

Carnal Christianity

An oxy-moron occurs when two ideas that are in opposition to each other are put together to convey a different thought. Terms like great depression, jumbo shrimp, or clearly confused. These are all oxy-morons.

Cor 3:1-3

1

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. *2* I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, *3* for you are still fleshly

In this passage, Paul makes one of the saddest statements found in the scriptures. He says he is talking to brethren, fellow Christians, but note the indictment he brings on them...

2

"I cannot speak to you as spiritual men, but only as to men of the *flesh*"

They were carnal, fleshly, in their intents and lives, so much so that Paul defines them as...

3

"Babes in Christ"

Now, Paul isn't saying that the Corinthians were babes in Christ, or new-born Christians, but rather that he was forced to speak to them as if they *were* babes in Christ, because they had not grown, they had not progressed beyond where they were because they were carnal in their nature and in their approach to their Christianity. Carnal Christians, who have been born again, should have grown in their knowledge and faith, but they haven't grown spiritually. Therefore, these immature believers must be fed baby food, what Paul calls the milk of the Word, because they have not grown in the word and or spiritually

The reason there seems to be so much baby food in the Church today, a lack of depth in study, is because there are so many Christians who are just that, babies! What would the world of today be like if more Christians left behind this carnal life and matured into the meat of the Word, the depth of what God reveals to us of His Love, grace, and mercy? Remember, babies are not grown enough to work, and they really don't work well together, they just complain and cry when they don't get their way, sounds familiar, doesn't it!

We read this passage and sometimes overlook the impact of what God through Paul is saying. Not only had they not grown spiritually as they would have if they had studied and learned God's Word, but they had brought their fleshly agendas and desires with them and were trying to come to God, not through Christ and the Word, but through those fleshly agendas and desires.

4

The term Paul uses, carnal or fleshly, comes from the Greek...

Sarkikos

5

NT:4559 from sarx, "flesh," signifies (a) "having the nature of flesh," i. e., sensual, controlled by animal appetites, governed by human nature, instead of by the Spirit of God, **1 Cor 3:3**; having its seat in the animal nature, or excited by it, **1 Peter 2:11**

Now, there is something that we as a group need to understand here as we consider this idea, when people are saved, it is the Lord that adds them to the Church or the Lord's body, regardless of abilities or mans perception of strength of faith. The only criteria to being added to the Church, is being saved, and that is for the Lord to determine, not us. We can see that principle in...

1 Cor 12:13

6

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Paul makes the same point in...

Rom 12:4-5

7

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

When we come to God through Christ and are added to the Church, it is very apparent that we are not equal in our abilities, knowledge, or commitment. In that same vein, we can see that we are not all equally mature. That is a part of Paul's statement to the Corinthians, we are all different in our maturity and knowledge when we come to the Lord. But even more to the point, is that he recognized that many of the Corinthians were not growing in the knowledge of the Lord and in their Spirituality, and that's why he called them "carnal" Christians. The important point in understanding Paul's statement to them is WHY they were not growing, it was because of they were trying to be Christians while trying to worship God by the ways of the world.

What is it that prompts some to put their opinions, bias', agendas before the commandments of God? Why do some think that God, and ultimately, the way to God, can be found in the carnality of this world? What was it that the Corinthians thought would come from engaging in...

1 Cor 3:3-5

8

3 For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

Have you ever thought about their motivation to argue over things that seem so petty? In hindsight when we look at what was going on there, there seems to be virtually no logic to their actions. Paul tells us, as he told them, that their actions were caused by the fact that they had eliminated God and His truth from their decisions and were placing their trust in their fleshly desires and the carnality of this world. It is a desire of man to want the preeminence and stature that might come from being affiliated with a person of note.

Paul's response...

1 Cor 3:6-9

9

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

This brings us to our topic for this lesson, Carnal Christianity.

A sign of being a Carnal Christian is that they are those whose greatest concern is that of their own welfare, advancement, or indulgence. As we saw, the Greek word for carnal is *sarkikós*, meaning flesh or of fleshly interest, that is what is under discussion in...

Rom 6:5

10

5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin;

The flesh, is to be the old "self" in us that is crucified together with Christ when we believe and obey in Baptism. The danger is that the fleshly man, that was crucified in obedience, doesn't disappear forever, but remains lurking in the shadows of our being our entire Christian life,

desperately raising his ugly head to try and regain control over the new creation we become through faithful obedience in Jesus Christ.

2 Cor 5:17 11

17 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Even Paul sometimes felt so defeated by the old man within him that he called himself, *sarkikós*, or fleshly.

Rom 7:14 12

14 For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

Paul understood the difficulty the Corinthian Christians were having separating themselves from the carnal ways and views of the world that they should have left behind, because of his own experiences and desires, and we should also discern the same struggle between the flesh and spirit in ourselves.

Another sign of Christian immaturity is an attachment to the humans who nurture them. In Corinth, the believers tried to gain stature by aligning themselves with Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, etc. We are also immature Christians if our allegiance to any human Christian leader, teachings of man, or denomination comes before our obedient and humble attachment to God through Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word.

This is Paul's point when he tried to bring the Corinthians to their senses by asking them who, after all, was crucified for them, Paul or Christ?

1 Cor 1:13-15 13

13 Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** that no man should say you were baptized in my name.

In the same way, we today must not put preachers or anyone else we see and hear, closer to our hearts than Jesus, who died for us and should now live within us. Growth, spiritual growth, can only begin when we put Christ first. That is when we will start to grow into spiritual adulthood.

A carnal Christian is one who accepts any doctrine or practice other than that of God's truth as the basis of his faith, whether consciously or not. By that I mean, that, when something other the Word of God is followed, whether or not it is by intent, we become carnal in nature following the flesh as opposed to the spirit.

The Corinthians obviously took pride in their baptism, though from what is indicated, their pride was less in their salvation from their sins and more in what stature might be gained from the one who baptized them. It was that carnal attitude that prompted Paul to say...

1 Cor 1:14-16 14

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** that no man should say you were baptized in my name. **16** Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other.

As was said earlier, it is not through baptism that we come into fellowship as brothers and sisters, but it is through our common redemption in Christ Jesus. Please don't misunderstand that. Yes, baptism brings salvation, and when saved the Lord adds us to His Church, so, in that regard, baptism does bring us into a relationship with each other through our relationship in Christ. What I am saying is that it is still up to us as individuals to get along. While Paul chastised the Corinthians for being carnal, fleshly, in their desires and attitudes, which made them as babes in Christ, please

note that in the same breath, he called them brothers. Our brotherhood is founded in our willingness and desire to be united with each other through Jesus Christ...

Eph 4:4-5

15

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

It is Christ through whom our fellowship with each other is cemented.

Acts 2:46-47

16

46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, **47** praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Our common faith and fellowship in the Church is not in just the common bond of fellowship that comes through baptism, but in the spiritual relationship with all Christians everywhere based on our faith and Love for God.

Another sign of the Corinthians carnality was that they were also filled with an attitude of spiritual superiority, which again is a mark of an immature Christian. They sought to present themselves as superior to one another because of spiritual gifts. That is Paul's comment to them in...

1 Cor 12:1

17

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

Similarly today, a carnal Christian puts their pride in an ability or "gift." This person must guard against the ensuing spiritual pride which accompanies such an attitude. Endeavoring to prove that one has more gifts than others is certainly a sign of spiritual immaturity.

The impact of Paul's statements to the Corinthians then, is that when we come to God we must put away our past lives, the fleshly man, and become Spiritual Christians, striving to put the Word of God into our hearts and let it abide within us as we endeavor to abide in it. Nor are we to try and incorporate the fleshly things of the world into the kingdom that Jesus established, the Church, or into how we live our lives before God.

Spiritual Christians are those believers that are exactly the opposite of carnal Christians. That is what Paul says...

1 Cor 3:1

18

1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.

The spiritual Christian, no matter how much he thinks he accomplishes for Christ, realizes that it is God who gives the increase...

1 Cor 3:6

19

6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

The Greek verb *auxáno*, *owx-an'-o*, means "to give increase" or "to cause to grow," to "make things grow," this is very important for us to understand in this passage. It is growth which is brought about by something other than from within. A seed is placed in the ground, it is watered, and it grows. In the limited scope of our experience, we are tempted to conclude that there is self-generation. But that truly isn't the case. We must always recognize the fact that it is God who puts the life into the seed, and it is God who makes it grow. A manmade seed with all the same parts,

placed in the ground and watered, will never grow. That is why when man tries to clone life, he must first start with that which God made, a fertilized egg. Man can duplicate identity through cloning, but he can never, and will never, be able to create life. A Spiritual Christian is one who recognizes and bows to God's power in all of the demonstrations of life. He recognizes that he is the zero after the one and that without the one coming first, he will always be a zero.

A mature Christian is one who never considers himself as having arrived. He is constantly growing, or trying to grow both in the Word and in the application thereof, and realizes that the moment he stops growing he is reverting back to the flesh, to carnality. Now note...

1 Cor 3:9

20

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

The word translated "building" here is oikodomê, **21** which means a building in the process of being constructed.

22

"For we are laborers together with God: . . . ye are God's building."

God never finishes building us till our last breath. When we allow Him to keep on building us, we are spiritual, abiding in Him, when we don't, we are carnal. Interestingly enough, oikodomê is the same Greek word used in...

2 Cor 5:1

23

1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The house under consideration here is our eternal house in the heaven. As God builds us through our commitment to His word here on Earth, He is building for us our home in heaven. What better incentive could we have to become less carnal and more spiritual!

The best treatment for carnal Christians is to feed them the milk of the Word, the spiritual food, that they need to grow, and as they grow they can begin to eat the meat of the Word. To treat someone constantly like a babe will perpetuate his or her state of immaturity. As those who have come to God, we are commanded to teach all men everywhere concerning Christ. Part of the responsibility for the seeming immature state of Christianity today may very well be traced to the apathetic attitude and laziness of many Christians in general and on how they teach. One of the comments that is often given by those coming from the world and the community churches and how they approach the study of God's Word, is that there is no depth to the study, it just barely scratches the surface. With that said, my personal compliments to the Elders, teachers, and all who participate in the teaching program here at Clovis, you stand as a standard for all to emulate.

Brethren, we need to beware that we don't fall into the trap the Corinthians found themselves in. The responsibility to grow is ours as individuals and ours alone. Elders, deacons, preachers, class teachers, can only do so much in terms of presenting God's truth in all its glory. We can't depend on or blame the Church for either our lack of growth or that of our children. Growth never comes externally; it is always a function of how, as individuals, we make the effort to learn God's truth. As individuals we will stand accountable for how we have taken that truth to heart and applied it in our lives, growing beyond being babes, into Christians that have a need for the deeper things of the truth. And here is the ultimate point

As the individual grows, so does the Church

22

What kind of Christian are we — ***carnal***, wanting to bring the world or parts of the world into our Christianity or are we a ***Spiritual Christian***, one who understands that only a path guided solely by the truth of God leads to heaven.?