

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Necessity of Maturity for Unity

The Food to be Eaten

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Introduction

ILLUS: Siblings fighting as kids, playground in school, a workplace environment, “Would you grow up!”

It would be helpful for us to do a little recap of the previous passages because what we will discover in today’s passage is that the basis has continued since 1:10-13.

“Paul already explained that there are two kinds of people in the world – natural and spiritual. But now he explained that there are two kinds of saved people: mature and immature (carnal).” (Wiersbe, 577)

In doing so, he points out ...

The Necessity of Maturity for Unity

Ephesians 4:13 (NKJV) — 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

He does so by giving a series of illustrations ...

The Food to be Eaten (3:1-4)

The Field to be Planted (3:5-9a)

The Foundation to be Built Upon (9b-15)

The Finish Line to be Crossed (16-23)

Ultimately, Paul is pointing out – to the entire church mind you – that no matter how mature you confess to be as Christians, your behavior reveals just the opposite.

And while, Paul certainly wanted their behavior to change, his greater desire was that would occur because of maturity in their beliefs.

“He simply has no patience for belief that does not issue in proper behavior; and this is not ‘perfectionism,’ it is rather a matter of growing up.” (Fee, 136)

He begins with calling the members of the Corinthian church “spiritual babies” and first noting related to maturity that The Food to be Eaten ...

Is Dependent on Age (1)

Notice that Paul begins with addressing them as “Brethren”

Spiritual

Paul has previously contrasted the spiritual person with the natural person

1 Corinthians 2:13–14a (NKJV) — 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom

teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14a** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God

There is an eternal difference. The person who has received the Spirit of God is spiritual and genuinely saved. The person who has not received the Spirit of God is natural and lost.

But Paul here brings a different comparison. Not the spiritual as opposed to the natural, but the spiritual as opposed to the carnal.

Carnal

Belonging to the flesh – while it could mean immorality – and in some ways for the church in Corinth, we will see that would certainly apply, the focus of Paul here is worldly. Attitudes and actions that are more descriptive of the world rather than the Word, the culture rather than Christ.

Babes

No matter how immature, they were in Christ.

From the Greek term *nepioi* where the term “nappy” as used in the UK or diaper is derived.

The overriding characteristic of babes is selfishness.

“They are dependent on others for all their needs. They have short attention spans. They go for things that glitter, and they

have no sense of values. They are illiterate and ignorant of much of what they need to know. Their own wants are predominant. They are ruled by their appetites and moved fitfully from one thing to another. They are unable to feed themselves, or to protect themselves, or to defend themselves. They cannot see beyond beyond their own little world. They enjoy being the center of attention and soon learn how to get their share of it. They have no thought for the needs and concerns of others. They are demanding. They get themselves in the most frightful messes and seem blissfully unaware of it. They demand a great deal of care. But in time they grow up.” (Phillips, 65-66)

At 2 months we think nothing of it. At two years we seek to correct it. At 12 years it is disciplined. At 22 years it is a failure.

“A baby who acts like a baby is a joy; but an adult who acts like a baby is a tragedy.” (MacArthur, 72)

This was the issue for the believers in the church at Corinth, they did not grow up. And there was no excuse for their immaturity.

Acts 18:11 (NKJV) — 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

And Paul was followed by Apollos

Acts 18:24, 27-28 (NKJV) — 24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus ... **27** And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; **28** for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

But not only is The Food to be Eaten Dependent on Age ... but ...

Is Different over Time (2-3a)

For all their boasting about being spiritually mature, the Corinthians were still carnal infants.

“Worldliness is much deeper than bad habits; it is an orientation, a way of thinking and believing.” (MacArthur, 68)

“The absence of progress in spiritual growth ... indicat[es] ... carnality.” (Patterson, 54)

Having identified those in the Corinthian church as “babes” ... he proves that assertion by noting what they are able to eat.

Hebrews 5:12–14 (NKJV) — 12 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.

It should be made clear that Paul was not downplaying or demeaning “milk” for newborn believers. That what he started feeding them because it is age appropriate.

However, up to this point, Paul has had to go back to help them understand the basics such as you are not wise God is, you were not called because of who you are but because of who God is, you don't have a message to share it's God's message, you know God because you are spiritual but because God's Spirit revealed Him to you.

This is not to mention that throughout the rest of the book Paul will address basic things such as a step son shouldn't be in a physical relationship with his step mother, that Christians shouldn't sue each other, that Christian couples should keep their marriage vows, that Christian men shouldn't go to a prostitute, that the Lord's supper shouldn't be a kegger, that spiritual gifts are not for personal recognition but God's glory, and that the resurrection of Jesus is an indispensable truth of the Christian faith!

The problem was they were “still not able” to digest solid food – the meat of the Word.

“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.” (MacArthur, 71)

The Food to be Eaten: Is Dependent on Age, Is Different over Time, and finally ...

Is Demonstrated by Behavior (3b-4)

There is no greater demonstration of the immaturity of believer than how they live.

And they were living in:

Envy – negative feelings over other’s achievements or success

Strife – engagement in rivalry

Division – opposing groups

And where there is division, selfishness is always present.

“The anomaly [is] Christians who are nominally or in principle focused on Christ but in practice ... still focused on the interests of self.” (Thiselton quoted by Taylor, 99)

And Paul says, “This proves you are immature, worldly Christians we are behaving like men.”

“Paul stops short of calling them ‘natural’, but his use of the term ‘man’ comes close.” (Taylor, 99)

There actions were not distinguishable from those who belong to the world.

“Babies are not accountable for their actions, but adults are.” (Akin & Merritt, 58)

It’s sad to say but there are Christian adults who expect more spiritual maturity from their children than they do from themselves!

“I lived for myself, I thought for myself,
For myself, and none besides –
Just as if Jesus had never lived,
As if he had never died.” (Drummond, The Greatest, Quoted
in Akin & Merritt, 58)

Conclusion

“Salvation gets the Christian out of the world. Sanctification gets the world out of the Christian.” (Akin & Merritt, 58)

And for those in Corinth, their lives were defined by the world.

What about you? The Food to be Eaten ...

Is Dependent on Age

Is Different over Time

Is Demonstrated by Behavior

Is non-existent because you need to be born again!