

SPIRITUAL LIFE CONFERENCE – WORD STUDY – SPIRITUAL VERSUS CARNAL

Are you spiritual? Are you carnal? How do you know and how do you get out of carnality into spirituality?

I. DEFINITIONS

πνευματικός *pneumatikos* – (adj) That which is characterized by spirit

πνευματικῶς *pneumatikōs* – (adv) In a spiritual manner

σαρκικός *sarkikos* – (adj) That which is characterized by flesh

ψυχικός *psuchikos* – (adj) That which is characterized by the soul, natural, used in opposition to spiritual

II. THEOLOGICAL

“The spiritual man is proven...by the one test of his ability to receive and know divine revelation. ‘He that is spiritual discerneth all things.’”

“A carnal Christian is born again and possesses the indwelling Spirit; but his carnality hinders the full ministry of the Spirit.”

“There are two great spiritual changes which are possible to human experience—the change from the natural man to the saved man, and the change from the carnal man to the spiritual man”

“The spiritual man is the divine ideal in life and ministry, in power with God and man, in unbroken fellowship and blessing.”

III. BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

We begin with “**ψυχικός** *psuchikos*” and will progress to “**πνευματικός** *pneumatikos*” The word for *natural* is used in four different passages. Let’s look at two of them and we will refer to two main passages at the end of this lesson.

James 3:14-15 – Natural is equated to that which is from this fallen world and demonic and is characterized by selfish ambition.

Jude 17-19 – Natural is seen as ones who are going about their lives in accordance with ungodly desires; they are without spirit.

“**σαρκικός** *sarkikos*” is a word that speaks to both the flesh and things of this creation.

Romans 15:27; 1Corinthians 9:11 – Carnal things are material, money, or provisions. This is not seen as good or bad but as the necessities of life.

2Corinthians 1:12 – Carnal wisdom is opposed to the grace of God. We can see that having carnal wisdom is to follow after the world’s system, ignore God’s truth, and to have impure motivation (trying to gain from it).

2Corinthians 10:3-5 – Carnal warfare consists not of swords and shields. This is in opposition to divine warfare, a battle of the mind and thoughts.

1Peter 2:11 – Carnal lusts wage war against the soul.

Now we come to “**πνευματικῶς** *pneumatikōs (adv)*” and “**πνευματικός** *pneumatikos (adj)*.” Before we proceed to our main passage, let us understand the nature of this word group.

The word *spiritual* is used mostly to describe things: gift, the Law is spiritual, meat, drink, blessing, songs, spiritual wickedness, understanding, house, sacrifices.

1 Corinthians 15:42-49 – Physically, we bear the earthly natural body, but we will be given a spiritual body. The natural body (for us) comes first then the spiritual body. Through Jesus Christ, our physical body will be transformed when He comes.

IV. 1CORINTHIANS 2:1-3:4

This is the main passage of Scripture that is normally the foundation of the doctrine of the natural, carnal, and spiritual man.

First, let’s read the text and then we will make some observations.

1. The words that Paul used were a demonstration of the Spirit
2. Paul speaks godly wisdom among those who are mature
 - a. This is contrasted to the wisdom of men
 - b. In this context, *mature* is not a status of the believer but is contrasting those who responded to the truth and those who did not.
3. God revealed truth (to us); the Corinthian church is included in this designation; they are among the mature. This is restated in verses 12-13.
4. The contrast in 2:14-16 is between the natural (**ψυχικός** *psuchikos*) and the spiritual (**πνευματικός** *pneumatikos*).
5. We have the mind of Christ; there is no special designation other than the dichotomy—if one is natural they do not have the mind of Christ, if one is spiritual, they do have the mind of Christ.
 - a. This indicates they are capable of appraising spiritual things
 - b. They can receive and handle the wisdom of God
6. In 3:1-4, Paul is speaking in comparison.
 - a. The comparative conjunction “ὡς *hōs*” is used six times in Chapter 3
 - b. Comparative language is not used to designate but to make a point
 - c. Verses 10 through 15 is obviously metaphorical
 - d. He is not calling them carnal; he is telling them that they are acting as carnal
 - e. Therefore, he has to speak to them in corrective fatherly tones and language
 - f. They have to get beyond this way of thinking, but this does not mean that they cannot think spiritual thoughts
7. More observations/questions
 - a. After proving that there should be no divisions among them, for all are God’s workman, he tells them in verses 18-23 that wisdom of this world is useless and all things belong to them, they belong to Christ, Christ belongs to God.

- b. The rest of the book is filled with the wisdom of God. If they were not capable of handling this truth, why then proceed in giving it?
- c. Romans 7:14 – Paul calls himself carnal
- d. There is the old man that is of the flesh and there is the new man that is of the spirit.
- e. There is no instruction in Scripture as to how to be spiritual
- f. There is no instruction as to how to stop being carnal
- g. You are spiritual with a competing fleshly nature
- h. There is only one other passage that speaks of spiritual people (Galatians 6:1)
 - i. The instructions in Galatians is for all the “spirituals”
 - ii. This is an admonishment for all believers
 - iii. All believers have to be careful in restoring a wayward believer
- i. Romans 7:14-25

V. CONCLUSION

Being spiritual is a designation. The contrast in Corinthians is the natural man. One is not designated as carnal, but one can act carnal.

The spiritual life is first and foremost a thinking exercise. What do you think about? What motivates you? What are your priorities? What dominates your thought life?

What the Bible does not do is change the identification of the believer to a sub-status if they are not abiding in Jesus Christ. The letters of Scripture make it clear—those in need of correction are first reminded of who they are in Christ Jesus, then they are admonished to think and act in accordance with their identity.