

## Seeking Revival

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

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"But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).

#### Our Link to Heaven

Before defining spiritual and carnal Christians, we need to remember that we're not talking about "sinners" and "non-sinners." All people, spiritual and carnal alike, are sinners in need of a Savior. Our only righteousness comes from Him. Instead, the criterion for inclusion in one group or the other is our personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. God has stipulated that we cannot sever our relationship with the Holy Spirit without damaging our connection to heaven (Matthew 12:32). Ellen White explains, "he who rejects the work of the Holy Spirit is placing himself where repentance and faith cannot come to him. It is by the Spirit that God works upon the heart" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 322).

And it's worth repeating: the only person I should be evaluating as spiritual or carnal is myself. God can work in other hearts and doesn't need me to pin labels on fellow church members. The good news is that if I'm disappointed by what He reveals in my heart, He can change me starting today!

#### The Spiritual Church Member

The spiritual person is a truly converted Christian. Although born a sinner, he is called "spiritual" because he has a living and growing relationship with the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul writes, "But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind [Spirit] of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:15, 16).

Jesus is the center of the spiritual person's life and reigns in his heart and determines his priorities. The spiritual person has committed himself completely to Jesus and asks continuously for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). In the context of Laodicea, the spiritual person could be called "hot" (Revelation 3:15). In the parable of the 10 virgins, he could be called "wise" (Matthew 25:2-4). The spiritual person experiences life "more abundantly" (John 10:10) and is filled with "all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). He rejoices that he has been "saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Although the spiritual person faces setbacks and temptations, he fixes his eyes on Jesus.

#### The Carnal Church Member

A carnal person might have a feigned or divided relationship with God. He might be quietly indifferent to the Holy Spirit or even openly rebellious. Here's what the apostle Paul has to say: "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

Here we conclude that the defining factor must be our relationship with the Holy Spirit. *Carnal* describes a person who lives by the flesh; that is, by normal human strength, not by the Holy Spirit. And the greatest tragedy is that he hasn't chosen to receive eternal life (Romans 8:9).

Paul addressed the carnal people as "brethren," which shows they were church members. He couldn't call them "spiritual" because they weren't sufficiently filled with the Holy Spirit. They hadn't grown in faith as they should have. It's possible to be a church member for many years and still be a carnal Christian. It's possible to have biblical

knowledge and still not mature spiritually. Many carnal Christians feel dissatisfaction, disappointment, or lack of purpose in their spiritual lives. Some are apathetic and say, "We're just sinners. We can't do anything about it."

Other carnal Christians are enthusiastic and active, perhaps proud of their important positions in the church. Sadly, Jesus says, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22, 23). What was the problem? They had no personal relationship with Jesus and no living connection with the Holy Spirit.

If you find that you are a carnal Christian at the moment, take heart! You have the possibility of new life starting right now. Many carnal Christians are in this condition unknowingly, and you may already be praying for a deeper faith experience. Jesus desires "that your joy may be full" (John 15:11), and He invites you to rest in the solid hope of eternal life.

### **Praying God's Word**

#### **We are still carnal, but there is hope.**

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

*Dear Lord, thank You for including "still" in this text, for it reminds us that we don't have to remain in this situation. We want You to change us today. Thank You that envy, strife, and divisions are healed when we live in the Holy Spirit.*

#### **Are we asking with carnal motives?**

"You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2, 3, NIV).

*Father, we live in spiritual poverty because we do not ask, or we ask with selfish, human motives. Please transform our prayers and guide us by the Holy Spirit.*

### **More Prayer Suggestions**

**Thanks and Praise:** Give thanks for specific blessings and praise God for His goodness.

**Confession:** Take a few minutes for private confession and thank God for His forgiveness.

**Guidance:** Ask God to grant wisdom for current challenges and decisions.

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

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

**Listen and Respond:** 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.