

Are You an N, an S, or a C? • By Dr. David O. Dykes  
1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4

## INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago, Dr. RG Lee, who was the outstanding pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, preached a very strong, excoriating sermon against sin. And he really stepped on some toes. Afterward, a lady came up to him, very offended and very angry. She said, “Dr. Lee, I didn't like that sermon one bit.” Dr. Lee. looked her right in the eye and he said, “Well, neither did the devil. Classify yourself.”

That's what I'm going to ask you to do... to classify yourself, whether you're an N an S or a C. First Corinthians 2:14-15 says:

“The man without the Spirit [your Bible may say the natural man] 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. The Spirit-filled man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment for “who has known the mind of the Lord that we may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. Brothers. I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly [the Greek word means “carnal” or “fleshly”] or mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you're still not ready. You are still worldly, for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly [or carnal]? Are you not acting like mere men for when one says, “I follow Paul” and another, “I follow a Paulus” are you not mere men?”

### **I. N – A Natural Person (2:14)**

Paul says he's a person without the Spirit. Now, to help you understand who a natural person is, there are a lot of words we could use. I'm talking about a non-Christian and unbeliever. Somebody who's never been born again. They just do what comes natural. They don't know the Lord. You may think you're a Christian, but there are a lot of people who claim to be Christians who've never been born again.

How can you recognize a natural person?

#### **1. A natural person is born into the natural world**

They've only been born one time. Jesus said in John chapter three to Nicodemus that unless you are born of the flesh, of the water, and of the Spirit, you can't enter the kingdom. You must be born from below and born from above. It's not enough just to be born one time. Christians were at one time all “Ns.” We were natural. We

were born the first time, physically. But those of us who are Christians, we can claim that we've been born again. There's a second birth. a natural person. I heard a pastor from Atlanta talking about Ted Turner, who is the owner of CNN. This pastor had personally asked Ted Turner, "Mr. Turner, have you ever been born again?" And I think Ted Turner's response is very typical of a natural man. He said, "No, I've never been born again." He chuckled. And he said, "In fact, I feel lucky to have been born the first time." And he thought that sounded pretty cute, but there will be a time... if he is never born again... that he won't feel lucky that he was only born once.

Do you remember what Jesus said about Judas? When Judas was at the point of betraying Jesus, Jesus said, "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of man. It would be better for him if he had never been born." And did you know that's true of every natural man? Ted Turner says, "I feel lucky to be born the first time." But Jesus says any person who dies without having accepted Jesus Christ, it's better for them to not ever be born the first time. And so a natural man is born into the natural world. Nature forms them; sin deforms them; education may inform them; prisons may reform them; but only Jesus Christ can transform a natural man.

Now a natural man describes all different kinds of people. They come in all shapes and sizes. There are thin natural men and fat natural men. There are smart natural men and dumb natural men. He may be a rich man, a poor man, a bigger man, a thief, a doctor, a lawyer, an Indian chief. It could be all kinds of different people, but a person without the Spirit is natural.

## **2. They are blind to the spiritual world**

Verse 14 says the man without the Spirit does not accept and cannot perceive or understand the things of the Spirit. When I sing praises, I am excited about it and enjoying myself. Did you know a natural man can come into a worship service like this and it goes over their head? They can appreciate the natural things...they can appreciate a choir on the basis of their musical talent... but they can't get the spiritual message of it. They can come to a church and they can appreciate the fact that the facilities may look good, that the churches making their budget, that our printed material looks first-class.

They can appreciate all those kinds of things, but they just cannot appreciate what God is because they're blind to spiritual truth. There's a spiritual world going on all around us, but a person who is not a Christian is not picking up on it. I've used this illustration before, but right now, as I'm speaking to you in this very room right now, there's a football game going on. Can you see it? There's a guy running down the field right there. And don't you see those cowboys shooting at the Indians? It's going on right here in this room. Now, you're saying I really have flipped. But do you know what I'm talking about? I'm talking about television waves. That is all happening, but you know why we can't pick up on it?

We don't have a television tuned in to those stations. There's a whole lot going on spiritually. And the natural man just doesn't have the right receiver to pick up on it. He is blind to the spiritual world.

### **3. They are bound to the physical world**

All of us have a body, soul, and spirit. But the Bible says the natural man's spirit is dead. So he can only relate to this natural world, his physical world. People without the Lord have their own little mottos, their own little beliefs, their creeds and codes that they live by that sound something like the following. You only go around once in life, so you better grab for all the gumbo you can get, right? They say to get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can, and poison the rest. Just get all you can for yourself—that is their motto.

Now I want to tell you up front a natural man can be happy. He really can. I know people who aren't Christians who are happy. Sometimes we make a mistake in saying that lost people aren't really happy. I've seen some pretty happy lost people, haven't you? They don't have joy, but they can find happiness every now and then. But here's the problem. They're happy the same way a dog is happy. The Bible says an animal has a body and a soul, but they don't have a spirit. It doesn't take much to please a dog. Just feed him and then give him a cat or two to chase and a garbage can to knock over. He's happy. But animals don't have the ability to understand that life is going to end and they're going to die. Just like a dog, a natural man is only interested in this existence. They enjoy self-gratification, self-preservation, and self-propagation. A natural man is bound to this physical world.

## **II. C – A Carnal Christian (3:1)**

This is a person who is a believer and who has truly been born again. But here's the problem. Instead of being led by the Spirit of God, they're led by their own flesh. In other words, they make their own choices, their own decisions. And so they're carnal. How can you recognize a carnal Christian?

### **1. They are unable to digest truth to grow**

In other words, a carnal Christian is someone who is a baby Christian. Babies are precious. You have to be a really hard person to look at a tiny little infant and not feel a real sense of joy. We coo and make over them—how cute, how precious. But imagine a parent brings you an 18-year-old who is still in a bassinet with a pacifier in its mouth? You're not going to look at that 18-year-old and say, "How cute. So precious." You're going to say something's wrong!

Every Christian has a legitimate time of spiritual infancy. When you first become a Christian, that's what you are. You're a spiritual infant, and that's okay. But the tragedy today is that we have some 30 and 40 and 50 and 60- and 70-year-old spiritual babies who haven't grown. Paul says in chapter three, verse one that he couldn't address them as spiritually mature but as babies. I believe the average

church member is basically a carnal Christian. That's just been my experience. I didn't say the normal Christian. I said the average church member, because you know what it takes to be an average church member? Just be in the middle. We have 8,000 members in this church, but half of them seldom ever come. And so it's safe to say that the average church member is a carnal Christian. You really have to be different *not* to be a carnal Christian today.

Vance Havner said most Christians today are so subnormal that if anybody comes along and starts acting normal, we label them as “abnormal.” When you bring a baby home from the hospital, you don't want to feed that baby sirloin steak; you feed it formula. Then you mash up baby food from jars because that baby can't take solid food. But as it grows, it begins to eat solid food. And Paul said, “Here's the problem. You ought to be taking solid food, but for years you've been unable to digest spiritual truth.” Amy Grant has a song called “Fat Baby” that says: “His spiritual tummy can't take too much. One day a week he gets his spiritual lunch. On Sunday he puts on his spiritual best and gives his language a spiritual rest. He's just a fat baby.” That's true of so many Christians today who are unable to digest spiritual truth.

## **2. They're unwilling to serve others**

Have you ever noticed how much attention a baby requires? A baby is a constant source of need. Hebrews 5:11-12 talks about spiritual food, spiritual babies, and carnal Christians. It says, “We have much to say about this, but it's hard to explain because you're slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food.” What is milk? It's a compilation of all of those elementary basic teachings that you have to be taught over and over again: Jesus loves you. God's the Creator. The basic things.

There are three levels of, of receiving spiritual food. Level one, you have to be fed. Second level, you can feed yourself. Third level, you can feed others. What level are you? If somebody doesn't teach you the word of God, you just won't receive it? That's a baby. But when a baby grows up a little bit, they can begin to feed themselves. And that's true spiritually. You get to a point where you can study the Bible and feed yourself. But there's a third level. It is where you feed others. Verse 12 of Hebrews five says you ought to be feeding other people, but the problem is you need someone to feed you the elementary truths all over. He says that solid food is for the mature who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The spiritual babies are the people who come and sit and soak. They only receive; they only take in. They never give out. They never minister. That's what Paul is talking about. Spiritual babies are unwilling to help others. When I was at Samford University in Birmingham, they were building a huge home with a moat near

campus. I'd never seen a house with a moat around it. I'd heard about castles, but never seen a house with one! And it was beautiful. When they filled it with water, they made one terrible engineering mistake. They designed it so water would go in that moat, but there was no way for the water to get out or circulate. The moat became a stinking swamp, and it cost them thousands of dollars to re-engineer it. And there's a lesson there. If you, as a believer, only receive spiritual truth, but you never send it out, you become a spiritual swamp. Useless. But when you receive and then you give, you stay clean and fresh. But a carnal Christian doesn't serve others.

### **3. They are unhappy with others who disagree with them**

First Corinthians says a carnal Christian is a divisive Christian who always wants to complain and argue. Paul says there's jealousy and quarreling among you. He says that's one mark that you are carnal because you're arguing. There's jealousy among you. In chapter 3:4, Paul says they're choosing which leaders they like—some like Paul, some like Apollos. Paul says you guys are acting just like mere men. What does that mean? A carnal Christian acts like a natural man most of the time: very divisive, argumentative. But here's the problem. Carnal Christians don't get concerned about the major issues like lost people dying and going to hell. They never get upset about that. They get upset about the little trivial things, the little picky things. That's what they get upset about. And that's a sign of a carnal Christian.

I remember several years ago, we took our daughters to Six Flags over Georgia in Atlanta, Georgia. I tell you, we had a great day. We wrote every ride there, several of them numbers of times; every time they want to ride a ride, we wrote a ride. Every time they wanted to stop and get something to eat, we got something to eat; every time they wanted to get something to drink, we got something to drink. I felt like a great dad having a great family day. When we were leaving, we passed a booth, and one of our daughters wanted a balloon. I was tired and ready to go, so I said no. We got in the car, and all of a sudden from the back seat, I hear it. I looked back there and she's crying! That just really frustrates fathers. I wanted to slam on the brakes and just give of those fatherly lectures. “You mean to tell me, we've spent all this day, all this money, doing all these things, and now the whole day is ruined for you? Just because you didn't get one lousy little balloon?” But you can't expect children to act any other way than as childish.

Have you ever noticed that some people in the church, no matter if everything is going great, can get upset over trivial things? God can be blessing a church and wonderful things can be going on, but you leave their name out of the bulletin and it's a disaster. Or God forbid you sit in their pew on a Sunday morning! They get upset over the little trivial things. And that's how you can tell a carnal Christian. There are times when all of us backslide into carnality, and then we move into

maturity and the Spirit-filled life. And so the question is not, have you ever been carnal, but are you carnal right now? You're not receiving spiritual truth, and you're not growing now. You're not serving in some area of ministry and you just get upset about the tiniest things and you get unhappy.

I've met some happy natural lost people. I really have. I guarantee you I've not met many happy carnal Christians. I really haven't. In fact, I believe without a doubt that the most miserable person on earth is not a lost man. It is a saved person out of fellowship with God, a carnal Christian. A natural man does what comes naturally. But a carnal Christian does what comes unnaturally. They don't feel at home with God's people. They don't feel at home with the world's people. They don't feel good with a Bible in their hand. They don't feel good with a beer in their hand. They live in no man's land. And they're miserable. A carnal Christian is a miserable person. Pay attention if you honestly are at a point where you feel something's wrong in your Christian life...you're not enjoying it and you're not growing. It could be that you're a carnal Christian, but you can do something about it.

### **III. S – A Spirit-filled person (2:15-16)**

The Bible says the spiritual man makes judgments about all things. Verse 16 says the mark of a spiritual man is the mind of Christ. Hebrews 5 said that by constant use, meaning the solid meat of the word of God, a spiritually mature person is growing.

#### **1. They meditate on the word of God**

Meditation means you are constantly studying it. I like what Psalm 1 says about a man after God's heart. He meditates on the word of God. Hebrews 5 says we grow by constant use of the word. Let me tell you the difference between spirituality and maturity. The moment that you become a Christian, you are instantly spiritual. You don't have to act spiritual. You are spiritual. All that means is that your spirit is alive, and you're in tune with the spiritual world. That happens immediately, but maturity doesn't happen immediately. There's no shortcut. Many Christians who thought they were instantly mature, went up like a rocket and down like a rock.

When I was in college, there was a real popular evangelist named Bob Harrington. He went up like a rocket and down like a rock. He had a tremendous testimony of how he got saved. He went down there to the French Quarter in New Orleans and started to minister to those people. And he became instantly popular, going and preaching everywhere. But here's the problem. He was instantly spiritual, but he was not instantly mature. And because he did not develop spiritual maturity, he really became a castaway spiritually. Now that's why the Bible says that maturity happens immediately, but maturity is something that you must work on.

That's why, for instance, the Bible says when we're ordaining preachers/pastors, it says to “lay hands suddenly on no man.” Some of the biggest mistakes in the Body

of Christ have occurred when some celebrity gets saved. They're instantly spiritual and start going around to all these churches, giving their testimonies, and doing concerts. And there's no maturing. They go up like a rocket and down like a rock. How many of you remember BJ Thomas who sang "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head"? He was into drugs, got saved, and instantly went on the road to start speaking and singing in churches. He didn't get in a local church. He didn't get into the word. He didn't start maturing in his faith. And as a result, he became a spiritual castaway.

What does it mean to meditate on the word? It means something different than just reading the word. It really means something different than studying the word. When you study the word or read the word, you read the text and think about it a little bit. But when you meditate on the word of God, you read it over and over and over again, and it begins to operate through you. Now let me just suggest something practical to you. Have you ever tried repetitive Bible study? For instance, you take the book of Philippians and its four chapters and study it for two months, reading it every day. You can do it easily. Just four chapters. You know, what will happen if you read it for 30 days over and over again?

The first time you read it, you'll say that's nice. The second, third, and fourth time you read through it, it may be boring because you'll think, "I just read that yesterday." But I promise about the seventh or eighth time that you read it, something's going to happen. You'll say, "Have I read that before?" You'll be meditating on the word, and it's going to reach out and speak to you. By the time you read the book of Philippians 30 times, once a day, for 30 days, for the rest of your life the book of Philippians is going to be yours.

When you hear somebody say, where's that verse about "for me to live is Christ and die is gain" you'll say Philippians 1:21. Someone will ask, "Where's that verse about we ought to shine like lights in a wicked, corrupt generation?" Oh, that's Philippians 2:16, you'll say. Where's that verse about knowing him and the power of his resurrection? You'll know it's Philippians 3:10. Where's that great verse about my God shall supply all your needs? You'll say, that's over in Philippians 4. You'll know that for the rest of your life. Maturity doesn't come quickly.

## **2. They operate with the mind of Christ**

This means you think the way Jesus thinks. What is lot more important than what I think or what you think is what God thinks. You find out what Jesus thinks in his word. Philippians 2 says to let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus. So you say, "I want to do that. Lord. How can I have the mind of Christ?" Well, don't stop reading there because the rest of that chapter tells us how you will act when you do have the mind of Christ. And this is what it says: "Jesus being in the form of God, didn't think it was robbery to be equal with God, but he made himself

of no reputation and humbled himself and took upon himself the form of a servant.”

When you have the mind of Christ, there will always be genuine submission and humility in your life. You can always tell when a person does not have the mind of Christ when they're arrogant and always promoting their own self. The mind of Christ is always a spirit of quietness and humility.

### **3. They demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit**

A natural person does what comes naturally. A carnal person does what comes unnaturally, but a Spirit-filled person does what comes supernaturally. The very best measuring stick to determine whether a person is Spirit-filled or not is not how they act. It is how they react.

You can plan the way you act, but it's very hard for you to plan the way you react. A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit of God never goes around saying, “I'm filled with the Holy Spirit of God.” They never have to say it. It is something that is obvious. Galatians 5:22 says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control. Those aren't ways you act; those are the ways that a Spirit-filled person reacts.

When someone hates you, you love them. When you're in a world of misery and unhappiness, you have real joy. That's the way you react. When you're in a world that seems to be falling apart and things are flying to pieces, you act with peace. When there's a world of people around you who are in a hurry, always trying to get things done quickly, you have patience. When you live in a world of people who are angry, harsh, mean, and ugly, you have gentleness. In a world that is getting progressively worse in terms of moral standards, you have simple goodness. And in a world that has no control over its passions and appetites, you show self-control.

### **CONCLUSION**

What are you ? A natural person? If you are, I invite you to come to Jesus. You can accept him as your Lord and Savior, and you can become a Christian. Are you a carnal Christian? Not growing, not serving, not happy? Or are you a Spirit-filled Christian? That's our desire...that we would walk in the Spirit so we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

At one of my former churches, a father came to me concerned about his son. This was a church family, but not what you'd call a real faithful Christian family. He was very respected in the business community and came to church irregularly, although he was a member. And he came to me very concerned about his teenage son because his teenage son was involved in heavy metal music, drugs, and



alcohol. The boy was about as counterculture as a teenager could be at that time. I just talked to him about his son a little bit. And we prayed together. Then I talked to our youth minister about him, and our youth minister assigned one of our teenagers who really loved the Lord to try to befriend this guy.

God answered our prayers. And this teenage guy who was about 15 at the time got radically converted. All the zeal and all the energy that he had had been directing toward the wrong kind of interests, he suddenly turned over to Jesus. He just became one of these Jesus freaks, for lack of a better term. He began to witness to his friends, and I was thrilled to see it. It wasn't long after that when he decided to be a preacher, and he felt like God was calling him into the ministry. You've never seen anybody as zealous as this guy was; he created a group of young men and they started doing Christian drama everywhere for youth rallies, etc. He was fired up and in love with Jesus.

Then his dad comes to see me again. I couldn't believe it. Do you know what he said? He said, "I wish my son was the way he used to be. I always want him to be a doctor or a lawyer. Now he's going to be a preacher. He's crazy." I wanted to say to that father, wait a minute. He was on drugs. His brain was getting fried. You had no control over him whatsoever. There was nothing good about him. And you like him better the way he was then than now? There's not a good end to this story. When that daddy walked out of my office, I thought to myself, "Here's a guy who either is a very carnal Christian or a guy who's never been saved himself." It is not how you act. It's how you react. Lord, it is our desire as believers, not to be carnal, but to be maturing, Spirit-filled believers.