

“I Could Not Speak to You as Spiritual Men”

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“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:1)

Read 1 Cor 3:1-4

Orville and Wilbur Wright were excited. On December 17, 1903, they had finally succeeded in keeping their homemade airplane in the air for 59 seconds. Immediately they rushed a telegram to their sister in Dayton, Ohio, telling of this great accomplishment.

The telegram read, "First sustained flight today fifty-nine seconds. Hope to be home by Christmas." Upon receiving the news the sister was so excited about the success that she rushed to the newspaper office and gave the telegram to the editor. The next morning the newspaper headline read, "Popular Local Bicycle Merchants To Be Home For Holidays."

One of the greatest stories of the twentieth century was missed because an editor missed the point.

There is a tendency in handling this passage to argue whether or not there is such a category in the Christian faith as a carnal believer. By arguing this idea, we are missing the primary point of the paragraph. "Paul's concern is singular: not to suggest classes of Christians or grades of spirituality, but to get them to stop *thinking* like the people of this present age. He wants them to stop *behaving* like the people of the present age, which is the point at hand." (Fee, 1 Corinthians, 122).

The believer is never identified as being *in Adam* and *in Christ* at the same time. You are either *in Adam* or *in Christ*. The unbelieving are *in Adam* and the believing are *in Christ*. Thus for the believer **“What we once were, we no longer are, but still have.”**

Thus, there is a sense in which every believer is still fleshly or carnal, but this carnality is not our identity nor it is our practice or pattern.

The “Fleshly” or “Carnal” believers in Corinth in 3:1-4 are the same ones that are “Sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” in 1:2 and who will be “Guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” in 1:8 and who have been “Called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” in 1:9.

The point I believe being made is that the fleshly Christian is not something different than the spiritual Christian except that the fleshly Christian is temporarily manifesting fleshly works. He is thinking and behaving like one who does not have the Spirit and Paul says such thinking and behaving is infantile.

The believers in Corinth were bad-tempered, discordant, and argumentative (1:10, 11). Paul accents these same sins in 3:4. They were acting like immature infants. As infants they were playing favorites, being braggadocios, and incapable of chewing on solid food. They

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were like the colicky child or the teething baby who cannot be pacified. As parents, one expects their child to be finicky and self-absorbed, but as with most children, we expect them to grow beyond this.

Paul, as a spiritual “parent” understood that believers in their “infant” stage of spiritual growth can act very childish. Most believers grow past this stage of spiritual infancy. Some, however, remain in that stage far too long while others lapse back into it. When they do, we have an adult acting like a child and this is never good. The Corinthian's as adults (spiritual) were lapsing back into an infant (fleshly) stage of behavior by becoming divisive, disgruntled, and disagreeable.

It is important to remember that one’s position always impacts and changes one’s practice. One’s practice can never alter one’s position. So while the Corinthians were behaving like infants and thus fleshly, they were still sanctified saints who will be guiltless before the throne and are in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The Corinthian community was failing in a primary display of brotherly love (Jn 13:34, 35). For this they were to be rebuked. Their behavior was entirely inconsistent with who they are *in Christ*. Friends, let us put off our infant/fleshly behavior and seek the larger truth of body unity and brotherly love.

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