

CARNAL CHRISTIANS?

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1 Cor. 3:1 is a text that some attempt to use to prove the existence of “Carnal Christians” or “Sinning Saints”. 1 Cor. 3:1 should always be examined with 2 Cor. 7:8-11.

2 Cor. 7:8-11 "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly matter, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of. But the sorrow of the world works death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, ye, what clearing of yourselves, ye what indignation, ye what fear, ye what vehement desire, ye, what zeal, ye what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

So Paul said that his letter or epistle (1 Corinthians) made the Corinthians sorrowful. And that this sorrow lead to repentance and repentance leads to salvation. So these individuals were sorry over their carnality, repented of their carnality, and found forgiveness for their carnality.

Here is a break down of the narrative as I understand it:

1 Cor. 3:1: Paul said that he spoke to them in regards to their carnality at some past time, assuming them to be babes in Christ merely needing instruction. He thought that they were babes in Christ, obeying the little light that they had, and that their "carnality" was done unknowingly. And if it was done unknowingly, it was not a sin (James 4:17) and they were therefore just ignorant babes, obeying the little light that they did have.

1 Cor. 3:2: Paul said he fed them milk at some past time (teaching them better) thinking that this would solve the problem. But they did not listen to it then (did not bear it) and are neither now listening to it (able to bear it) because the problem is their heart and not their mind, the problem was their will not their knowledge.

1 Cor 3:3: Paul concludes then, that since they are not doing it ignorantly, but now definitely know better, yet aren't doing better, that they are merely carnal because they are acting the same way they were before they were fed. He thought maybe they didn't act better because they didn't know better (merely babes) and simply needed to be taught (milk) , but now they've been fed milk and are still acting carnal, so Paul concludes that they are simply carnal.

2 Cor. 7:11: Paul says that his previous epistle or letter made them sorrowful (no doubt 1 Corinthians), their sorrow lead them to repentance, and their repentance brought salvation. There is no forgiveness of sin (sin is violating known law) without repentance.

But when a person repents of violating known law, they are forgiven. Therefore repentance is "unto salvation", and without repentance there is no salvation.