

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9

FLESHLY CHRISTIANS

The Corinthian believers, like all believers, had a battle with the world, as they sought after the philosophies of the world, and also had a battle with the flesh. They lost quite frequently as they gave into the temptations of sin of these twin enemies. Many of their sins are exposed as we move through this epistle which identifies those sins as we witness Paul correcting them.

The sin of division is the one we have looked at the past few weeks. They were divided because of worldliness, of love for human wisdom. In this section today, we will see them divided because of the flesh. They continued to give in to the sin in their humanness. They operated in the flesh and were acting like unbelievers. They had been Christians for awhile but were baby Christians, refusing to grow. They were undeveloped, immature Christians. As we see this, then we can understand why they would be divided. The world and the flesh causes so much of the problems in the church.

We want this to be a lesson for us. We don't want to slip into the attitude of the Corinthian Christians and be lackadaisical in our hunger for God's deep truths.

1. CARNALITY—THE CAUSE OF DIVISION 3:1-3

A. BRETHREN

Once again as Paul addresses the problems and rebukes the Corinthians, still does it with grace. He calls them brethren and recognizes them as fellow believers. He shows his love for them and reminds them that they are still saved, despite their terrible sins. He is a brother to them and not a judge, even though he rebukes them.

B. SPIRITUAL

Paul wanted to speak to them as spiritual men or mature Christians but he could not because they were babes. They were not mature enough to receive the deeper things of Christ.

1. Positional spirituality

All believers are spiritual and all unbelievers are unspiritual. There are only two kinds of people, spiritual, and unspiritual. That means believers and unbelievers. 1 Cor 2:14-15 contrasts believers and unbelievers. So, there would be no such thing as an unspiritual Christian in this context. This is positional spirituality in which the believer is a new man with a new heart. Every believer is equal. Every believer is regenerated 1 Cor 2:16---The spiritual man has the mind of Christ. Rom 8:9

2. Practical spirituality

The practical aspect is another thing, however. These Corinthians were far from acting spiritual, even though that was their new nature. Paul had to speak on the lowest spiritual level to them.

C. CARNAL

1. Arrested spiritual development

As babes in Christ—They were in a state of spiritual infancy. They had not grown up. They weren't ready for the meat although they should have been. Heb 5:13

Their diet was baby food. Paul had to teach them the ABC's

2. Living out of character

Carnal (Sarkinos)—fleshly, fallen humanness

The flesh cannot any longer dominate us, but it can greatly influence us. The Christian is no longer characterized by sin, it is not his nature. But he still can sin and even sin like an unbeliever.

Carnality is not an absolute state in which a believer exists but a behavior pattern he chooses one moment at a time.

Even though they were Christians, they were walking as Corinthians. They seemed as if they were unregenerate and natural men. Even though they were spiritual by nature, they were still natural by their behavior. As they walked out of character, they were walking in the flesh rather than walking in the spirit. Many who walk as Christians do indeed walk as men, live and act too much like other men. Christians sin and when they do, they are practically unspiritual and appearing on the same level as an unbeliever.

James 1:25, Because they refused to give up their carnal desires they became forgetful hearers.

2 Peter 1:12-13 Spiritual truths that are neglected will become less and less remembered and meaningful.

D. MILK DIET

Milk vs. solid food

After five years, they still needed to be fed with milk. They could not digest solid food. They seemed content to stay at that level.

Many Christians don't want to listen to deep teaching. They are not threatened that way. The weekly evangelistic message is easier for their ears to hear.

Christians are to be learning more about the doctrines that have been known for years. Nothing is more sad than to see a 20 year old man with the mind of an infant. A baby that acts like a baby is joy but an adult that acts like a baby is a tragedy.

It is a tragedy when a preacher gives only milk every week. The preacher must create an appetite for his people to grow spiritually.

How can we expect spiritual maturity today when preachers pass out crackers and milk and get no deeper than spiritual ABC's?

The spiritual food for the Christian is provided in perfect form but it cannot be of any benefit just as it is found. One must read, study, pray, discern, divide, absorb, and digest it. Maturity demands activity.

Why is it that so many believers are saved and still on milk, and do not develop to maturity on to meat, and become spiritual people but remain carnal? Why is it?

leaders, a great number of them, are unspiritual themselves and are carnal and cannot teach spirituality! The second reason is most likely also the

mirror image of this, that there is no appetite, or at least generally speaking to a large extent, there is not an appetite within believers. There is not a desire within Christians to seek after God's truth, God's meat, God's maturity, spirituality - and if there is that desire, there's not the willingness to pay the cost, to pay the price! Because of that and many other reasons, the consequence, is that the church is overstuffed with big babies.

We can see that at large in our nation today, where the word of God and the preaching of the word of God is relegated to a minimal status. Now Christians can watch a 3 and a half hour long film, an epic, sit before it and take it all in, follow the plot - but they can't sit for half an hour or 45 minutes or even an hour under God's word and think about it!

There is a famine in God's word and there is a famine in doctrine, doctrine is diluted and made to seem unimportant - but that is not, I believe, what Paul is talking about here.

They knew everything, but what made them carnal was that they didn't have the power to express in their life that which they knew! That, perhaps, is the fundamental distinction between those who are spiritual and those who are carnal - it is not how much you know, it is how much you implement of what you know!

what many people today, especially in our circles, need is not increased spiritual teaching, but an increased obedient heart to the Spirit's command. In fact, if you don't have obedience to the Spirit's command in the teaching of the word of God, the more teaching you get the more carnal you get! Does that mean we need to stay away from meetings and start to consider for a while whether we've put into practice what we believe and have been taught? No, but we need to be obedient to the things we learn from the Word. He mentioned this as the cause of division in Corinth in chapter 1 and verse 11, and two more times he's going to mention it: chapter 3 verse 22, and chapter 4 verse 6. He's always coming back to the fact that they are divided because of their humanistic wisdom and reasoning, because of their carnality! He says: 'Even the ones that are saying, 'I am of Christ', the motivation behind it is jealousy and strife'. They're trying to set themselves up as spiritual when they're carnal!

2. CARNALITY'S SYMPTOMS 3:3-4

Jealousy and strife are always found in immature congregations

A. JEALOUSY---Attitude---This is the inner emotional condition

B. STRIFE-----Act-----This is the outward expression of selfishness.

Carnality has many manifestations. It will corrupt morals, relationships, and doctrine.

Selfishness is a characteristic of a baby. Its whole concern is its own comfort, hunger, thirst, attention, and sleep. You could say a baby is self-centered. For a church to act this way is to be spiritually infantile.

C. DIVISION-----Selfishness

Division happens when there is selfishness.

Factions result when there is jealousy and strife.

When there are loyalties around certain individuals it means there is immaturity in the church.

The Corinthians were behaving in a fleshly way by being selfish. Selfishness causes division because it favors one's self and lowers another.

3. CARNALITY'S CURE

3:5-9

The cure is always the same antidote, turning our eyes away from ourselves and turning them to Christ whom we all glorify. When we pay attention to Him, then the factions disappear.

A. SERVANTS (Diakonos) Ministers

They see a man with a gift, a tremendous gift that the Lord uses, and they set him up on a pinnacle over another man that doesn't seem to have as much of a flamboyant gift - but they are priding the man, ignoring the fact that the Spirit is the one who has given the man the gift. These people are not demi-gods, they are servants. Servants are menial workers, table waiters, busboys.

B. TWO TYPES OF MINISTRY

Planting

Watering

Paul and Apollos were simply the instruments.

We are not to celebrate the servants of the Lord, but the Lord Himself!

If we recognise the sovereignty of the Spirit we will realise who makes one Christian to differ from another. Paul says: 'I am what I am by the grace of God'. The world honors men and try to make them out to be gods. Man is the highest thing they know so they crown him. Only the Lord should get the glory.

We are all working for the same Lord, so you shouldn't be divided at all!'

C. THE CAUSE OF THE GROWTH—GOD

No matter what man does in his work, he can't give life, only God can. The most That man can do is prepare and water the soil and plant the seeds.

God does it all, but He does it all through us - and God wouldn't have given the increase, I believe, if Paul hadn't planted and Apollos hadn't watered.

What Paul and Apollos could do God wasn't going to do, because He commanded them to do it.

D. REWARD

Rev 11:18

God rewards on the basis of labor, not success or numbers. A missionary might be out in the field for 30 years and only have a couple of converts. Jeremiah saw few results.

If we are faithful with what God gives us, He will not disappoint us of our reward.

E. LABOR

1 Cor 15:10—It is all by grace.

F. GOD'S FIELD, GOD'S BUILDING

The believers there in Corinth were God's field, God's building. verse 9 says - that they are fellow-labourers with God, they are a team

working for God, that the church is God's field, it's not our field, it's not the Iron Hall's field, it's God's building! He has a unified field, not divided into sections! He doesn't have a building that has a segregation down the middle, but it's one building, one field, and it's all God's and He's the leader!

Do you know that you're saved to serve? Do you know that if you don't use the abilities God has given to you, you might lose them? You could stay as a baby right throughout your whole Christian life! Do you not realise the passion and the pleasure and the power that there is in working for Christ, and even the joy that there is in it of itself? No matter about people getting saved, no matter about the blessing it incurs, the joy to serve the Lord!

How do you come from being a carnal Christian to a spiritual Christian? What's the problem? The problem is the flesh. What can we do with the flesh? Maybe you're a young Christian, and Christians struggle with the flesh, they try to beat the flesh and conquer the flesh and tame the flesh - but you can't do it. Can I say a startling thing tonight? Even the blood of Christ can't cleanse the flesh - do you know what the only answer for the flesh is? Crucifixion. Where was the flesh crucified? Calvary. Crucify the flesh, the lusts thereof. It's irredeemable, you can't make it better. Don't pray for God to make you better, pray for God to make you dead - that old nature crucified with Christ, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our bodies. Is it any wonder he said: 'I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified', because it's the answer to everything.