

1 Corinthians Series #8
"Natural, Spiritual, Carnal" - 1 Cor. 2:14-3:4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Put Downs

1. Today =
2. My teen years: "You're so immature!"

B. The Tragedy of Immaturity

1. We expect babies to be immature
2. But it's tragic when adults act like children
3. Karesse
 - a. 1 year old
 - b. walking and falling
 - c. eating; bottle, baby food, "big" food, hands, silverware, cup, popsicle
 - d. cute - fun - a joy!
 - e. but tragic if the same when 10 years old

C. The Immature In Corinth

1. That is what Paul writes about in our passage today
2. The Corinthians had been believers for some time
3. Still acting as babies
4. "Grow up!"

II. TEXT

A. Last Week

1. At the end of Ch. 2, Paul introduced us to 2 kinds of people: the natural person and the spiritual person

14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one.

2. The natural person is not saved; not born again
 - a. he or she is spiritually dead
 - b. he lives only by the senses
 - c. dominated by the world and the flesh
3. The spiritual person is saved; born again
 - a. Spirit of Christ lives in them
 - b. not only that, they walk In the Spirit
 - c. they live, not only in the realm of sense, but in the realm of the spirit so that they understand God's word

4. In Ch. 3, Paul introduces a 3rd kind of person = the Carnal person

B. V. 1

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

1. Just who are these carnal people?
What does Paul mean by carnal?
2. We know the natural man is not saved
3. The spiritual man is!
4. What about the carnal man? Is he saved?
5. Notice how Paul addresses the Corinthians
 - a. "Brethren"
 - b. "babes in Christ"
6. The carnal person is saved, but something is wrong in his/her walk.
7. The problem is this: Though saved, he/she is not walking in the Spirit, He is walking in the flesh
8. That is why Paul calls them "carnal."
9. "Carnal" means "of" or "dominated by the flesh."
10. He also calls them "babes in Christ."
11. They shouldn't have been babes at this point
12. Paul was their spiritual father
 - a. 1 Corinthians 4:15 **For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.**
 - b. he had planted the church there
 - c. had spent 18 months instructing them and nurturing them in the faith
 - d. they had had a great start and should have gone on to maturity
 - e. but they were still acting as infants act
 - f. as their father, Paul was sorely grieved.
13. How did Paul know they were carnal?
 - a. what were they doing that made Paul realize they were so far off base?
 - b. what marks of carnality and spiritual immaturity marked them as babes?
 - c. there were two main marks that Paul saw

C. Vs. 2-3a

2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;

3 for you are still carnal.

1. The first mark of spiritual immaturity is the believer's diet
2. Think of a child
 - a. when they are a baby, they drink milk from a bottle
 - b. they are unable to digest solid food
 - c. but as they mature, they move to more mature food
 - d. this more mature food, like meat, takes a bit more work to digest, but it also provides more nutrition for growth
 - e. children also go from being fed, to feeding themselves as they mature
3. The problem in Corinth is that long after the time they should have gone on to solid food, they were still sucking on the milk bottle
4. What would you think if we went out to lunch after church and when the waitress came, I ordered a bottle?
5. Or when the food came, my wife put it into the baby food grinder and spoon fed it to me like we do with my little 1 year old daughter?
6. That was the problem in Corinth - in a spiritual sense
7. But what does Paul mean when he speaks of milk and solid food?
8. The answer to that is found in Hebrews 5
 - a. in that passage, the writer is dealing with the same problem of spiritual immaturity

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. *13* For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. *14* But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

- b. then in the next two verse he goes on to explain what he means by milk as opposed to solid food.

6:1-2 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, *2* of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

- c. so, in other words, spiritual milk is the very most basic things of the gospel
- d. it's a looking back to what Christ has already done
- e. while solid food is more about what Christ is now doing, in and through us

9. Another way to look at this is to say that milk is evangelism while solid food is edification
10. The baby wants to be entertained while the mature wants to be effective
11. So the first mark of their spiritual immaturity was their spiritual diet

D. Vs. 3b-4

3b For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere men*?

4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal?

1. The second mark of their spiritual immaturity was their disunity
2. Have you ever noticed how children love to disagree and fuss over every little thing?
 - a. as babies, if they are not the center of attention and being constantly entertained, they will let you know their dissatisfaction
 - b. as they turn into children, they demand to be entertained; and if they're bored, they'll let you know it, usually by getting into trouble
3. Part of the process of growing up is learning that life isn't about always being entertained - it's about being responsible
4. The Corinthians Christians were broken and divided among themselves because of their allegiance to their favorite teachers.
 - a. like little children on the playground they were saying, "My dad's better than your dad."
 - b. of course, what they meant was their spiritual leaders - Paul, Apollos, Peter, and others.
5. The real core of all this disharmony was that they were being selfish, and that is the biggest of all the marks of immaturity

E. Amazing!

1. What's amazing in all this is that, as we shall see, the church at Corinth was what you might call an extremely Charismatic church.
 - a. they had all the gifts of the Spirit in operation
 - b. they were very Pentecostal; tongues, interpretation, knowledge, wisdom, healing, miracles, prophecy
2. But Paul calls them carnal, immature
3. There are some who think that what it really means to be spiritual is to flow in the gifts of the Spirit

4. I have been a part of some these churches, and let me tell you, I have seen some of the most petty and small minded people I have ever met there, as well as some genuine saints of God.
5. True spiritual maturity is not determined by the volume of worship or ministry in the gifts of the Spirit -
6. It is determined by the amount of the fruit of the Spirit;
 - a. love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control
7. The spiritually mature realize the gifts are given for building with
8. The immature think they are for playing with and boasting about - which exactly what they were doing in Corinth

F. Love for God / Love For Others

1. An important truth is revealed in these things for us
2. That truth is this: Our relationship with God is revealed in our relationship with others.
3. We cannot say we are spiritual, and then live in disharmony with others
4. The truly spiritual Christian is in committed fellowship with other believers
5. If he or she is not, then he is only fooling himself.
6. As Paul says here, he is not spiritual, he's carnal!

III. CONCLUSION

A. A Challenge

1. What kind of Christian am I / are you?
 - a. spiritual?
 - 1) enjoying the deep things of God
 - 2) feasting on spiritual tri-tip
 - 3) enjoying close fellowship with other members of the body of Christ
 - 4) seeing the fruit of the HS born in my life
 - b. carnal?
 - 1) wanting to be entertained
 - 2) waiting for someone to feed me
 - 3) unaware and disinterested in the deeper things of God
 - 4) constantly finding fault with others and being critical of who they are and what they do
2. And let me say this; and I say it from personal experience . . .
 - a. if this challenge makes you uneasy and defensive, chances are, you are indeed carnal.
 - b. you see, the spiritual person will hear this and because their heart is tender to God, will take it and

- ask the HS to apply it to them
- c. but the carnal person will immediately react to it and grow defensive because they see it as an attack
 - d. I know this is true because it's my own experience
 - 1) when the light of criticism is applied to my life, if there is a valid basis for the criticism, I tend to resist
 - 2) if there is no basis, it's easy to shrug it off because it simply doesn't apply
 - e. so, if this challenge makes you uneasy and defensive, it would be best for you to spend some time meditating on these things and ask God to turn the searchlight of the HS on your heart.

B. This Message To Believers

- 1. If you aren't, you may be thinking, "Christians can be pretty messed up. Wow! So what makes them better than me?"
- 2. Nothing, they aren't "better" than you or anyone else
- 3. But they are different; different in the most important thing of all
- 4. They have been forgiven of their sins and have the promise of eternal life - you aren't and you don't
- 5. Now, you might think that's unfair
 - a. why would people who seem worse than you be able to go to heaven while you can't
 - b. friend, that's the whole point of the gospel
 - c. salvation is not an issue of whose been good and whose been bad.
 - d. it's a question of who has received the gift of God's grace