

Divisions Arise From Carnality *1 Corinthians 3:1-9*

Good Morning.

We have already learned that the church in Corinth was an unhealthy church with idolatry, sexual immorality, worldly wisdom, and divisions and more.

So, one of the things Paul addresses to this Church is the issue of **divisions** over differing **personalities**.

Casey Lewis about these divisions *“Some in the church attached themselves to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and still others to Christ. These factions killed church unity and damaged their ability to accomplish their Christ given mission. Churches also divide today over personalities, politics, how to do church, and even church décor*

James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

James 4:2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. NKJV

Please open your Bibles to *1 Corinthians 3* as we continue. Last week...we learned for the Christian; though the world seems as if it is falling apart, ***“The Best is Yet to Come”***.

God has a plan for His Children; but the limited human mind cannot fully grasp all of the blessings God has for His children.

No matter how much of this world we have seen with all of its wonders and beauty, heaven is so much greater.

God's plan is revealed by His Spirit. "*No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God*"

Believers have the mind of Christ which involves wisdom from God, which cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit.

When we think like Jesus, we gain an eternal perspective about suffering, the brevity of this life, and we begin to live our lives based upon Christ's **priorities** instead of our own.

The Lord is going to take us to heaven; don't forget Abundant, Eternal life **promised** to us begins immediately at Salvation.

Today, we will learn how one Corinth's major problems was divisions in the church; so Paul teaches that divisions, envy and strife come from carnality in people; but we belong to Jesus.

I. Babes in Christ.

Read *1 Corinthians 3:1-2*

Wiersbe said, "*Paul already explained that there are two kinds of people in the world—natural (unsaved) and spiritual (saved).*

*"...But now he explained that there are two kinds of saved people: mature and **immature** (carnal)."* (Wiersbe)

Dr. Constable, *“The Apostle Paul addressed these local church people as “believers,” because that is what they were.*

They shared the life of God because the Holy Spirit indwelt them and submitted to God's rule over them to some extent.

God had commissioned them to take the gospel to every creature

We need to bear these things in mind as we read about the church of God in Corinth, because we might otherwise conclude that they were unbelievers in view of their conduct.”

It is hard to believe that a person can be saved, and still behave **carnally** like the world, but here Paul clearly says it happens.

Some believers are immature because they have only been saved a short time; others begin to backslide, and still others **neglect** their relationship with Christ; not studying the Word or praying.

Within Christianity, **our diet** has a lot to do with our maturity.

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Hebrews 5:13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. NKJV

One commentator said, “*milk*” represents what Jesus did on earth, while “*meat*” concerns what He is doing now in heaven.

In context, the writer of *Hebrews* was teaching about the present heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ, but those church members were so immature, they did not understand.

Growth is so important for the Christian, just as it is for physical human life and development.

If we witnessed a six year old child with a binky in his mouth, we would all think, either that child has special needs or his parents are not doing a good job raising them.

When the same child is 19 and in college; it will be a little off pudding for them to bring their pacifier with them to class.

In *Hebrews*, “*By this time*”; the writer thought these followers should have been a lot further in their faith than they were.

The NIV translates the words, “*first principles*” in *Hebrews 5:12*, as *elementary truths of God's word all over again*.

In other words, you need someone to teach you the ABC's of the Bible again.

Truth heard, but **not personally applied** will be **lost** by the hearer

The ability to share God's truth comes with maturity.

These Christians understood that Jesus came to earth and took the cross for their sins, but the writer was unable to retain them the deep truths about who Jesus is.

Imagine a 30 year old man walking around with a baby bottle while wearing a diaper. How disgusting, yet some in the church were **refusing** to grow up in the Grace and knowledge of Christ.

Hebrews 5:13 says, “***For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe*** (in the Greek; has become a baby). ***NKJV***

David Guzik said, “*There is nothing more delightful than a true babe in Jesus.*

...but there is nothing more irritating and depressing than someone who should be mature but who has become a babe.”

Hebrews 5:13 says, “***Unskilled in the word of righteousness***”

Christians, who go back to being babies, are exposed because they are **unskilled** in the Word of righteousness.

Brand new Christians have to grow in order to be skilled in the Word of righteousness, but those who have been Christians for a while should be skilled enough to handle it.

Wiersbe said, “*The immature believer knows little about the present ministry of Christ in heaven.*

He knows the facts about our Lord’s life and ministry on earth, but not the truths about His present ministry in heaven.

He lives on “Bible stories” and not Bible doctrines.”

i.e. Christians who have a strong diet of the world and junk food theology, so they cannot handle the meat of the Word of God.

II. Still carnal.

Read *1 Corinthians 3:3-4*

No one is perfect, but Mature Christians should practice **love** as they try to maintain unity with their brothers and sisters; immature believers want to argue and disagree with others.

The problems this Church was having with favoritism among leadership, revealed there was actually something wrong in their **individual** relationships with God.

These divisions were evidence of carnality, and people living and thinking according to the flesh, rather than the Spirit.

Gordon Fee said, *“Spiritual people are to walk in the Spirit. If they do otherwise, they are “worldly” and are called upon to desist. Remaining worldly is not one of the options.”*

The Christians in Corinth wanted to promote their favorite Bible teachers instead of unifying in Christ.

We hear, *“John Calvin said, or Jacobus Arminius said.”*

There is nothing wrong with learning from those who have gone before us; but these people are mere men, not Jesus Christ.

If you study church history you will learn that the Church, instead of being UNITED, has been divided several times.

Over time, we see one group breaking off from another group to form a new group.

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517 and many people broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed new denominations.

Later most of those denominations splintered into other groups; some of these splits were good and some were petty and carnal.

What are the some of the tell tale signs that someone is immature in their faith and unskilled in the Word?

1. Immature believers, lack of **unity** with other believers.

Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Ephesians 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; NKJV

2. Immature believers do not adhere to **sound** doctrine.

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ. NKJV

3. Immature believers have a lack of concern for others.

Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

4. Immature believers are self governed, and lack humility.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

Philippians 2:7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. NKJV

Again, *Hebrews 5:14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. NKJV*

The Corinthian Christians were definitely saved people; but they were living carnally and were not demonstrating a changed life given to them by the Holy Spirit residing in them.

These Christians showed immaturity by a lack of discernment between good and evil and following men, instead of Jesus.

Wiersbe said, *“When immature Christians, without spiritual discernment, get into places of leadership in the church, the results will be disastrous.”*

A mature Christian is shown, not only by their discernment, but by their **unshakable** faith in Jesus.

Maturity is also shown by those who understand the teaching about Biblical righteousness and then also live it out practically.

III. God’s garden of Grace.

Read *1 Corinthians 3:5-9*

The Bible uses gardening as a metaphor in few different places; the most notable is Jesus’ parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:3 “Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Matthew 13:4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.

Matthew 13:5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth.

Matthew 13:6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.

Matthew 13:7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

Matthew 13:8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. NKJV

In the parable of the seed in ***Matthew 13***, the message was the **same** each time, but there are 4 different types of soil (hearts).

1. ***The wayside*** was a well traveled road or a walking path.

Lettuce, chard and certain beans grow in clay soil, but the wayside described here was packed down soil and very hard, so the Seeds could not grow.

The birds came and snatched up all of the seed because the ground was so hard that the seeds were never covered.

Most times birds in the Bible represent evil.

2. ***Stony places*** had very **shallow** soil on top of a rocky underlayment.

There are some shallow-rooted plants, such as grasses and ground covers, and some weeds.

On this ground the seed springs up quickly because of warm soil, but do not take root because of the rocks.

3. ***Among thorns*** describes good soil that has a bramble bush, brier, or a thorny plant.

Many weeds or thorn bushes are growing along side of the grain.

4. ***Good ground*** describes fertile soil free from any weeds growing in it. A ***fruitful*** crop grows in the ***good ground***.

What farmer or sower in the world would not want to plant on the Good Soil, because of the yield that seed produces?

The parable is about God's kingdom and the Sower is Jesus; He sows "the Word of God"

People come to saving faith come from all kinds of different backgrounds, personalities, talents, intellectual capacity, etc.

They receive and process the truth of Christ differently; including the time of life they receive Him.

We are all on different time table with our spiritual maturity, but all Christians have embraced the truth of Christ in the Gospel!

Wiersbe asked, "*How did this image of the church as a "field" apply to the special problems of the Corinthians? To begin with, the emphasis must be on God and not on the laborers.*

Paul and Apollos were only servants who did their assigned tasks. It was God who gave life to their efforts. Even the faith of the believers was a gift from God.

"It is wrong to center attention on the servants. Look instead to the Lord of the harvest, the source of all blessing." (Wiersbe)

When a person has a true conversion experience, many people may have watered or planted seeds during the individual's life; but it was the Lord who gave the increase!

1 Corinthians 3:6 teaches us that no matter what job or ministry the Lord has given to **individuals**; all are equally important as the Lord allows us a part in fulfilling His purposes and plan.

So many people make the mistake of spiritual hierarchy when it comes to positions or ministries; but it is God who gives all true spiritual growth and increase; not individuals.

Charles Hodge said, *“The faithful, minister or missionary who labors in obscurity and without apparent fruit, will meet a reward far beyond that of those who, with less self-denial and effort, are made the instruments of great results.”*

The very purpose for humans to be on planet earth is to minister in the area the Lord has planned for us to do, before time began.

David Guzik said, *“When a farmer plants a seed, and waters it, he really does not make it grow. The miracle of life does that.*

All the farmer can do is provide the right environment for growth, and trust in the miracle of life.

We do the same thing in ministering Jesus to other people.”

And by the way, notice **verse 8**; not only are we unified in Christ for the work, we will individually be rewarded for our ministry.

1 Corinthians 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. NKJV

Christians tend to forget we are playing on the same team; we should have the same goals; to glorify Christ, edify the body and see people saved. The main reason is vs. 9; you belong to Jesus

IV. Practical Application.

Next week we will speak on rewards and judgments; But for the Christian who does what the Lord calls them to do; the Lord of the harvest will say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*”

David said in *Psalms 133:1*, “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” NKJV

When a church follows the Lord’s structure for ministry, there will be fruit, growth, joy, and unity and it will flourish.

Wiersbe said, “*Surely brethren should live together in love and harmony, yet often they do not.*”

Think about biblical examples; Lot caused a quarrel with his uncle Abraham over grazing land for his cattle. Absalom created a war for his father David by killing Amnon.

The disciples argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom. Some of the early churches had disagreements as well.

We can get hyper focused on non-essential issues in the Church whether in the way a ministry is handled, music or other things;

When we major on minor things, we lose focus of Christ and the desire He has for us personally and the ministry of His Church

The Corinthian church members were competing with each other in public meetings, and even suing each other in court.

Wiersbe said, *“The world watches these religious wars and says, “Behold, how they hate one another!”*

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” NKJV

When we live according to the flesh, we **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God who lives in us.

Galatians 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

When Christians realized they have died, and their real lives are hidden in Christ, our focus and our priority is Christ Himself.

When the priority is truly Jesus Christ, the little things in life begin to fade away, and the divisions will fade away as well.

Some things that get in the way of unity between Christians:

- Unforgiveness.

The unwillingness to forgive someone hinders unity. Go to them ***Matthew 18*** style and seek reconciliation.

When the heart is so filled with the flesh, forgiveness is almost impossible; because forgiveness has to be born of the Spirit.

- Bitterness.

When we fail to forgive others and hold on to past hurts, bitter root begins and then controls our lives; this prevents unity.

- Jealousy.

When we are jealous of other people and how the Lord has blessed them, it creates division rather unity.

When unity with our brothers and sisters becomes more of a concern than individual desires, we will grow spiritually.

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. NKJV

As we come before the holy God and realize all we have been given in Christ, we will humble ourselves before Him.

Then Jesus will lift us up, because God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The unmerited favor of God, His grace will always lift us up.

We are God's garden of Grace; since we belong to Jesus, we are fully redeemed, forgiven, and He wants us to live in **unity**.

1 Corinthian 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

1 Corinthian 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

As part of the Body of Christ, you belong to the Lord and our hearts belong to Him.

And like any good parent, the Lord desires His Children to live together in unity in the essential doctrine of Christ as Lord.