul himself urge them to be followers of him (1 Corinthians 4:15-17)? The language leaves nothing to doubt. He expects to be followed in respect to his gospel, his teachings and his ways in Christ.

Nevertheless, the problem as something to do with the divisions which have resulted over men; and the men who fostered these divisions were liable to be held accountable for so corrupting the church. Since the divisions condemned by their teachings cannot be divisions over the gospel or a holy walk in the Lord, it is evident that they were divisions over exotic, unprofitable, sensational teachings of human wisdom. This is the burden taken up in chapter 1, verse 17, and carried all the way through the second chapter: "*not with wisdom of words*", "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise*", "*Where is the wise*", "*the Greeks seek after wisdom*", "*not many wise*", "*to confound the wise*", "*not with excellency of speech or of wisdom*", "*not with enticing words of man's wisdom*", "*not stand in the wisdom of men*", "*not the wisdom of this world*", and finally, "*Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual*".

The Corinthians could not have been divided over the gospel these men taught. There is no division in the gospel. If they indeed taught the gospel, they would have been all teaching the same thing. No, they were divided over their personalities, their oratorical abilities, and the sensational teachings that tickled their intellectual pride, puffing them up with a fleshy knowledge instead of humbling them before the grace of God. *That was what was defiling the temple of God.*

Now we have some idea of how the church is corrupted today, and what has caused it. It is corrupted by powerful human personalities who obscure the gospel by so setting forth themselves and their oratorical gifts that men are converted to them rather than to Christ. It is corrupted by excellent homiletical style, powerful persuasive abilities, so that men are persuaded to do the will of the preacher while having no idea of what the gospel is all about.

It is corrupted by side-issue teachings that have little reproach of Christ attached to them, and plenty to puff up the carnal mind: Elaborate divisions of the Bible and its interpretation according to artificial “dispensations”. Different classes of Christians (carnal, spiritual, deeper life, lower life, overcomers, sanctified, unsanctified, etc.). Speculations on various theories (taught often as dogmatic fact) on details of the end time and Christ’s return. Healings. Signs and wonders. “Christian” psychology. “How to” seminars. Even the truths emphasizing the sovereignty of God and divine election are more often than no presented in such a way that a person can embrace and delight in them, yet be a total stranger to Christ and His grace in his own heart. People can be converted to a life of “self-denial”, “mortification of the flesh”, religious asceticism that is alien to Christianity, having its seat in fleshy glorification of self-denial.

The church is corrupted by perverting the gospel to give respectability to denominational programs and activities that are designed after nothing less than worldly human wisdom. These have their criteria, not in promoting Christ and glorifying God and preserving the truth, but in promoting the program and glorifying the denomination and in preserving the jobs of denominational bell-hops. When such a denominational spirit gains hold in a church, it has been defiled and destroyed beyond hope.

This flaunting of human abilities and wisdom effectually destroys the church by at least two principal means: It fills the church with unregenerate members. They have no appetite or heart for God or the gospel, only that which panders and pampers the flesh. And the preacher who must preserve this whole stinking mess and keep it from falling apart finds himself obliged to preach and promote whatever it will take to keep it going. This not only perpetuates the pollution but increases it. Secondly there is enough un-mortified flesh in most Christians to cause us to be attracted to these worldly trinkets of human wisdom and delightful personalities. If our hearts are so drawn aside after them, our minds so occupied with thinking worldly thoughts, our wills so set on the pursuit of them, there will be no worship among us. We will not have our minds and hearts full of the word of God so that we can speak it forth in convincing power. Our spiritual lives will be so weak and pale, we will impress no one. The unregenerate can come and go without any sensibility of God being among us. He will leave our presence with his conscience unscathed. There has been no convicting Holy Spirit among the people of God. The temple of God has been destroyed. Is not this the rule, rather than the exception in churches today?

“If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” Remember, we are dealing with the immutable, unfailing word of God. Just as certainly as the church has been destroyed, shall the man responsible for it be destroyed. God has promised it.

In what way are preachers destroyed, who are responsible for corrupting the church? Certainly, we seem to be seeing no wholesale judgment upon preachers as the world or even contemporary Christendom would count it. They are not being hit by lightning, stricken with deadly diseases, put out of their ministries on welfare. On the contrary, the ministerial profession has never been more comfortable, more well paid, more accepted in worldly society than now. The corrupting preacher keeps getting richer and richer, climbing higher and higher up the ladder of religious success and keeps gathering to himself the awards and accolades of men. Where, then, is his destruction?

It is to be found in the same sphere in which the church is corrupted. The nature of his judgment is described in the preceding verses: “*But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*”, verse 10. “*it (his work) shall be revealed (tried) by fire*”, verse 13. Some shall be burned, and he will suffer the total loss of his work (verse 15). It is the man’s *effectual ministry* that shall be destroyed. He may well trot along the rest of his life piling up his wood, hay and stubble. But if he *is* a Christian, he knows deep in his heart that it is worthless and already burned up. There are, to be sure, thousands of religious holes in the land called churches, pastored by hirelings who are perfectly content with God’s absence. In fact, it would be a disaster if one were visited by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. The whole thing would fall apart. They are generations away from spiritual life, and comfortably ensconced in fleshy apostasy. This alarm is not directed to these wells without water for whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. It is directed to those for whom there may yet be hope, who are already deeply disturbed over the absence of God in His power.

I would venture to say that thousands of preachers are tormented with this suspicion or realization. Their outward work continues, and in some degree, continues to flourish, but the power and presence of God is not upon it. The power of their human personality, their worldly wisdom, their clever methodology, their attractive gimmicks, their exciting teachings are there, but the *know* it is not the power of God. The faith of their converts stands, not in the power of God, but in the power of men’s cleverness! This is too horrible for them to think about, so they push it from their minds and keep plodding along in their delusion. To such the Apostle says: “*I will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power (1 Corinthians 4:19-20).*”

This about this, preacher. What are you doing? Making a living? Trying to cover up the adulteries of a whore? Trying to save face? Are you too lazy to renounce and repudiate all our previous ministry not built upon the truth and the power of God? Or too much of an unbeliever? You just don’t think a strictly New Testament ministry will work today? Do you have too much invested in your strength and wisdom and methods to count in all dung than you may win Christ? Are you too proud to eat a mess of humble pie and say, “I have been wrong, dead wrong about this whole thing, and I am done with it”? Are you too committed to your denomination and your cronies to risk total ostracism?

Then, think about this: You are defiling God’s temple, and God has said, “I will destroy you”. If the terrible prospect of being responsible for corrupting, polluting, the purest thing on this evil earth, being guilty of soiling the spotless garment of Christ’s beloved bride, of fouling the waters around the fountain of Life . . . if that is not enough to make you tremble and repent and seek restoration, then surely, the certain, unavoidable judgment of Almighty God ought to be. If there is any conscience of God left in you,

take a look . . . a good honest look at your ministry. If it does not bear the stark, unmistakable mark of the divine supernatural, you have been destroyed. It would be better for you to get out and get yourself a job selling insurance than to keep piling up the wrath of God upon yourself. If you are unwilling to undertake the ministry of the gospel in weakness, fear and trembling, utterly devoid of any confidence in the flesh, depending on nothing more than the power and faithfulness of a sovereign God, then get out of the way and let someone take your place who will.

- C. M.