**Carnality – Behaving Like Mere Men**

*1 Corinthians 3:1-4*

**Introduction**

1. “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.” (C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory)
   1. Context concerning our spiritual/eternal existence, and our responsibilities toward each other as spiritual creatures.
   2. Emphasis – No “ordinary…mere mortal [men]…But…immortals.”
2. Growing in Christ is about transcending our physical existence by prioritizing our spiritual man in service to God – **cf. Galatians 5:24-25 (i.e. not remaining as “mere men” – we’re more than that!)**
   1. This is not an immediate change, but an ongoing process.
   2. Spiritual birth – **1 Peter 1:23**
   3. Spiritual infant needing growth – **1 Peter 2:1-3**
   4. Spiritual man – perfect, maturity – **1 Peter 5:10** (part of that maturity comes through experiencing trials)
   5. This process involves a complete renovation of our mind – **Romans 12:2** – ***“transformed”*** (mature spiritual man), ***“renewing of your mind”*** (the method of transformation – process).
      1. A change from thinking like mere men, to thinking spiritually (by the Spirit of God).
      2. Then the change manifests everywhere else – transformed.
3. The Corinthians provide a case study of the importance of such continued growth, what remaining a babe looks like, and what it will lead to – **1 Corinthians 3:1-4**
4. Carnal vs Spiritual
5. Context – Receiving the Wisdom of God
   1. **1 Corinthians 2:13-16** – contrast of natural man and spiritual man.
      1. NOTE: Speaking of receiving the revelation of God.
      2. **Natural** – operating, not on revelation, but on worldly/human wisdom.
         1. **(v. 12)** – spirit of world vs. Spirit who is from God.
         2. Foolish – has rejected such revelation accordingly. (**1:18** – to those perishing) (evaluation based on a worldly perspective – worldly wisdom)
            1. **1 Corinthians 1:20-21** – world through wisdom not know God.
      3. **Spiritual** – operating on wisdom from revelation.
         1. **(vv. 14-16)** – received the spiritual wisdom – mind of Christ – and can discern, judge, all things accurately.
         2. **1 Corinthians 1:22-25** – to those called, power of God – accepting of wisdom of God – acknowledge its merit based on spiritual perspective.
   2. **1 Corinthians 2:6-7** – speaks wisdom among those who are mature.
      1. **NOTE: He does not say, “we speak wisdom among Christians.”**
      2. **Mature** – i.e. in context “spiritual” – able to discern the spiritual **(v. 14)** (**cf. Hebrews 5:13-14** – babe vs. full age – ability to discern – “judges all things” – i.e. accurately)
6. A Contrast of Christians – Babe or Mature
   1. Beginning – **1 Corinthians 3:1-2b** – a babe in Christ is a Christian, but not “spiritual” – in context.
      1. Spiritual – **1 Corinthians 2:6, 14-15a** – mature, spiritually discerning.
      2. NOT A CONDEMNATION OF THIS STATE – babes aren’t expected to digest meat. (**v. 2ab** – milk, not solid, not able to receive it – **cf. 2:6)**.
         1. Consider – coming out of the waters of baptism, you are a new creation, but not a full-grown creation.
         2. Sins washed away but maintain the mind you had before – merely at the start of a greater change.
   2. Time elapsed – **1 Corinthians 3:2c-4** – ***“EVEN NOW”*** – by this time you should have been able.
      1. **Cf. Hebrews 5:12** – ***“by this time you ought…”***
      2. Still ***“behaving like mere men”*** – should not be anymore.
      3. ADMONITION – whereas before it was not expected, now it is, but not capable because of negligence.
7. Fleshy vs Fleshly
8. Babes in Christ are Carnal
   1. **1 Corinthians 3:1** – Paul’s words mean that, although one has become a Christian, they are carnal in a way at the start.
   2. **Carnal** – *sarkinos* – “’consisting’ or ‘composed of flesh,’ ‘fleshy’” (BDAG)
      1. “(2) as relating to the earthly sphere of existence worldly, earthly” (ALGNT)
      2. FLESHY
      3. *Inos* – made of
      4. ***“men of flesh” (NASB)***
   3. Yes, they are new – **2 Corinthians 5:17**
   4. However, they are unskilled in the word – **Hebrews 5:13**
      1. Thus, unstable **– 2 Peter 3:16**
   5. They know some basics they have been taught, and have acted on it, but REMAIN MORE IN TUNE WITH THE WORLD THAN WITH GOD’S REVELATION – **Matthew 28:20** – need for further teaching.
   6. Need pruning – **John 15:1-3 (Note: “prunes,” and “clean” – same root, kathairō [prunes], katharos [clean])** – needs the continued cutting away of the bad, so new can grow in its place.
      1. **Ephesians 4:20-24** – put off old, be renewed, put on new.
9. Remaining a Babe Leads to Carnal Behavior
   1. NOTE: Paul did not admonish them for being carnal babes initially, and unable to receive wisdom.
   2. **1 Corinthians 3:2c** – ***“until now…AND EVEN NOW”***
      1. Until now – implication that at this time you should be able to receive wisdom – solid food.
      2. Even now – implication of negligence, remaining as they were from the beginning
   3. **Carnal** – *sarkikos* – “’belonging to [flesh],’ ‘having the nature and characteristics of [flesh],’ fleshly’” (BDAG).
      1. “(2) of behavior, having the characteristics of σάρξ (flesh) in its sensual, sinful tendencies worldly, carnal” (ALGNT)
      2. FLESHLY
      3. *Ikos* – characterized by
      4. ***“fleshly” (NASB)***
   4. “At one time, in their early days, they were [sarkinos]…They could then not help it, they were "fleshy" in heart, mind, and life and yet giving promise that they would soon outgrow that stage. But something has interfered with their development, Paul finds that they are now [sarkikos]… "fleshly," people who ought to obey the true spiritual norm and yet by a choice of their own obey the norm of the flesh. The difference between the two terms is: "fleshy," and you cannot help it; "fleshly," and you can but do not help it.” (Lenski)
      1. **1 Peter 4:2-3** – should no longer, have spent enough time.
   5. They remained infants and did not grow – **cf. 1 Peter 2:2** – did not desire the pure milk of the word to grow.
   6. Result – **1 Corinthians 3:3-4** – fleshly, behaving like mere men (when they should have been more than men, i.e. spiritual men)
10. The Danger of Remaining Mere Men
11. I.e. in Christ, but not progressing – ﻿“they were intellectually as well as spiritually tarrying at the threshold of the faith (cf. Heb. 5:11, 12); making no progress, and content to remain where they were, when they might have been carried far onward by the mighty transforming powers of that Spirit freely given to them of God. He does not charge them in this word with being antispiritual, but only with being unspiritual, with being flesh and little more, when they might have been much more.” (R.C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament)
    1. NOTE: Not ANTI-spiritual but UN-spiritual.
    2. THOUGH, UN-spiritual leads to ANTI-spiritual (or contrary to spiritual).
       1. “He goes on indeed, at ver. 3, 4, to charge them with the graver guilt of allowing the [*sarx, flesh*] to work actively, as a ruling principle in them; and he consequently changes his word. They were not [*sarkinos, fleshy*] only, for no man and no Church can long tarry at this point, but [*sarkikos, fleshly*] as well, and, as such, full of “envying and strife and divisions.”” (ibid.)
12. Turning the Spiritual into Carnal
    1. Context – Corinthians’ view of the gospel, and gospel preachers/teachers.
       1. **1 Corinthians 3:3-4** – envy, strife, division.
          1. A bookend of the context – **1 Corinthians 1:11-13**
       2. Why the division?
          1. Not simply dividing for the sake of dividing.
          2. Not a random happening.
       3. Cause – **1 Corinthians 1:17, 20-25** – viewing messaged preached by those men as THEIR wisdom – philosophy.
          1. Not different messages – **1 Corinthians 3:10-11** – implying Apollos’ work was on the same foundation.
          2. Effect – **1 Corinthians 2:4-5** – faith in the wisdom of men. (Lead’s away from God – hence the division)
       4. Because they had not progressed spiritually, they were incapable of properly discerning the wisdom of God – **1 Corinthians 2:14**
          1. This led to their division – ***“behaving like mere men”***
             1. WHERE THE GOSPEL WOULD HAVE LED TO UNITY.
          2. Warping something good to their destruction – **2 Peter 3:16**
    2. If we don’t go on to maturity in Christ, we will not only be unable to properly evaluate the matters of God’s wisdom, but such will become weapons for carnality used by Satan to lead astray:
       1. Man’s Nature and Sin
          1. Is it in man’s nature to sin?
             1. “Man does not have a sinful nature, but man cannot help but sin.”
             2. By nature? – **Ephesians 2:3** – *physis* – “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature” (Thayer)

**(v. 3a)** – conducted self to fulfil desires. (**cf. James 1:14** – your desires)

**(v. 2c)** – spirit (disposition) of disobedience.

**(v. 2b)** – walked acc. to Satan’s rule.

**(v. 2a)** – walked acc. to the world.

**(v. 1)** – chose to break God’s law.

* + - 1. Sin is contrary to man’s nature:
         1. Made upright – **Ecclesiastes 7:29**
         2. Instructed not to sin – **1 John 2:1**
         3. Jesus, a man, did not sin – **Hebrews 4:15** – can He sympathize if not same as us?
    1. Christ’s Perfect Life
       1. Substitutionary?
          1. “Christ was perfect so we don’t have to be.”
          2. Substitutionary life of Christ? – NO SCRIPTURE.
          3. Substitutionary death **– Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-6** – scriptural.
       2. Reduced responsibility – Christ’s perfect life appropriated as our own by faith, so our sin is inconsequential. (Umbrella – God doesn’t see our sin, just Christ’s righteousness.)
          1. **1 John 2:6** – WE must walk as He walked.
    2. Grace
       1. Separate from doctrine?
          1. Misunderstanding – **Romans 6:14** – not [merely]…but [especially]

“We need to talk more about grace. We need more sermons on grace.”

* + - * 1. **James 1:25** – law of liberty – Gospel is a law, but a law of grace.

**Titus 2:11-12** – grace teaches.

* + - 1. Turned to lewdness – **Jude 4** – misunderstanding God’s grace leads to lewdness.
         1. **Cf. Galatians 5:13** – not opportunity for flesh.

**Conclusion**

1. The importance of spiritual growth cannot be overstressed.
2. There are carnal Christians who have not matured to the ability to discern the deeper things of God.
3. These members of Christ’s body who are still viewing things through the lens of the flesh are a danger to themselves and others. (**cf. 2 Peter 3:16**)
4. It is imperative that we each grow out of our carnality and into maturity.