

# **Spiritual Babies!**

Our Text: **1 Corinthians 3:1–9** *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 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; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?*

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.*

In his book *The New Life* Michael Green wrote about a friend, who is a cyclist, and said the following: ***"It is rather like a cyclist who, when he is climbing a long hill, thinks he will be able to freewheel down the other side. It is not until he reaches the top that he sees that his task has only just started and that the road winds on with even steeper hills than the one he has just climbed."***

Faithful Christian living is no different . . .

- It becomes increasingly more difficult and more demanding.
- It is the furthest thing from a downhill ride.
- Christ does solve all of our important problems.
- He does bring peace, joy, meaning, purpose, and many other blessings of which the unbeliever knows nothing.
- But the Christian life is not easy.
- And, in many ways living is far more demanding than before we were saved.

*But why?* I got two reasons:

- **The World!**
- **The Flesh!**
- **The first is outside us.**
- **The second is inside us.**
- **And both can be manipulated by the enemy to lead us to defeat!**

**Romans 7:15-24** *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

*I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

**But the promise of the New Covenant in Christ is the promise of a new spirit and a new heart because of Jesus!**

**Romans 7:25a I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . .**

***“When a person becomes a Christian he also becomes a new creation, with a new nature, a new inner being, and a favorable disposition toward God — none of which a person can have apart from Christ. From that point, until the Lord takes him to be with Himself, he is swimming upstream. Like a salmon returning to spawn, he discovers that gravity and the current are continually against him. His new heart drives him in an entirely different direction from that of the world around him.”*** John MacArthur Jr

- When we were born physically we inherited from Adam the flesh with its propensity to sin.
- When we were born spiritually and given a new spirit, a new heart, God broke the back of sin, crippled its ability, and paid its penalty.
- But the tendency to do evil remains.
- The one word that best characterizes the flesh, our humanness, our Adamic nature, is *selfish*.
- The sin of Adam, like the sin of the tempter when he fell, centered on setting his own will and interests against God's;
- This has been the center of sin ever since.

The Corinthian believers had an especially hard struggle against ***“the world”*** and ***“the flesh”***. They would not break from either and were continually succumbing to both. Because of this they kept participating in one serious sin after another. (*This is the point of the entirety of the Book of 1 Corinthians!*)

Here, Paul will try to show them how to overcome this pattern. Let's dive in . . .

### ***The Flesh Was Still In Control!***

**1 Corinthians 3:1–3a** *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 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; for you are still carnal.*

Here we can see clearly that the cause of division in the church was more than an external, worldly influence . . . It was also internal, and rooted in the flesh!

- True, the Corinthians had succumbed to the pressures of the world.
- But, equally true, they were also succumbing to the pressures and enticements of their own flesh.

But notice again, Paul speaks to them as ***“brethren”***:

**Brethren** = **ἀδελφός** *adelphos* = A brother. A kinsman or relative. One of equal rank and dignity.

This is a term of recognition and of love and was meant to remind the Corinthian church that they were still saved, and that their sinning, terrible and inexcusable as it was, **DID NOT FORFEIT THEIR SALVATION!!!**

- He absolutely did not diminish the seriousness of their sins.
- But he did try to diminish or prevent any discouragement that his rebuke might otherwise have caused.
- In other words . . . He stood with them as a brother, not over them as a judge! **(AND IT'S VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT WE LEARN TO DO THE SAME!)**

The problem was that most of them had received Jesus Christ years earlier but were acting as if they had just been born again. In other words . . . **THEY WERE ACTING LIKE SPIRITUAL BABIES!!!** *What does that mean?*

The New Testament uses the word *spiritual* in a number of ways . . . When applied to men it is used of their relationship to God in one of two ways:

- **Positionally**
- **Or Practically**
- Unbelievers are totally unspiritual in both senses. They possess neither a new spirit nor the Holy Spirit. Their position is natural and their practice is natural.
- Believers, on the other hand, are totally spiritual in the positional sense, because they have been given a new inner being that loves God and is indwelt by His Holy Spirit. But practically, believers can also be unspiritual.

We read about this a couple of weeks ago, but let's back up to review:

**1 Corinthians 2:14-15** *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. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

- The **“natural man”** (v. 14) is the unsaved.
- But **“He who is spiritual”** (v. 15) is the saved.
- In the positional sense, there is no such thing as an unspiritual Christian or a partially spiritual Christian. *(In this sense every believer is equal.)*
- Practically, however, believers may be anything but spiritual . . . **AND SUCH WERE THE BELIEVERS IN CORINTH!!! ALTHOUGH THEY WERE “POSITIONALLY” SPIRITUAL, THEY WERE ACTING “PRACTICALLY” CARNAL!!!**

- Because of this truth, a Christian is not characterized by sin because it no longer represents his basic nature.
- But he is still able to sin, and his sin is just as sinful as the sin of an unbeliever . . . After all in is sin.
- But practically speaking, when a Christian sins they are being unspiritual and living on the same practical level as an unbeliever!
- And this is why Paul is compelled to speak to the Corinthian believers as if they were unbelievers!

But notice that Paul also compares them to ***“babes in Christ”***. This acknowledged two truths:

- 1) They were definitely in Christ!**
- 2) They were spiritually ignorant and therefore immature!**

- The Corinthians were not unintelligent.
- Their problem was not low IQ or lack of teaching.
- They were not ignorant of the faith because they were dumb, but because they were fleshly.
- The cause was not mental but spiritual.
- Because they refused to give up their worldly ways and their carnal desires, they became *“forgetful hearers”*.

***James 1:25*** *But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

***2 Peter 1:12–13*** *For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you,*

***1 Peter 2:1–2*** *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,*

Let's continue . . .

### ***Still Babies!***

***1 Corinthians 3:2–3a*** *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; for you are still carnal.*

- When Paul first preached to the Corinthians he taught the more easily digestible elementary truths of doctrine, the ***“milk”***.
- But now, some five years later, they still needed to be fed milk.
- This is because they could not yet spiritually digest ***“solid food”***!

***“Like many Christians today, the Corinthians seemed quite content to stay on milk. Some congregations do not want the pastor to get “too deep.” Their fleshly habits are not much threatened if, for instance, the preacher sticks primarily to evangelistic messages. Evangelism is the cutting edge of the***

***church's mission, but it is for unbelievers, not believers. Or the congregation wants Scripture to be preached so superficially that their sin is not exposed, much less rebuked and corrected."***

People like these are **SPIRITUAL BABIES!!!**

- There is no difference at all between the truths of a spiritual milk diet and a spiritual solid food diet, except in detail and depth.
- All doctrine may have both milk and meat elements.
- It is not that we are to be continually learning new doctrines in order to grow . . .
- But that we are to be learning more about the doctrines we have known for years!
- A new Christian might explain the atonement, for example, as, "*Christ died for my sins.*"
- A long-time student of the Word, on the other hand, would go into such things as **regeneration, justification, substitution, and propitiation.**
- One explanation would not be truer than the other.
- But the first would be "***milk***" and the second, "***solid food***"!

**This is why it is a travesty when any Christian preacher or teacher gives only milk week after week, year after year . . . It is a crime against the Word of God and the Holy Spirit! It cannot be done without neglecting much of the Word and without neglecting the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit, the supreme Teacher and Illuminator.**

**But it is also a terrible thing for the people to get used to it and only desire milk!**

Nothing is more precious or wonderful than a little baby. But a twenty-year-old in a diaper is an embarrassment . . . **WE NEED TO GROW UP!!!**

### ***Jealousy And Strife Dominated!***

**1 Corinthians 3:3b-4** *For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?*

Because self-centeredness is at the heart of fleshly behavior, "***envy, strife, and divisions***" are always found in an immature congregation.

**Envy** = ζήλος *zēlos* = Zeal in a bad sense. Ardent affections.

**Strife** = ἔρις *eris* = Having a contentious disposition.

- **“Envy”** is the attitude.
- **“Strife”** is the action that results from it.
- One is the inner emotional condition.
- The other the outward expression of selfishness.
- Envy and strife are not the least of the symptoms of fleshly living.
- Those sins are more destructive than many Christians seem to think.
- They are far from being petty sins, because, among other things, they cause **“division”** in the church, Christ’s body, for whom He gave His life.
- They are among the surest marks of fallen humanness, just as unity is one of the surest marks of divine transformation.
- Envy (or Jealousy) is a severe form of selfishness, begrudging someone else what we wish were ours.
- And selfishness is one of the most obvious characteristics of babyhood.
- An infant’s life is almost totally self-centered and selfish.
- Its whole concern is with its own comfort, hunger, attention, sleep.
- It is typical of a young child to be self-centered, but it should not be typical of an adult, especially a Christian adult.
- **It is spiritually infantile to be jealous of and to cause strife among fellow believers!**

### **Defeating The World And The Flesh By Glorifying God!**

**1 Corinthians 3:5–9** *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*

*For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.*

### **THE CURE FOR ALL OF THIS IS TO FOCUS ON THE LORD!!!**

**Apollos and Paul** were simply the **“ministers through whom you believed”**:

Minister = **διάκονος** *diakonos* = *One who serves. An attendant. Someone like a busboy.*

- They were the instruments, not the source, of salvation.
- As Paul had reminded them earlier, he had not died for them and they were not baptized in his name!
- The same was true, of course, for Apollos and Peter, as it is true for all other ministers of the Lord of all time!

- WE NEED TO GET OUR EYES OFF OF PAUL!!!
- WE NEED TO GET OUR EYES OFF OF APOLLOS!!!
- WE NEED TO GET OUR EYES ONTO JESUS!!!
- THEN WE WILL FINALLY BE UNITED AND GIVE GLORY TO THE ONE THAT DESERVES IT!!!

Here is a paraphrase of what Paul was saying, ***“No one builds a movement around a waiter or busboy, or erects monuments to them. Apollos and I are just waiters or busboys whom the Lord used as servants to bring you food. You do not please us by trying to honor us. Your honor, your glory, is misplaced. You are acting like the world, like mere men. Build your monuments, give your praise to the One who prepared the spiritual food we delivered.”***

- The world honors and tries to immortalize great men because men are the highest thing it knows.
- ***Why? Because the world cannot see beyond itself!***
- ***But Christians know God—the Creator, the Sustainer, the Savior, the Lord of the universe, and the Source of all things!***
- ***He alone is worthy of honor!***
- ***We are but His servants, His instruments!***
- ***If an artist is to be honored, you do not make a statue of his brush or his palette!***
- ***It makes no more sense for Christians to glorify men, even a Paul or an Apollos, who are only brushes or palettes in the Master’s hands!***

Notice that Paul here mentions only two types of ministry, represented by ***“planting”*** and ***“watering”***. His principle, however, applies to every type of ministry . . .

- In our eyes, some Christian work is more glamorous, or seems more important or more significant than other work.
- But if God has called a person to a work, that is the most important ministry they can have.
- All of God’s work is important.
- To glorify one kind of Christian work above another is just as carnal and divisive as to glorify one leader above another.

***Matthew 20:1–16 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’”***

*“So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

All of God’s workers are one in Him, **AND THEREFORE ALL GLORY GOES TO HIM AND HIM ALONE!!!**

**This would leave no place for the flesh and its jealousy, strife, and division!**

- God rewards on the basis of **labor**, not success or results.
- A missionary may work faithfully for 40 years and see only a handful of converts.
- Another may work far fewer years and see far more converts.
- But our usefulness and effectiveness are purely by God’s grace:  
***1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.***

Paul and Apollos were but God’s fellow workers . . . **BUT IT WAS NOT THIER MINISTRY!!! THEY JUST WORKED IN IT!!!**

**SO THE GLORY NEEDS TO GO TO GOD, AND GOD ALONE!!! AMEN?!**

Let’s pray . . .