

“I Could Not Speak to You as to Spiritual Men”

1 Cor 3:1-4

Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly

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. Without question there was within the Corinthian fellowship, those who were deeply involved in spiritual activity, but were acting fleshly by their deep divisiveness and wretched factionalism. But by trying to figure out who these people were, we miss the point as to why they were being identified as such. Chapter 3 continues with the idea begun in 1:10.

It is against this backdrop that Paul addresses his audience as acting fleshly. They were rejecting the centrality of Christ in the local assembly and splitting the body by polarizing around individuals; individuals who were identified as the foolish, weak, base, and despised.

I. Who are these spiritual men referenced in verse 1?

The spiritual men in 3:1 are the same as those in 2:6-16. They are identified as being mature (v. 6), as those who love Him (v. 9), as being spiritual (v. 15), and [those who] have the mind of Christ (v. 16).

The spiritual men of 3:1 are in contrast to the natural man in 2:14. Paul's biting comment reflects the fact that as spiritual men they should not be thinking and behaving like fleshly men.

As one's who have the mind of Christ (2:16), why would they be acting fleshly? The rebuke is intentional.

II. Who are men of [the] flesh and infants in Christ in verse 1?

The same people identified in 2:6-16 as spiritual are identified as fleshly and worldly in 3:1-4.

From Paul usage of these two statements the terms are in parallel. The men of flesh and infants in Christ are one and the same.

The Corinthian as adults (spiritual) were lapsing back into an infant (fleshly) stage of behavior by becoming divisive, disgruntled, and disagreeable. Paul's rebuke is against such works of the flesh (Gal 5:20) that are indicative of the unbelieving.

Nothing could alter what they were positionally, but practically they were acting like fleshly people.

Continued on the other side...

III. How did Paul minister to these fleshly infants (v. 2)?

- A. Every believer starts out on milk
- B. Believers are to advance to solid food

All truth is doctrinal, but not all doctrinal truth is taught in the same way. Many are content to hear the same elementary things over and over again, but such teaching impedes the growth of the body.

IV. Why were they not able to receive the solid food (vv. 2-4)?

- A. Because they were dividing over personalities

They were still factious and divisive. They believed that what Paul preached (2:2) was inadequate. They loved the wisdom of this age. As such, their unity was destroyed.

- B. By being fleshly they were impeding spiritual growth

Paul changes his word usage from “men of the flesh” in verse 1 to “fleshly” in verse 3. His intent is to show how their thinking and behavior was indicative of those who had embraced the wisdom of this age and not the wisdom of God.

Those who divide the body of Christ are not celebrating the centrality of Christ.

V. What did Paul desire to accomplish by “rebuking” his audience?

Paul’s desire was for them to see the centrality of Christ and to put off the old man that was leading them to division.