

## Maybe Elvis Was Just a Carnal Christian

Imagine trying to lovingly confront a high profile evangelical to share your concern that his Gospel presentation wasn't Biblical. Gulp. That is precisely what I did with Luis Palau several years ago prior to one of his mega-events.

I suggested he was giving the cure without explaining the disease of sin. Mr. Palau informed me that everyone has an overwhelming burden of guilt and it is not necessary for him to preach about their need for forgiveness.

Suspecting he might say that, I handed him a c.d. with a montage of people we interviewed on the street. We asked strangers, "Do you have an overwhelming burden of guilt?" The responses ranged from condescending disdain to outright laughter.

While Mr. Palau was very nice to me, he ultimately patted me on the head and said, "Be careful that you don't fall into that Lordship salvation trap. Christians can be carnal."

Carnal Christianity is the concept that says: you can live like the world and still be a Christian. It also teaches that sanctification can come some time after a person signs a card...er...asks Jesus into his heart...I mean gets saved.

Later that night at the festival, Mr. Palau's message included two profanities and proclamations like, "If Elvis had become a Christian, he would have been a rock star, but his life wouldn't have turned out so bad." He also informed the audience that if they would simply ask Jesus into their hearts, "The party starts right now." A woman from my church who just buried her seven year old son almost rushed the stage...and not to sign a card.

His Gospel presentation, as our British friends would say, was "a complete dog's breakfast."

It is no surprise that the follow up statistics to crusades are so tragic. The backslider rate (or Carnal Christian rate) hovers around 90%. It seems that Carnal Christianity and Gospel presentations that don't include sin, righteousness and judgment go hand and hand. In order to explain those statistics, the minister must:

1. Admit the preaching is inadequate and without Holy Spirit power.
2. Alter theology to explain how a decision-maker can name the name of Christ but live like the devil.

Option one is out of the picture. And so it is, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern day evangelicalism (thanks to Lewis Sperry Chafer and the Scofield Bible) has been proclaiming the oxymoron known as Carnal Christianity.

The support text for Carnal Christianity is I Cor.3:1-5. "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

Paul was warning the ignorant, sectarian Corinthians that they should not be divided into cliques. That's it. This text does not suggest that born-again believers can live like pagans. Paul was introducing them to new theology, not giving them license to sin.

With all credit to Ernest C. Reisinger's "A Carnal Christian," here are eight reasons why Carnal Christianity should be rejected.

1. In I Cor.1:2-5, Paul addressed his audience as "sanctified in Christ". So are they sanctified or carnal? In I Cor.2, Paul divides men into "natural" and "spiritual," i.e. un-saved and saved. By labeling some Christians as "carnal," Paul would be introducing a third classification of humans. Furthermore, this would violate every other presentation in Scripture that there are only two classes of people: children of God or children of wrath.
2. The new covenant of salvation includes two inseparable blessings at salvation: justification and sanctification. Carnal Christianity teaches you will be justified upon conversion, but sanctification is optional.
3. The Bible presents two types of faith: saving faith and spurious (false) faith (Lk. 8:13). Carnal Christianity does not recognize spurious faith. What a false assurance we allow the unregenerate to possess if we allow them to think their faith is valid when the Bible teaches it might be a false conversion.
4. Carnal Christianity excludes a necessary component of salvation: repentance. The unconverted sinner can just "ask Jesus into his heart" with no requirement to forsake sin.
5. How does a person know he is saved? Fruit in keeping with repentance. We are told to examine ourselves to see if we are in the truth. What a beautiful gift to the believer. If we can be carnal, how can we know we are saved? Carnal Christianity robs us of assurance.
6. Carnal Christianity may be a relatively new name, but it is merely a new moniker for an old false teaching: anti-nomianism. "Should we go on sinning that grace might more abound?" Carnal Christianity says, "Sure."
7. "Carnal Christian teaching is the mother of many second work-of –grace errors in that it depreciates the Biblical conversion experience by implying that the change in the converted sinner may amount to little or nothing." Dr. Reisinger goes on to point out that a second step is required to make a man a "spiritual Christian."

8. Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, right? (Lk.2:11) Carnal Christianity divides Jesus and allows Him to be Savior but not Lord.

Listen to the words of A.A. Hodge. "Think of a sinner coming to Christ and saying, 'I do not want to be holy; I do not want to be saved **from** sin; I would like to be saved **in** my sins; do not **sanctify** me now, but **justify** me now.'"

That is ridiculous, isn't it? And so is Carnal Christianity. Even Elvis would agree with that.