

The World and the Flesh Outline

1st Corinthians 3:1-3

I. Context.

- A. Paul connects his foundation laid in chapter two to the situation in chapter three.
 - 1. The problem is disunity in the church.
 - 2. The Corinthians were dividing by following their favorite personality (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Jesus Christ).
 - 3. Paul had established the truth that knowing God is a matter NOT of human discovery but divine revelation.

II. The Christian life is not easy!

- A. The Christian life goes completely against the grain of the world.
- B. The Christian life goes completely against the grain of the flesh.
 - 1. Romans 7:14-25

III. The Corinthian situation.

- A. They were “spiritual infants”.
 - 1. Not because they hadn’t been in church very long!
 - a. By the time Paul wrote 1st Corinthians, they had been in church for about six and a half years.
- B. *If you walk in the flesh long enough, you will shift your spiritual gears into reverse.*
 - 1. James 1:25 “*A forgetful hearer*”.

IV. The cause of the jealousy and strife, the problem. (Verses 1-3).

- A. “Spiritual Men” – Greek *pneumatikos* -- being controlled by the Spirit.
 - a. Spiritual men are “Christians”.
- B. “Carnal Christians” and “Spirit Lead Christians”?
 - a. There is only ONE kind of Christian and that is the Spirit controlled Christian.
 - 1. Our problem is when we don’t submit to the control of the Holy Spirit.

- b. *Indwelt by the Holy Spirit* = At conversion one receives the Holy Spirit.
 - c. *Filled by the Holy Spirit* = Our submitting to the Holy Spirit (many fillings).
 - C. “Babes” and “infants” describing a Christian.
 - a. Does not refer to a “new” Christian but rather an ignorant Christian.
 - D. Milk and meat (solid food).
 - a. Both are the same food! There are no verses in the Bible that are just milk.
Milk and meat describes depth of knowledge and understanding.
- V. Conclusion—Colossians 3:1-10

The World and the Flesh Pastoral Notes

1st Corinthians 3:1-3

We're never going to make it to where the title of this message makes any sense... because that would require us to make it all the way to verse 9 in 1st Corinthians 3... I don't think we will get past verse 3... so I'm changing the title of this message **The World and the Flesh**

Read Chapter 3:1-9

Notice the Chapter three begins with the word "and"... and of course "**and**" is a conjunction connecting what is about to be said to what already has been said...the word "**and**" is adding to the previous thought... it is in effect building upon what has been said.... which was what we looked at three weeks ago... My guess is not many remember what that was so let me refresh our memories.

Paul had laid out some very important doctrine... teachings from God that would support the problems that he is going to address with the Corinthian church... He's already addressed a specific problem briefly back in chapter one....It kind of leaked out of him...I don't think he could contain himself... what was going on in that church truly disturbed him.

And then I think he realized he needed to lay some groundwork before he pounded their heads with it...which we will look at this morning.

He addressed their problem of division within the church... remember?...Unity is essential in the church... the church being the body of Jesus Christ cannot be divided...remember what Paul rhetorically asked them?...**Has Christ been divided? (13)**. the church was dividing over which personality to follow...

Each one of you is saying "I am of Paul" and "I am of Apollos" and "I of Cephas"...and "I of Christ"...

Rather than going to church to worship, praise and learn about God... they were doing exactly what their culture was doing... picking out charismatic celebrities to follow...personalities... well that is what he is going to revisit here in chapter three.

The "**and**" though... is connected to a very essential truth... In chapter two Paul explained that only those who have the Holy Spirit can access reality since it is the Holy Spirit...and only the Holy Spirit that reveals the truth about God...which is the essential truth of the universe!

In chapter two Paul laid out the fact... and this is an essential fact we all need to know... and that is that **knowing God is a matter NOT of human discovery but divine revelation**.... In other

words... you cannot know ANYTHING ABOUT GOD UNLESS HE REVEALS HIMSELF TO YOU.

You can't go searching on your own for God and find Him through your efforts... if you find Him it is because He revealed Himself to you... you might ask... *"Well, what about Romans 1 where it says that no man is without excuse for not knowing about God because God is evident in creation..."*

Can't one walk out on a starry night and look at the universe and conclude...ON HIS OWN... 'There must be a God' ...No! he can't... because Romans 1 clearly says... well... this is what it says... Romans 1:19

Because that which is known about God is evident within them... FOR GOD.....MADE IT EVIDENT TO THEM.... in other words... God REVEALED Himself to them... *knowing God is a matter NOT of human discovery but divine revelation.*

I think I mentioned this last time...but

We are quick to hand a bible to the unbeliever that has come into our path... but the fact is... unless God reveals His word to them... they will look at the Bible the same way they look at *Grimm's Fairy Tales* or *Aesop's Fables*... GOD MUST OPEN THE MEANING OF THE WORDS TO THE READER....AND God does this through the Holy Spirit... the third person of the Trinity.

And the moment a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior...repents from their sins... the Holy Spirit resides in them...A verse we will come to in a week or so...speaking of the Christian... 1 Corinthians 3:16 **Do you not know that you are a sanctuary of God and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?**

So Paul begins chapter three by saying... SINCE YOU ARE ALL BELIEVERS... AND HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT RESIDING IN YOU... GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF TO YOU... YOU HAVE THE TRUTH..... IN THAT IS THE CASE...

What's wrong with you people?!

Read 3:1

We'll dissect that in a minute... but first, so as not to be too hard on the Corinthians...here's a fact... **The Christian life is not easy!**...It's hard... if not harder than a non-Christian's life... If someone has told you *"come to Jesus and your life will be better"* ...which is true...but I hope they weren't trying to tell you your problems will go away...

That you'll now have material prosperity... enjoy great health... never have a problem in your marriage... and your children will always sing your praises... often the Christian life is more difficult than the non-Christian life.

Years ago Mt Whitney in California was at the end of my hike... Mt. Whitney is only about half the elevation of Mt Everest but it is the tallest mountain in the continental United States... and it is not an easy hike up it!

I remember... this is back in 2004... as we were slowly climbing up that mountain...I thought that this was a great metaphor for the Christian life... in fact... when we returned from that trip I shared that with this congregation.

Going up is slow...very slow... oxygen is a luxury... as you swithback back and forth... never able to see the summit... you are always thinking... maybe just over that ledge....maybe just over that ridge... and you get to the top of that ledge only to realize you're not there.... There's another ledge in front of you.

You get to the top of that ledge only to find another one a thousand feet above you... even when you do get to the summit... the top of the world... going down the other side is as hard as going up!...that's a clearer picture of the Christian life than what Joel Osteen paints!

Why is the Christian life so hard?... if we can understand some of that... we will have greater empathy to these in the Corinthian church getting scolded by Paul....and we might see fit to include us in the scolding as well.

God want us to live supernatural lives... supernatural as opposed to natural... Supernatural lives are lives lived through the power of the Holy Spirit...

A.W. Tozer

"A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible and knows that which passeth knowledge."

This really is the paradox of the Christian life... it defies our understanding because it is a "supernatural life". We have a hard time understanding the supernatural life... the natural life is so much easier... why?... BECAUSE IT IS NATURAL!...it doesn't go against the grain.

Natural is like water in a flood... it goes where there is the least resistance.

And what is natural for the Christian is that we leave the supernatural and follow our natural tendencies... we like what is natural because it is predictable... it follows "natural laws" of nature... $1 + 1 = 2$... if I go to the gym and work out hard and build muscle I will be strong.... But Tozer says for the Christian you are the strongest when you are the weakest.... Hmmmm.

The Christian life is not easy!... we can boil down most of our difficulties and see two contributing factors... two realities of the natural world which every Christian must grapple with... two realities that makes the Christian life so difficult.

1. The Christian life goes completely against the grain of the world.

All over the New Testament we find evidence that once you are a Christian you have entered into a different world but you're still in the natural world... Listen to Jesus's own words in John 15.

John 15:18-19

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

The Christian life is like getting out of your space ship on Mars... hey... this air is different!...you're an alien!...MacArthur in his commentary describes like this:

You are finding yourself like a spiritual salmon. While everything else is floating downstream, you're fighting the current.

But the problem is... it is easier to turn around and go with the current...and so often we do... and we become much more like the world...and that can happen without realizing it...

Interesting week for the country... last Monday...by a vote of 61 to 36, the United States Senate voted to codify same-sex marriage.

Now, technically what it did in adopting what is mis-characterized as the *Respect for Marriage Bill*, the central issue there is to require states to recognize legal, same-sex marriages performed in any other state. That effectively means coast to coast legalized same-sex marriage.

What was amazing to me was the overwhelming support for this bill... across the aisle...12 Republicans joined all the Democrats in supporting this bill... now compare that to 1996 when the *Defense of Marriage Act*...defining marriage is between a man and a woman...

The Biblical view... marriage the way God designed it.

Had been passed overwhelmingly by the United States Congress. In the Senate then, it passed by a vote of 85 to 14...some of the same senators who just voted for the reversal... .Then senator Joe Biden passionately defended the definition of marriage between man and woman.... Who now more passionately has pushed to repeal the *Defense of Marriage Act of 96* in exuberant support for same sex marriage...

Now I'm not getting political this morning... I'm trying to illustrate the tremendous power Satan has as he uses the World to battle the gospel of Jesus Christ.... God's word.

Just consider how this reveals the vast moral change taking place in the United States in a single generation... *This is the world*... but what's most disturbing is that many evangelical churches have spoken out for the support of the so called *Respect for Marriage Act* just passed by the senate...

Many of you when you heard the news last Monday were very disappointed... some of you may have been disgusted with our leadership... some of you may have thought "well, *that's just the way things are now*"... Some of you may have thought... "well, *there are bigger fish to fry*"... all sorts of reactions but one thing I'm sure of... none of us were surprised.

Satan is bringing the world down... as far from God as he can get it... the world is in a constant avalanche down the mountain... and as it goes down it picks up rocks and boulder to go with it... and many Christians are those rocks and boulders!

The pressure of the world... The fear of coming across as uncompassionate towards gays... the fear of appearing to be judgmental... harsh... unloving... you see the pressure of the world... begins to bend the absolute truth of God's word... and you slide down the mountain!... and we're susceptible to that... in fact it is natural!

Has this affected us?

I'm sure that me talking about this has some of you uneasy... if statistics are correct there is a percentage of you who have come to accept the travesty of same-sex marriage... why?... because that's the grain of the world... and the Christian life completely goes against the grain of the world.

And that reality contributes to the difficulty in living the Christian life... the forces coming from the OUTSIDE... the world... the Corinthian church was succumbing to the world's influences... the other thing is what is going on INSIDE of us:

2. The Christian life goes completely against the grain of the flesh.

When we are saved, God breaks the back of evil; neutralizes, in a sense, sin; gives us the Holy Spirit to subdue sin; but He doesn't remove the tendency to evil that is in our humanness... And so with all of those things that He does, we still, though the triumph over sin is ultimate, we struggle on the path to that ultimate triumph over sin.

Paul in Romans 7 says it better than anywhere else:

Read Romans 7:14-25

All of that is to say... the Christian life is difficult because it goes directly against the grain of the outside grain of the world... And the inside grain of the flesh... That's why the Christian life is so difficult... And of course Paul knows this... he knows the Corinthian church at this time is being overtaken by both the world and their flesh... and he calls them out on it... so in verse 1

“You guys are so influenced by the world and you’re operating from your own flesh... that I can’t even talk to you as Christians.... you won’t get what I’m saying... I’m having to talk to you as if you are not Christians...” **I’m not able to speak to you as to spiritual men...but as to fleshly....as to infants in Christ.**

At least he called them infants in Christ.... Acknowledging they were saved...

You might be thinking Paul should cut them some flack... Why are you being so hard on them... maybe they are babes in Christ... *give them a little time Paul!...more time?... think about this...* After Paul established this church in Corinth...

Remember this is a most unlikely place to plant a church... It would be like planting a church on the strip in Las Vegas... but nonetheless he plants the church...that’s what he’s referring to in verse 6 **I planted, Apollos watered...** He stayed with that church for about a year and a half...

You would think that after a year and a half under Paul’s teaching they would really know the Bible!... they would be mature in their knowledge of God....

Well... maybe when Paul left the church kind of stagnated because their pastor left.... No... because (6) **Apollos watered...** dynamic, brilliant Apollos...described in the Bible as being **“eloquent teaching the Word of God”**... became the pastor and carried on the teaching of God’s word... how long was he doing that?... Paul is writing this letter probably five years after he left!

So these Christians...at least most of them had been attending church for at least six and a half years!...but we know that the amount of time you sit in a pew doesn’t relate to spiritual maturity!...

It’s been years now... but one of our dear...since passed... senior ladies confessed to me after I had preached on John 3... Nicodemus **you must be born again...**

“I’ve attended church for over fifty years.... This one for over twenty... and I’m ashamed to confess I don’t know what it means to be “born again”.... I so appreciated her transparency... but that’s tragic!..... And that is what Paul is addressing here.

Let me read you this statement I read this week...

If you walk in the flesh long enough, you will shift your spiritual gears into reverse... you will become what James 1:25 calls a **“forgetful hearer,”** and you will literally lose the ability to function on the things you once knew. You will go in reverse. First, neutral, then reverse, backwards... They forgot the things they should have known. Their carnality had stunted their growth. The Word of God they couldn’t receive.

And what specifically was revealing this worldly and fleshly condition was disunity within the church... verse three tells us there is **jealousy and strife among you...** there are many outcomes

of being worldly and fleshly but Jealousy and strife within the church are big ones... resulting in a disunified body of Christ... jealousy and strife are a deadly disease.... So Paul addresses it here in chapter three...

He brings back something he started in chapter 1... disunity

First he identifies the cause of this disunity...which is all we're going to get to this morning...but then He reveals the symptoms.... Then the cure.

The cause of the jealousy and strife... the problem. (Verses 1-3)

He said **I was not able to speak to you as spiritual men, but as to fleshly men, infants in Christ.**

The cause of their disunity was lack of growth... their diet was bad...God's word diet.

The word "spiritual" is very important...there are many different meanings of the word "spirit" in the Bible... unfortunately we have only one word to describe them all...spirit...here the Greek *pneumatikos*... which means **being controlled by the Spirit**... so a spiritual man would be one controlled by the Holy Spirit... now... I've wrestled with all this in the past...wrapping my brain around it...some of my problem is what I learned many years ago in the church I grew up in.... if you remember the 4 spiritual laws... it promoted this thought.

And that is... there are two types of Christians.... fleshly Christians which we call "carnal (flesh)..Christians" and "Spirit Controlled Christians"... Carnal Christians are people who are saved but live carnal, fleshly lives....Spirit controlled are "good Christians"..... NO!

There is only ONE kind of Christian and that is the Spirit controlled Christian.... This is what I had a hard time grasping years ago... ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The moment you become a Christian... The Holy Spirit resides in you and He's in control....you're thinking... *If the Holy Spirit is in control why do I still mess up?... why do I still sin?*.... the issue is that YOU ARE NOT SUBMITTING TO HIS CONTROL... even though you are doing your own thing... he's completely in control.... You're not thwarting His plan.

But the Holy Spirit ALWAYS controls you to the end HE WANTS!... that points us to that classic verse Romans 8:28... let me just read that... but a few verses before it as well.

Romans 8:26-28

26 Now in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us...intercede is basically taking control over the situation... with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the

hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit intercedes...takes over the reigns...takes control on our behalf... according to the will of God.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[I think most Christians think the Holy Spirit is the poor impotent spirit that has to do go and endure everything we decide to do..]

If you are a Christian you are controlled by the Holy Spirit... the Holy Spirit resides in you... now... if you want to make life easier for you... obey the Holy Spirit within you!... that's what it means "**to be filled by the Holy Spirit**".

Clarify some terms.... All Christians get the Holy Spirit the moment of conversion = "**Indwelling of the Spirit**"...when you yield to the Spirit for control of your life... you submit to the Spirit... that is called *being filled by the Holy Spirit*...and there then are many fillings of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life.

Ephesians 5:18

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, yield to the Holy Spirit in your life... depend on His power, wisdom and strength...that's how you battle the world and the flesh.

If you are not a Spirit Controlled Christian then you're what Paul calls "natural Man" which is an unsaved person who is completely controlled by his flesh and the influences of the world...a little earlier in Romans 8...verse 5

Romans 8:5-6

5 For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, natural man but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,...spiritual men.

There is no such thing as a "carnal Christian" in the sense that you can live a completely carnal life and still be a Christian.... You can be a carnal Christian in the sense that you still battle with the flesh.... carnal

So Paul's saying... I can't speak to you as Spiritual men...I'm having to speak to you like I would to natural...fleshly man...*I'm having to speak to you as if you were babies.*

HE DOESN'T SAY I'M SPEAKING TO YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE BABIES... BUT AS IF YOU ARE BABIES....BIG DIFFERENCE.

You might think that an infant here is like a “new Christian”... I’ve heard people call new Christians “baby Christians”... a few years ago as I was teaching a passage in 1 Peter which says **as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow...**

I searched out all the uses of baby in the context of the Christian... it’s always used as a simile... nowhere in Scripture is a new Christian called a baby because he is a new Christian!... Every time one’s identified as a “babe” or “infant” its referring to ignorance... or as one commentator defined as “*one who is spiritually stupid*”

Paul is saying here as spiritually stupid people!.....

Read Verse 2

What is milk and what is solid food?... solid food refers to meat... what is the difference?... I don’t think there is a difference... I say that because I don’t think there’s a verse in the Bible that would be considered as milk... No difference in the doctrine there’s just a difference in the depth.

You read John 3:16 to a new Christian... **For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life....** they understand that... otherwise they wouldn’t be a Christian... that would be milk.

Say that same verse to a theologian who’s taught seminary for fifty years and he will think of the kenosis... Justification, sanctification, atonement, propitiation, glorification... and a host of other deep theological explanations for the verse..... SAME VERSE.... But that is meat.

There’s no difference in the doctrine of that verse... there’s only a difference of depth of understanding..... let me just say... the Bible gets more and more exciting... more relevant to your life... more cherished the deeper you go in it!... you don’t want to stay as an infant.

So Paul reprimands the Corinthian church for being spiritually stupid... they’ve been hearing the word.... Great in depth teaching of God’s word for six and a half years.... and they haven’t progressed in their knowledge one bit..... why?

Read verse 3

Your flesh is having victory over your spiritual life... and you are **walking like mere men...you are walking like the world walks.**

So the cause of the disunity of the Corinthian church was their jealousy and strife... and the cause of their jealousy and strife was from living in their flesh... and because they were living in the flesh... they were not growing in their spiritual life.

We are living in times where we cannot afford to mess around with the flesh... we cannot afford to be influenced any more by the world... we need to be “spiritual men and women” filled with the Holy Spirit...

A great passage to conclude with is from another one of Paul's letters... Colossians 3...so practical... just let this soak in.

Read Colossians 3:1-10

Keep seeking the things above – eyes off the world

You have Christ!

Consider your flesh dead!

Be obedient to Christ and lay aside your sinful tendencies

Acknowledge you are a new “man”—person in Christ.

Christ is all in all!