

What Kind of People Should We Be?

By Bob Young

It is easy to read the Bible in small sections, ignoring the larger context. One place that happens is in 1 Corinthians 3. The context of chapter 3 begins in chapter 2 where Paul explains that authentic spiritual wisdom is available to spiritual people who think in spiritual ways and can apply spiritual truths to real life settings.

To explain the application in Corinth, in chapter 3 he uses two similar adjectives, both of which are sometimes translated carnal (or worldly), but there is a difference. The words are *sarkinos* and *sarkikos*. The root of both words is *sarx* (literally, flesh); they are different only in the suffix, the last four letters. The “inos” suffix points to the material of composition, “made of....” The “ikos” suffix points to characteristics, thus “characterized by, influenced by, or controlled by....”

Look at the text: can you see Paul’s point? He would like to write to them as those who were characterized by spiritual realities (*pneumatikos*, 3:1, reflecting chapter 2). He cannot; he has to write to those who are very much like every other human being, composed of flesh. (*sarkinos*, NET uses the phrase, “people of the flesh.”) He calls them babies in Christ.

That is not their only problem. They are not only “people of the flesh” (v. 1, *sarkinos*) they are still influenced or characterized by the flesh and fleshly concerns (v. 3, *sarkikos*). The evidence Paul cites is their jealousy and dissension. They are acting like mere human beings—by nature, and in their thinking.

A picture of the contemporary church! When we begin the faith journey, we face two challenges. One, our nature is transformed so that we become participants in the divine nature. Two, how we think and the things we value changes, so we are influenced and characterized by the spirit and not the flesh, described in chapter 2 as spiritual people discerning spiritual things.

Too many modern Christians are trying to live using only one or the other of these two powers. We cannot stop being humans and living in this world. (The New Testament never describes Christians as *pneumatinos*, made up of spirit). Nevertheless, we have two natures—human and image of God. We are given a new nature and become participants in the divine nature. We walk by the Spirit and do not fulfill fleshly desires (Gal. 5). We have a new outlook (Rom. 8) and live according to spiritual influences and values.

Christianity is not only how you act. Christianity is how you think! Some do reasonably well with actions but in reality think like the world. This method will eventually fail! When we bring every thought into control (2 Cor. 10), when we are influenced and characterized and controlled by spiritual realities, our actions follow. Our challenge is to grow until our spiritual nature supersedes our physical, fleshly nature. Our challenge is to be led by, characterized, influenced, and controlled by the Spirit. That is how one stops thinking like the world!