

1Co06 – Immaturity Leads to Division – 1 Corinthians 3:4-23

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “Immaturity Leads to Division.” We are in 1 Corinthians 3:4-23, cutting out a section to come back to next week.

We started this critical chapter of 1 Corinthians 3 last week with our message, “Carnal Christians in Diapers.” That entire message was to introduce the subject of this chapter and to try to get across the critical truth that Christians acting like the world or still wearing spiritual diapers long past their “potty-training” time can really start to smell bad in the church.

And so today we’re going to build on that pleasant topic and we’ll see Paul get much more specific in his instruction to the carnal and immature Christian. Today we’re going to focus on the carnal and immature Christians who are starting factions within the church. A **FACTION** can be defined as: *a small disagreeing group that causes problems with a larger group.*”

So we’ll see that today and then next week we’ll look at the responsibility of those who are serving the church on behalf of Christ. Can you handle it?

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, make us ready. Would you just touch our hearts, Lord? Would you give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to receive? Lord this is such a crucial message. Lord, reveal this to us in a way that we would be less susceptible to being used by the enemy to bring division and discord into the church, that you would grow us up in this area, that your Spirit would protect us from being schemed and duped from acting like worldly thinkers or immature Christians and thereby being used by the enemy. Protect us from it by bringing this truth to life in us today, in your name, Jesus, amen.*

Let’s start with two verses that really set the stage for what the Holy Spirit wants to address today. We’ll start with verse three, which was our last verse we studied last week and we will transition into the new thought.

1 Corinthians 3:3–4 (NLT)

3(the vs we ended on last week) ***for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn’t that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren’t you living like people of the world?***

4 ***When one of you says, “I am a follower of Paul,” and another says, “I follow Apollos,” aren’t you acting just like people of the world?***

This is a *very big deal* in living “Life As The Church.” Let me give you the best example I can think of – of what Paul is talking about here.

Let’s say there’s a Bible study and there are two Bible teachers in that study and the two teachers have no conflict or issues with each other. But within the study, one person says to another, “Hey, don’t you think *our guy* should be teaching this study? Don’t you get more out of the study when *our guy* is teaching?”

“Yeah, I do, you’re right. *That guy* shouldn’t be teaching, *our guy* should be teaching it.”

“Let’s see if we can get *our guy* to teach instead of *that guy*.”

That is exactly what Paul is talking about here, and it is *so* serious that Paul is going to continue to *return to this issue* several times in this letter.

Again, 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 says to these immature believers, **3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature . . .** (then at the end) ***Aren’t you living (just) like people of the world? 4 When one of you says, “I [want OUR GUY to teach],” and another says, “[I’d rather have OUR GUY teach],” aren’t you acting just like people of the world?***

WHY is it such a big deal? Haven’t we been trained to be consumers? Don’t we get to choose what we want? Aren’t we just picking our favorite guy and then backing him? Aren’t we just deciding who we like and then trying to get what we want? What’s so wrong with that? (Well, actually – a lot.)

Can I tell you a couple of stories? Actually, it’s the same story, it just happens over and over again. When we started this church there were two pastors and we were both Bible teachers and the vision God had given me was of the two of us teaching God’s Word back to back – like gunslingers in the old west.

But over a short period of time, a few people decided the wrong person had been put in the senior pastor position and they were sure God had called them to *correct that mistake* and before it was over I was receiving anonymous death threats from *Christians* who were attending this church. And so threatening death became an acceptable way for them to get “their guy” into the position they wanted him in. And you would say NO – Christians would never do that... and I would say YES – carnal and immature Christians would, and they do things like that, *all the time*.

So – we barely recovered (my family and I) and I mean *barely*. And then a few years later, we put the wrong guy in charge of the men’s ministry and him and a buddy started teaching some pretty wild stuff, and they made up their own business cards and called

themselves “Ministers of the Gospel.” And they got a little following in the church – primarily because they provided dinner for anyone who’d come to their study, which is where the saying comes from “I really got fed at that guy’s study.” And by the time we corrected the problem, those two got mad and left and took most of their following with them and most of those people ended up drifting away from both fellowship and growth in Christ.

Oh, and then there was that time in 2009 when we refocused the entire church on discipleship and one guy didn’t like that direction and he had a better idea and he had a lot of relationship built in the church. And because the church’s side was different than his, he had to tell all those people that I was wrong and his plan was right. So he got a bunch of people to leave the church and go to another church with him, and then he ultimately left that church and all those people drifted away somewhere.

Oh, and then there was that time... but, do you really need to hear more? Even though I have plenty more real-life tragic stories about what happens when people decide “their choice” is a “better choice” than “God’s choice.”

And we know by the larger context here in 1 Corinthians that these leaders had nothing to do with the division and discord the immature believers were sowing into the church. These leaders (Paul, Apollos and Peter) they all knew better. They weren’t creating this, the carnal Christians in diapers were, and so Paul tries to get these baby Christians at Corinth to see the light.

1 Corinthians 3:5.

1 Corinthians 3:5 (NLT)

5 After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God’s servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

Paul says: We aren’t leaders of your faction or your group, we are strictly and only God’s servants. Greek word is DIAKONOS which became the word “*deacon*.” It means “*servant in action*” maybe best translated as “*ministering servant*” because it refers to servants who were at work, ministering. And Paul says – that’s all we are, God’s servants, at work, doing the work the Lord gave us to do. (that’s it.)

And then Paul explains that every “ministering servant” has a different type of work to do.

1 Corinthians 3:6 (NLT)

6 I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.

Notice one servant does one type of work, another servant does another type of work. And they are both working on behalf of God and it is God alone who brings the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:7 (NLT)

7 It's not important who does the planting (one type of work), or who does the watering (another type of work). What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

One ministering servant over another is NOT important. It's the work of God that's important.

Planting and watering are not the same type of work, they are two different types of work done by two different types of people. If a plant is “planted” but is never “watered” what will happen to the plant? (Die).. If a plant is just laid on the ground and “watered” without ever being “planted” what will happen to the plant? (Die). So to the life of the plant, which type of work is more important – planting or watering?

And so, should the plant (which is you) decide that one type of work is better than another? And in the end, is it the type of work currently being done that's important? Or is it the fact that the plant is growing that is important?

We know that Paul and Apollos are two very different personality types and verse 5 says they each did the “type of work” that God gave them to do. Have you ever known two leaders (teachers) in the same group who were very different personality types? Let's say one is mainly intellectual and one is mainly relational.

Well, if you were a carnal or immature Christian (using Paul's terms here) it is highly likely you would begin to choose, or side with, or support the teacher or leader who is either most like you or with whom you have some connection or relationship. And if you remain thinking like that you will likely become part of the enemy's scheme to bring division and discord into that group. Maybe not willingly – but maybe unknowingly.

And the answer to save you from being used by the enemy in that situation is right here in 1 Corinthians 3:7.

Verse 7 says it's not important who does one type of work, or who does another type of work. What's important is that God is using ALL types of work to cause you to grow in your relationship with him.

The question is NOT what type of work is God doing in your life right now and through what minister... the question is, are you growing into a mature Christian or is the enemy capitalizing on your immaturity and using you to subtly sow division into the church?

I can tell you this, after caring for God's people IN Church for twenty-five years, I promise you the type of teacher does NOT determine if there is true growth in a Christian. The Christian *themselves* determine if there is true spiritual growth in their lives or not. I have seen true and supernatural growth in Christians under all types of Bible teaching.

And the truest growth and truest maturity I've seen is in those Christians who finally realize that every type of worker that God puts them under is part of God's overall purpose for their spiritual growth.

That is so good I have to say it again.

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Look closely at 1 Corinthians 3:8-9.

1 Corinthians 3:8-9(NLT)

8 The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.

9 For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

Looking back at verse 8. Listen to the NET Bible translation note here: ***Although*** [God's ministers] ***are in fact individuals, they are used by God with a single purpose to accomplish*** [God's] ***will in facilitating growth.*** (meaning your spiritual growth)

That leader or teacher that you like and equally, the leader that you don't like are both being used together – by God – for the same purpose which is to facilitate your spiritual maturity.

And the truth is (I promise) the one you don't like is much more likely to be used by God to accomplish true growth in you, if you will let God do his work, his way, through his vessel.

Guys, when we are acting like carnal or immature Christians we have no idea how much damage we can do by picking sides or choosing one leader or teacher over another. The bottom line is, this causes division in the Church and God takes division very seriously.

Paul gives this serious warning to pastors in Titus 3:10-11.

Titus 3:10-11 (NLT)

10 If people are causing divisions among you, give a first and second warning. After that, have nothing more to do with them.

11 For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them.

The phrase ***have nothing more to do with them*** means remove them from the church after two warnings. I believe the Bible treats division and discord in the church so seriously because it is one of the enemy's "most used" and "most successful" schemes to destroy a church.

Next week we're going to look at the responsibility of all workers of God who are serving the saints in the church. But today – we're going to finish with the level of damage that can be done by carnal or immature Christians causing divisions in the Church.

So, skip down to 1 Corinthians 3:16 and we'll come back and do the section we're skipping next week.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NLT)

16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

We – TOGETHER – make up the Temple of God because the Spirit of God lives IN US, and apparently that is a very serious thing to God according to the next verse.

1 Corinthians 3:17 (NLT)

17 God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you (the church) are that temple.

WHOA!

Paul is trying to get across the seriousness of what these carnal and immature Christians are doing by choosing sides and picking leaders and causing division and I think he gets his point across perfectly clear in that verse.

Then, in verses 18-20 Paul refers back to his previous teaching about the contrast between the world's wisdom and God's plan.

1 Corinthians 3:18–20 (NLT)

18 Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you

need to become a fool to be truly wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, “He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness.”

20 And again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless.”

The context here is still the carnal and immature Christian who is causing divisions in the church. And verse 18 says *stop deceiving yourselves if you think you are wise by this world’s standards... you **MAY NOT BE** for the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God.*

And so Paul closes the chapter with an appeal to unity among the believers.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23 (NLT)

21 So don’t boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you—

22 whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you,

23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Paul is saying there are no competing teams in the true Church. So stop boasting about any one leader. Stop dividing the Church with your “human (worldly) wisdom.” There is only one Body, one Temple of the Holy Spirit, one Plan (God’s) and one ownership (God’s.)

It’s time to put away the immaturity and the worldly thinking and become a unified part of the one body of Jesus Christ and be built up by all the different types of servants of God, and by all different methods that God uses to cause us to grow.

And most of all, let’s not allow the enemy to capitalize on our immaturity or on our worldly thinking in order for him to use us to bring *any level of division* into the Church.

Let’s pray. *Lord would you drive this home to us? Would you make this stick, Lord? Would you make us afraid of our own wisdom? Would you make us deathly afraid of being used by the enemy to bring division into the Church? Would you show us that you actually know that you’re actually involved, that you’re actually at work through every minister that impacts our lives, through every leader and every teacher, through every circumstance and every situation, every relationship in the church – you’re at work Lord for our good and to grow us, and to mature us. And to use us to grow others in your Church. Would you show us that, God? We love you Lord. We pray that you would break our pride. We pray that we would surrender complete control even of our own wisdom,*

we would surrender it to you and say, "Lord, you know. You are God. And you are able." We surrender to you Lord.

Would you do that today? Would you take a minute and say, *"Lord I'll do that. I surrender my own wisdom to you Lord. I surrender my own ideas, my own thoughts, my own likes and my own dislikes, Lord. I'll surrender control of the Lordship of my life and I'll actually give it to you."*

And if you have never done that, if you've never surrendered your life to the Lord, would you do that right now? Would you just say, *"Lord, I don't know anything else this guy said, but I know this, I need to surrender my life to you. I need you to come into my life to restore me. To give me new life, to forgive me of my sin. To give me peace, to give me your miraculous power. Make me a citizen of heaven. Forgive me of my sins. Jesus I believe you are who you say you are, and I pray you would come into my life, be my Savior and be my Lord. Lord, I'll serve you all my days, trusting you, following you. In your name and for your glory, Jesus, amen."*