

Doctrine of The Three Classes of Men

1. There should be an obvious difference in the character and quality of the daily life of Christians. This difference is acknowledged and defined in the New Testament. There is also a possible improvement in the character and quality of the daily life of many Christians.
2. This improvement is experienced by all such Christians who fulfill certain conditions. These conditions form an important theme in the Word of God.
3. The Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, has divided the whole human family into three groups:
 - 3.1 The "natural man," who is unregenerate, or unchanged spiritually;
 - 3.2 the "carnal man," who is a "babe in Christ," and walks "as a man" neither willing to name his sin to God nor is he willing to consistently take in the Word of God; and
 - 3.3 the "spiritual" man, a believer who consistently takes in the Word of God under the filling of the Spirit.
4. These groups are classified by the Apostle according to their ability to understand and receive the Word of Truth, which doctrine is only "revealed" unto us by God the Holy Spirit.
5. Men are vitally different one from the other as regards the fact of the new birth and the life of power and blessing; but their classification is made evident by their attitude toward things revealed.
6. In I Corinthians 2:9 to 3:3 this threefold classification is stated.

1Co 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

1Co 2:10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

1Co 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

1Co 2:12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

1Co 2:13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

1Co 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

1Co 2:15 The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

1Co 2:16 "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

1Co 3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ.

1Co 3:2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

1Co 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are

you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

7. The passage opens as follows: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

8. A distinction is here drawn between those general subjects of human knowledge which are received through the eye-gate, the ear-gate, or the "heart" (the power to reason), and other subjects which are said to have been "revealed" unto us by His Spirit.

9. There is no reference here to any revelation other than that which has already been given to us in His Word and such revelation is boundless, as the Scripture goes on to relate: "For the Spirit (Who reveals) searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. Ó

10. Men are classified according to their ability to understand and receive the "deep things of God." Into these "deep things of God" no unaided man can go. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

11. An unaided man may enter freely into the things of his fellow man because of "the spirit of man which is in him." He cannot extend his sphere. He cannot know experimentally the things of the animal world below him, and certainly he cannot enter a higher sphere and know experimentally the things of God.

12. Even though man, of himself, cannot know the things of God, the Spirit knows them, and a man may be so related to the Spirit that he too may know them.

12.1 The passage continues: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we may know the things [the "deep things of God," which eye hath not seen, etc.] that are freely given us of God."

12.2 "We [that is, all saved, excluding none] have received the Spirit Which is of God." Here is a great potentiality. Being so vitally related to the Spirit of God as to have Him abiding within, it is possible, because of that fact, to come to know "the things that are freely given to us of God." We could never know them of ourselves: the Spirit knows, He indwells, and He reveals.

13. This divine revelation is transmitted to us in "words" which the Holy Spirit teacheth, as the Apostle goes on to state: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

14. God's Book is a Book of words and the very words which convey "man's wisdom" are used to convey things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man."

15. Nevertheless unaided man cannot understand these "deep things of God," though couched in words most familiar to man, except as they are "revealed" by the Spirit. Let's now look at the three classifications of man.

16. THE NATURAL MAN

16.1 "But the natural man receiveth not the things [the revealed or deep things] of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." In this passage the natural man is not blamed for his inability. This is simply an accurate statement of the fact of his limitations.

16.2 He has received only "the spirit of man which is in him." Though he may, with "man's wisdom," be able to read the words, he cannot receive their spiritual meaning. To him the revelation is "foolishness." He cannot "receive" it, or "know" it.

16.3 The moral principles and many of the religious teachings of the Bible are within the range of the capacity of the "natural man." From these sources he may eloquently preach; yea, and most seriously, not even knowing that "the deep things of God" exist.

16.4 Satan, in his counterfeit systems of truth, is said to have "deep things" to reveal (Rev 2:24) and "doctrines of devils" (1Ti 4:1 and 2) which things, on the other hand, are not received by the true child of God; for it is said believers will know the voice of the Savior. (Joh 10:5)

Rev 2:24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

1Ti 4:1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

1Ti 4:2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

Joh 10:5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

16.5 Yet the "deep things" of Satan are strangely adapted to the blinded "natural man" and are, therefore, received by him. Every cult and many denominations are examples of this phenomena.

16.6 The unsaved man, though educated with all of "man's wisdom," and though religious and attentive, is blind to the gospel. (2Co 4:3 and 4)

2Co 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

2Co 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

16.7 If called upon to formulate a doctrinal statement, the unsaved man will naturally formulate a "new theology" which is so "restated" as to omit the real meaning of the cross with its unfolding of the "deep things of God."

16.8 The cross, as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, is "foolishness" unto him.

1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

16.9 Human wisdom cannot help him, for "the world by wisdom knew not God." On the other hand, the boundless "deep things of God" are to be "freely" given to the one who has received "the Spirit which is of God." The true child of God may, therefore, be taught the divine revelation, having received the Spirit.

16.10 A trained mind, it may be added, will greatly assist; but apart from the presence of the indwelling Teacher, a trained mind avails nothing in coming to know the spiritual meaning of the revealed things of God.

16.11 The "natural man," with all his learning and sincerity, will find nothing but "foolishness" in the things which are revealed by the Spirit.

16.12 Apart from the Spirit there can be no regeneration, and the "deep things of God" are unknowable. When an unregenerate teacher openly rejects the vital saving truths of God's Word, those truths will usually be discredited and discarded by the pupil. This is the colossal blunder of many students in universities, colleges, seminaries and denominations today.

16.13 The ability to receive and know the things of God is not attained through the schools, for many who are unlearned possess it while many who are learned do not possess it. It is an ability which is born of the indwelling Spirit.

16.14 There are no divine classifications among the unsaved, for they are all said to be "natural" men. There are, however, two classifications of the saved, and in the text under consideration, the "natural" man is named before the "carnal" man and is thus placed near his distant cousin. Remember, the believer who is carnal can be just as bad if not worse than the unbeliever or natural man.

16.15 All of this is fitting because the "spiritual" man is the divine ideal. He that is "spiritual" (1Co 2:15) is the normal, if not the usual, Christian. But there is a "carnal" man and he must be considered.

17. THE CARNAL MAN

17.1 The Apostle proceeds in 1Co 3:1-4 with the description of the "carnal man":

"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 you 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?"

17.2 Some Christians, thus, are said to be "carnal" and can receive only the milk of the Word, in contrast to strong meat; they yield to envy, strife and divisions, and are walking as men, while the true child of God is expected to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16), to "walk in love" (Eph 5:1-2), and to "walk in the works designed by God in eternity past." (Eph 2:10)

Gal 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Eph 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children
Eph 5:2 and walk by means of love (**Agape**), just as Christ loved (**Agape**) us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

17.3 Though saved, the carnal Christians are walking "according to the course of this

world." They are "carnal" because the flesh is dominating them. (Rom 7:14-15)

Rom 7:14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.
Rom 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

17.4 The "carnal" man, or "babe in Christ," is not "able to bear" the deep things of God. He is only a babe; but it is important to note that even in his carnality he is infinitely superior to the natural man and can never be compared with the utter incapacity of the "natural man."

17.5 The "carnal" man, being so little occupied with true spiritual meat however, yields to envy and strife which lead to divisions among other believers.

17.6 But the "carnal" Christian is also characterized by a "walk" that is on the same plane as that of the "natural" man. "Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (compare 1Co 10:2-5)

1Co 10:2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

1Co 10:3 They all ate the same spiritual food

1Co 10:4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

1Co 10:5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

17.7 The objectives and affections of the carnal man are centered in the same unspiritual sphere as that of the "natural" man. In contrast to such a fleshly walk, we read: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." This is spirituality: consistently taking in the Word of God under the filling of the Spirit.

18. THE SPIRITUAL MAN

18.1 The second classification of believers addressed in our passages is the spiritual man. He, too, is proven to be all that he is said to be by one test, his ability to receive and know divine revelation. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "He that is spiritual discerns all things."

18.2 The progressive order of this whole context is evident:

18.2.1 First, there is faith alone in Christ alone.

18.2.2 Second, positive volition results in divine revelation. That revealed concerns things which, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man." It is revealed by the Spirit (1Co 2:9 and 10).

1Co 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

1Co 2:10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

18.2.3 Third, basic doctrines are presented at first and if positive volition continues, God the Holy Spirit will teach the more complex doctrines called "the deep things of God."

1Co 2:10 But **God** hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all **things**, yea, the **deep things** of **God**.

1Co 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

18.2.4 Fourth, the divine wisdom is hidden in the very words of God's Book; but the spiritual content of these words is understood only as one is able to compare spiritual things with spiritual (1Co 2:13).

1Co 2:13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

18.2.5 Fifth, the "natural man" cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness neither can he know them, because they are only discerned by the Spirit of God. (1Co 2:14)

1Co 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

18.2.6 Sixth, a carnal Christian is born again and possesses the indwelling Spirit; but his carnality hinders the full ministry of the Spirit (1Co 3:1-4).

1Co 3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ.

1Co 3:2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

1Co 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

1Co 3:4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

18.2.7 Seventh, he that is spiritual discerns all things. There is no limitation upon him in the realm of the things of God. He can "freely" receive the divine revelation and he glories in it. He discerns all things; yet he is discerned, or understood by no man. How could it be otherwise since he has "the mind of Christ?"

1Co 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

18.3 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.

18.4 The former is divinely accomplished when there is faith in Christ; the latter is accomplished when there is an adjustment to the Spirit. The one who is saved through faith in Christ, may at the same time wholly yield to God and enter at once a life of true surrender.

18.5 Doubtless this is seldom the case. It was thus in the experience of Saul of Tarsus and yet later in his life we find him failing. The Scriptures record three major trips into reversionism: his failure to forgive John Mark, his failure to preach at Troas, and his trip to Jerusalem against the wishes of God.

18.6 Most of us at some time or another become a carnal Christian either by sin and/or evil. To these the Word of God gives clear direction. The directions from God are to use the two power options. Rom 12:1 and 2.

Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

18.7 Lewis Sperry Chafer has written: "The "spiritual" man is the divine ideal in life and ministry, in power with God and man, in unbroken fellowship and blessing. To discover these realities and the revealed conditions upon which all may be realized is the purpose of systematic theology."