

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

"Let's Grow Up"

They *should be united*, but instead they're *divided*. That's the current situation in the Corinthian congregation. Dividing over various teachers who've been ministering *to* them, rather than simply recognize that it's Jesus who's been ministering *through* them (to them). They've drifted back into placing a premium on the wisdom of this world rather than recognizing the true wisdom of God in Christ. So they banter back and forth about who had the best *delivery*, who waxed most *eloquently* & they're missing the point *entirely!*

Paul says, "Look I *intentionally* kept my preaching simple, my words straightforward. I didn't want anyone to think that people were abandoning their lives & following what I said because I was such a smooth talker. But rather it would be clear, that when people experienced the *confrontation* of the gospel & what followed was a *transformation* of hearts/lives, that it was a *demonstration* of the Spirit & of power. Why? So that your faith might be *not* in the wisdom of *men* but in the power of *God*."

We want people to see the hope in *us* of what God can do for *them*! I don't have a 10 or 12-step program for you. I have a 1 step program: out of darkness & into light. Out of death & into life; it has nothing to do w/the wisdom of men & everything to do w/the power of God through faith in J.C.

& Paul told them that there was unfathomable wisdom awaiting them in Christ which God has revealed to us through His Spirit. However, God isn't going to force it upon you. Spiritual *illumination*, & spiritual *revelation* has to be received through spiritual *evaluation*. Or to say it another way; spiritual things can really only be explained & understood by *spiritual* people.

Yet, even in that (Paul is preparing to explain), you can have the Spirit of God *in* you & still not allow the Spirit of God to *lead* you or *rule* you. So though you've been "born again" of the Spirit of God, you're really a "spiritual" person. (Submitted *to* the Spirit or led *by* the Spirit). You're (what he refers to as) a "carnal" person. Notice.

Vs 1

We spoke last time (prior to Resurrection Sunday) of the 2 types of people in this world. Saved or unsaved. You're either alive to God in Christ Jesus or dead in sin (spiritually speaking). You're either in the dark or in the light, there are just no "if" "&" or "but" (s) about it. However, of those who are saved. Paul points out that there are actually 2 categories of people in that bracket.

There are those who are “spiritual” people. (Meaning they seek to pattern their lives in obedience to God’s word. They *pursue* the things of God, desire to be found well *pleasing* to God, they walk *in* the Spirit, seek to be sensitive *to* the Spirit that they might be led *by* the Spirit). –

Then there are those who are “carnal” people. Born again? Yes. Headed for heaven? Yes. But they’re (what we might term as) traveling 3rd class. We can’t rightly say that they’re dominated by the flesh (which is what “carnal” means, it means fleshly) in *every* aspect of their lives or else they wouldn’t be born again, they’d be showing zero signs of regeneration. However, to some extent (some greater, some lesser) they’re still governed & guided, driven & directed by the flesh. They’re still using worldly reasoning.

Now, when I speak of “the flesh”, I don’t want you to misunderstand me as though I’m speaking of the skin & bones in which you abide. The body in & of itself isn’t evil, it’s not sinful, it’s simply a shell, a housing (if you will). Jesus had a body, but He didn’t wrestle w/a sin nature. (We spoke last week about the sinless, holy nature of Jesus as the Perfect Sacrifice for the sins of the world). – **When we speak of the “flesh”, we’re speaking of that intrinsic desire that’s woven into the fabric of our inner being that will often times express itself in tempting us to go in a perverted or ungodly, self-seeking, self-gratifying direction. The “flesh” serves self. Be it through lying, stealing, cheating, flattering, ungodly physical gratification through substance abuse, alcohol abuse, fornication (you get the idea). Or even trying to get you to dance as close to the line as possible w/out taking you over the edge. Those kinds of things are the impulses/inclinations of the “flesh”... So, though it’s not the body per say, it will often times express itself through the body.**

Romans 7 might be a good Ch to read in this regard. What I will to do I don’t do, what I don’t want to do, that I do. Mastered by the flesh rather than led by the Spirit.

But check it out. There’s a sense in which it’s a completely “natural” (what we might call) “transitional” phase of the Christian life. We might even refer to the “spiritual” man as one who is “mature” in Christ; & the “carnal” man as one who is *immature*, or a “babe” in Christ. We kind of expect a brand-new believer to stumble or fumble or not have his/her act completely together. They’re a brand-new baby in Christ. Babies are selfish, they don’t speak well, they don’t consider others, they mess their drawers... ☺ But as time goes by, we expect that they grow out of those things, they begin to mature.

If not, something is wrong. So to in the body of Christ. If you’ve known the Lord for a couple of yrs or more & you haven’t grown, or matured beyond your “born again” experience...

You *know* what's right, you're just not doing it... You're not a "new believer", you should be moving on in maturity & engaging in ministry but you're still just kind of doing what you want, when you want, essentially all about self... there's something wrong.

Jesus is in your life; He's just not seated on the throne. You're allowing your "seat of decision" to be governed by the flesh... So the question we're confronted with is, "Which category am I in?" If you're a "natural man", then we implore you, submit to J.C. Believe on Him & be born again, salvation by grace through faith in Him awaits you.

If you're the "spiritual" man. Praise God! Keep going, keep growing, serve the Lord w/all your heart!

If you're the "carnal" man... Then today is the day that the Lord is knocking on the door of *your* heart & you need to *confess* your sin, *turn* from your sin & give the Lord J.C. His rightful place upon the throne, ruling & reigning in your heart. Move on into maturity, refuse to linger any longer in that infantile state & ask the Lord to strengthen your resolve to give Him His way, laying hold of all of that for which He has laid hold of you.

Vs 2

Notice; "I fed you w/milk." That's how babies begin, w/a basic diet of essential nutrients. Now; the Corinthians *thought* they were a super spiritual bunch of believers. But Paul says, "Even *now*, you're still not able to receive solid food!" The idea is that they haven't even grown into the basic principles that have already been laid out for them.

& Btw, don't be confused on this idea of "milk" & "meat" when it comes to God's word. As though there are certain "elite" theological concepts that are to be w/held from people until they can "handle" it. Every doctrine that is taught in seminary can be taught in children's ministry. The difference is the words that are used, & the depth, detail & degree to which they are searched out. You don't graduate into "the deeper things". It's more about your "appetite".

He says, "You weren't (& aren't) able to receive it." You see, it's not that God was preventing them from *having* it. It's that they weren't able to *receive* it. They were feasting on spiritual "junk food", they didn't have an appetite for the "meat & potatoes" of the word of God. – Perhaps you've seen a child who has so filled their stomach with junk that they won't eat their meal? They won't receive what's good for them, what will help them grow because they've given themselves over to junk food.

That's the way some Christians are. They're so conditioned to spiritual junk food that they don't even want what's good for them. It's not about what they need, it's about what they want.

If something isn't sugar coated or watered down, they don't want it. If it's not entertaining, they won't engage.

But God doesn't want you to stop at "Jesus loves me this I know". He wants you to have the appetite that longs to know the height, the width, the length & the depth of His love. Don't stop at salvation, or justification. Let's grow in sanctification. We want to mature in the message of the cross... Paul continues to admonish them.

Vs 3-4

Remember when we talked about the self-centered motives of a baby? "I" am of Paul. "I" am of Apollos. "I, I, I, me, me me". It's all about self.

He says, "You're thinking you're spiritual for aligning yourselves w/a certain teacher & dividing against one another over the matter. The fact is, things like envy, strife, divisions & dissensions are proof that you're *not* spiritual, you're carnal. You're being governed *by* & given over *to* the flesh."

Often times we think of "carnal" behavior as some sexual misconduct or substance abuse issue (& certainly those qualify). However; here Paul points out that problems in human relationships reveal something wrong in our relationship w/God. – Think about that... The mature Christian will take to heart the admonition of Christ. *"love one another; as I have loved you, ... you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*¹ We're learning here that one real aspect of our growing up as believers is learning to get along w/each other... Children like to disagree, fuss & fight, the mature will (out of love for God & one another) seek to get along.

But when we're given over to envy, or strife, or dissensions & divisions, we're behaving like "mere men". Meaning, we're no different than the unregenerate individual who doesn't have the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their life. – Listen, God has every right to expect more out of a Christian than a non-believer. You've been equipped, you've been enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit to live on a different level than does the person of this world. – As spiritual people, we're to "walk in the Spirit" & *not* fulfill the inclinations or predispositions or desires of the flesh.

& When we're willing to divide over preachers (or which church we think is better) or put people on platforms setting one above another & dividing over our opinions; that's *not* spiritual... it's carnal.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [In 13:34–35]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 5-7

It's not the instrument, but the one who wields the instrument who deserves the praise. The scalpel by itself is unable to do anything good or bad. But in the hands of a competent surgeon, it will be used to save lives.

Paul is saying, that's the way God's servants are. They're instruments performing the role & responsibility they were designed for. *God* is the One who is wielding them, who is achieving the results through them, therefore *God* is the One who deserves the praise, the honor & the glory.

In Vs 5 he says, "Look, we're not the ones *on* whom you believed. We're the ones *through* whom you believed. But let's remain focused *on* Whom you believed.

Now, later on in this letter Paul will speak in more detail about this concept. But the idea here is that God "enlists" (if you will) different people into different roles & responsibilities in His work. & We're each accountable before Him to walk in & perform that role. Here; he says it like this, "I planted, Apollos watered." Paul had been called to one task, Apollos another & each was ministering according to their given calling & responsibility. However, what resulted (in salvation) wasn't to *their* glory, it was to *God's* glory.

Peter put it this way, "*As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*"²

When a farmer (or gardener) plants a seed, & waters the seed, he's creating an environment conducive to growth, but he himself can't cause growth or manifest increase. That's something only God can do, it's the miracle of life... It's the same thing in ministering the gospel to people.

We do the same thing in ministering Jesus to other people. Planting is evangelistic, you're sharing your story at work or w/your neighbor or at the gym... Watering is more along the teaching lines, just giving people God's word, or continuing to share w/them after the initial seed has been planted. (Jesus spoke of God's word like seed & the human heart like soil into which it's sown). & The cultivating of the ground, the watering process may carry on for years!

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (1 Pe 4:10-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But one day when that person believes on the Lord, & they're born again. It was something that took place between them & God, God brought forth *life* in them. *I* can't create life in anyone, *you* can't create life in anyone. It's to the praise & glory of God!

Why divide over the one who planted & the one who watered? They're on the same team! They're not competitors, they're co-laborers! We're all working toward the same goal! & When we understand this, we can individually, corporately & collectively give *God* glory! Ours is to be diligent to plant the seed, water the seed, pull the weeds, shoo away the pests, maintain an environment conducive to growth, so that when the harvest happens, we can glorify God.

Vs 8-9

You see? We don't work against one another, we're working w/one another to increase God's kingdom. & Each will have his own reward according (notice) to his own *labor*. So we work together *collectively*, but we'll be rewarded *individually*.

& We see the wisdom of God on display in this. What's the basis of reward? Will I be rewarded on how talented I am, or how gifted I may be? How about how fruitful or "successful" the work appears to be? No. Each one will be rewarded according to his own *labor*... The author of Hebrews said it like this, "For God is not unjust to forget your *work* and *labor of love* which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."³

God may call me to fertile soil. Perhaps I plant or water & see exponential increase. Things are just popping! He calls you to pioneer a work where the ground is fallow, needs busted up, takes years & years. You're working harder than I am & seeing less tangible results. But you're faithful, you keep at it. Your reward will be greater than mine even though it appeared (from a practical perspective) that I had more success than you did.

Think of Jeremiah. Saw miniscule to zero tangible results from his entire prophetic ministry. From all practical perspectives he failed. But he was faithful... His reward will be something to behold. – Then there's Jonah. Fairly self-centered, mostly unwilling, yet God won the entire city of Nineveh w/minimal, bitter effort on his behalf...

God sees beyond the surface of, "Wow, they must really be doing it right, look at all the success they've experienced!" Or "Man, I don't know what they're doing, but they just can't get that work off the ground." God sees the work, the labor, the faithfulness of the individual...

³ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 6:10-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“For we are God’s fellow workers.” Think about that. We can’t work w/out Him & as a general rule, He won’t work w/out us. God wants to partner w/you in the accomplishing of His agenda. Not for His benefit (He could’ve done much better w/out us). It’s for our benefit, our growth & His glory.

Vs 10-15

So whatever our role. Whatever our responsibility, it’s not because we’re *great*, it’s because of God’s *grace*. (Vs 10) “According to the grace of God which was given me.”

Paul says, “Look, I laid the foundation.” That is, he established the work. & What was the foundation that he laid? The only one that can be laid, & that is J.C. It’s quite simple, if J.C. isn’t the foundation, it isn’t the church.

But others will build upon it (as Apollos did). But we have to be careful how we build. There are *worthwhile* materials that can be used, or *worthless* materials that can be used. *Worthwhile* materials are valuable, difficult to come by & endure the fire. Gold, silver, precious stones (granite, marble). *Worthless* materials are cheap, easy to come by & readily destroyed in the fire (wood, hay, straw).

When you build w/the wisdom of man, (entertainment, charismatic personalities, sugar-coated emotional stories) it’s like using hay, or straw, it won’t last. But when you build w/those precious, valuable materials... prayer, the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God... You’re building something that will stand forever... & The materials we’ve used will be revealed as by fire.

Of course this isn’t a reference to salvation, it’s a reference to rewards. Some of our labor will go up in smoke. Perhaps all of some people’s labor will be incinerated. They’ll be saved, but have nothing to show for it... Again, the fire doesn’t purify the worker, this isn’t a reference to purgatory, purgatory is a teaching of the Roman catholic church, not of the bible. It essentially denies the finished work of the cross. – But our works will be tested.

Vs 16-17

Let me just say this passage has nothing to do w/you as an individual. People use this to reference how a person takes care of their body. Later on Paul will address us individually as the temple of God. This is a collective statement. “You all are the temple of God.” Yes, God dwells in us individually, but He’s in our midst collectively.

Here’s the point. It matters to God how people treat the church (His Temple). If we damage the church, God will damage us. The context is w/reference to division, dissension.

If you're causing division in the church, it will have personal ramifications on your relationship w/God. Your nearness *to* Him & walk *w/Him* will be diminished.

Think of it like this; division destroys the temple, brings it to ruins. The love of God is shoved to the side, bitterness & blame take the main stage & God is Jealous for His church. Rather than cut people off from one another we should be working to unite & build together for the glory of God.

Vs 18-20

The point here is to “check yourself before you wreck yourself.” Cast worldly wisdom aside, embrace the wisdom of God. It may not make sense to people around you, but it will eternally benefit you. Jesus said it like this, *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”*⁴

Vs 21-23

“Let no one boast in men.” My how we like to boast in others, celebrities, PhD's & the rest. We love being seen w/the influential of this world. We value the esteem of man more than the esteem of God... Let no one boast (or glory) in men.

*“For all things are yours.” Ladies & Gentlemen, this is Christian liberty. God has given you freely all things to enjoy. Now; before you go crazy thinking of all the ways you want to gratify your flesh ☺. – This is Christian responsibility; “& you are Christ's.” If what you do will please Him, bring glory to Him, if you would invite Him to be in *on* it & a part of it, then go for it. All things are yours, & you are Christ's...*

Let's set our heart upon maturity. Growing up to be all that God's called us to be, that we might glorify Him both now, & eternally.

Prayer Points:

Father, may we move on into maturity. We desire to crucify our flesh & be all that You've called us to be. May the seed of Your word find fertile soil in our hearts that we might be fruitful for Your glory.

If you're here & you've not yet come to a place where you've surrendered to J.C. Let me invite you to have the foundation laid in your heart today, which is J.C. Jesus died for your sins, was buried, & rose again the 3rd day so that you might find forgiveness of sin & life in Him. Why put it off, believe on Him today.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 16:25-26). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.