

Unsalty Christians (Part 1)

Jesus calls Christians “salt” and “light.” There’s nothing negotiable about it. If we are truly children of God, then we are, by our position in Christ, salt and light in the world. That will never change. Jesus is obviously speaking to believers, for unbelievers are never referred to as salt or light. Indeed, unbelievers are “darkness” (Eph. 5:8).

Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14).

The problem is that many Christians become “unsalty” and hide their light. Yet they never cease to be saved. I would allege they have become carnal in some degree.

Three Spiritual States

Before exploring the consequences of unsaltiness, it will be helpful to review the three spiritual states in 1 Corinthians 2. Every person on earth can be categorized as either (1) natural, (2) spiritual, or (3) carnal.

Natural

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

The natural man is a lost person. The Greek word translated “natural” is ψυχικὸς (*psuchikos*), which comes from ψυχή (*psuche*) – or soul. The lost man lives according to the dictates of his soul, not his spirit. The soul is the realm of the mind, will, and emotions.

Because the natural man’s spirit is dead in trespasses and sins, he cannot receive the things of God’s Spirit. Anything of a spiritual nature is foolishness to an unregenerated spirit. So he lives according to what he *rationalizes* is best for him and/or what he *desires* to do and/or what he *feels* like doing. He has no regard for God.

Spiritual

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man (1 Cor. 2:15).

In contradistinction to the natural man is the spiritual man. The Greek word translated “spiritual” is πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*), which comes from πνεῦμα (*pneuma*)—or spirit.

This person's spirit has been regenerated, and he is living by taking his marching orders from the Holy Spirit, not merely from his own thoughts or feelings or volition. The evidence that he is spiritual is that he is discerning, and others cannot figure him out. He is an anomaly in culture, for he has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), not merely in a positional sense, but practically. He thinks as Jesus thinks.

Carnal

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 ([1 Cor. 3:1-3](#)).

Were these people saved? Yes, for Paul refers to them as "brethren." Yet he labels them "carnal." What characterizes carnality? First, spiritual immaturity. Carnal Christians are like babes in Christ, even if they have been saved for decades. They have not grown as Christians should, but remain feeding on the milk of the Word, not meat.

What a shameful condition! When the preacher goes on to heavier things, they yawn and zone out; the content goes over their head or in one ear and out the other. Worse yet, they get angry and divisive over truth.

The second characteristic of carnal Christians is self-focus. Indeed, the Greek word translated "carnal" is σαρκικός (*sarkikos*), which means fleshly. They live according to the flesh, not according to the Spirit. They are full of envy and strife and division. They "walk as men" (i.e., unsaved men).

Incidentally, flesh is not the equivalent of body. If it were, then we might be tempted to punish the body, as if it were bad. Rather, flesh is the collusion of soul and body to pursue behavior that displeases God. On the contrary, a spiritual man cooperates with the Holy Spirit, bringing soul and body into conformity to the will of Christ. Christians are either Spirit-controlled (spiritual) or flesh-controlled (carnal).

The Danger of Denying the Possibility of a Carnal State

A dear pastor friend of mine said to me, "I believe eighty percent of the people in our independent, fundamental congregations are unsaved." Surprised, I replied, "I don't agree. I believe eighty percent of the people in our independent, fundamental congregations are carnal."

I believe there is a grave danger in declaring those who don't live as they ought "unsaved." For then we make works an element of salvation.

By the way, it is critically important to distinguish between soul and spirit in one's theology, for God does in the Word (e.g., [1 Thess. 5:23](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)). Those who are of a more reformed theological persuasion often tend to lump

soul and spirit together and refer to them collectively as the soul or innermost part of man. Some dispensationalists unwittingly do the same. However, integrating soul and spirit results in making theological and hermeneutical errors.

We know that at salvation, technically speaking, the spirit is the aspect of our being that is saved. It was dead in trespasses and sins, but it is made alive in Christ, as the Holy Spirit regenerates and comes to reside in our spirit. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our *spirit* that we are the children of God ([Rom. 8:16](#)). Our spirit *has been* made completely righteous because of Christ—and there we find our provision for living the Christ life. That is the doctrine of justification and positional sanctification.

But, technically speaking, the soul has not been made righteous, and so we continue to sin. Our soul *is being* saved, and that is the doctrine of progressive sanctification. Thus Jesus calls us to discipleship. He wants us to choose to lose our soul in this life—that is, to die to self, letting go of the things of this world, so that we might find our soul at the Judgment Seat.

Of course, the body is not saved now. It will die, and so the body *will be saved*, and that is the doctrine of the redemption of the body.

The spirit **has been** saved (i.e., justified); the soul **is being** saved (i.e., progressively sanctified); the body **will be** saved (i.e., redeemed). Those who merge spirit and soul together are compelled to arrive at an incorrect theological position in order to make sense of the Scriptures. Whenever they see the word “soul” in the Bible they tend to equate it with “spirit”—and vice versa—essentially viewing the terms as interchangeable.

In so doing, they are essentially synthesizing justification and progressive sanctification. Then they are forced to arrive at either an Arminian interpretation of Scripture—which teaches that one can lose his salvation by not living righteously—or a Calvinistic interpretation—which teaches that if one does not live righteously he was never saved in the first place. I believe both of those theological conclusions are errors, not based on the Scriptures, but rather based on a faulty understanding of spirit and soul, which then leads to incorrect hermeneutical conclusions.

Those who do not distinguish between spirit and soul in their theology tend to misinterpret the books of Hebrews, James, and 1 John, for example.

When they see the term “save” or “salvation” or “salvation of the soul” or some other similar reference, they assume it is a soteriological reference (that is, a reference to the Gospel, to justification).

However, when many of those references are interpreted according to a right understanding of spirit and soul, and within context rather than according to one’s theological grid, it becomes clear they are sanctification references (not justification). Instead of one losing one’s salvation (Arminianism) or having never been saved in the first place (Calvinism), a more biblical conclusion is that carnality leads to millennial disinheritance.

A state of carnality—regardless of duration—is a possibility, according to the Scriptures. In an Old Testament sense, think of King Saul, who was saved but carnal. Think of Lot and Solomon, who were saved but carnal. In the New Testament, think of Ananias and Sapphira. God took their lives! Think of Peter who was carnal for a time. Think of Demas who forsook Paul and left the ministry in pursuit of worldliness. Think of those in [1 Cor. 11](#) who were carnal and partook of the Lord's table unworthily, and God killed them. They were carnal for the rest of their lives!

Now I realize, some readers may get very uncomfortable admitting the possibility of a carnal state. Here's why: they think that admitting to the possibility of an indefinite carnal state for the Christian will lead to shallow professions and profligate living. The result will be that our churches will fill up with people who call themselves Christians but don't act like it. In fact, some may even go so far as to suggest that by teaching the possibility of a carnal state we will actually go so far as to convince unsaved people they are saved, but carnal!

To those charges I respond: Yes, that could be the case and, I fear, is the case in many fundamental, dispensational churches. Because many pastors are not accurately teaching the distinction between soul and spirit, and they are not correctly teaching the doctrines of faith and repentance. They are not teaching the Christ-life, which is the God-given provision for living righteously ([Rom. 8:4](#)), and they are not teaching about the importance of preparing for the kingdom, which provides biblical motivation and accountability.

But when spirit-soul-body are accurately distinguished; and faith and repentance are preached biblically, not as mere professionalism ("pray this prayer or walk this aisle and you will be saved"); and the Christ-life is taught as our provision; and accountability is preached—that how we live now will determine whether or not we inherit the millennium—then carnal Christians will either get right with the Lord, or they will duck and run from the pressure.

In other words, when the Scriptures are preached accurately in our churches, then we never need to worry about an epidemic of false professions or perpetually carnal saints. Indeed, we can rest in knowing that the truth of the Word will prevail.

The sad truth is that carnality is a possibility for the Christian, and the duration of carnality is never limited. It is not our place to judge whether one is saved or not; we must continue to preach truth and let the Holy Spirit bring conviction, as needed.

Carnal Christians are not salty, nor do they shine brightly for Jesus.

Their saltiness has been diluted and their light has been hid.

In [Part 2](#) we will explore the dire consequences of carnality in the life of the Christian.