

Sunday, December 13, 2015—I Corinthians 3:1-3: The Carnal Corinthians

I Corinthians 3:1

- **And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ.**
- *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual*—note the conjunction “and” at the beginning of verse one. After establishing the difference between the “natural man” (v. 14) and “he that is spiritual” (v. 15) at the end of Chapter 2 and telling the Corinthians that they were present possessors of the mind of Christ (v. 16), Paul opens chapter 3 by telling the Corinthians that he could not speak unto them as spiritual.
- The phrase “could not speak” is in the past tense. Paul is referring back to way he spoke when he was among them in Acts 18.
- The word translated “spiritual” in verse 1 is the same word translated “spiritual” in I Cor. 2:15. Paul is not saying that the Corinthians weren’t “spiritual” for as believers that were possessors of the “spirit which is of God” in I Cor. 2:12. Rather, Paul is saying that he could not address them as such due to their immaturity.
- *But as unto carnal*—instead of being able to address the Corinthians as spiritual men who were judging all things (I Cor. 2:15) Paul had to speak them as though they were “carnal.” The Greek word translated “carnal” occurs eleven times in the Greek text supporting the King James Bible. The word is various translated as “carnal” 11x and “fleshly” 2x.
 - II Corinthians 1:12
 - II Peter 2:11
- *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* defines the English word “carnal” as: 1) Pertaining to flesh; fleshly; sensual; opposed to spiritual; as carnal pleasure. 2) Being in the natural state; unregenerate. The carnal mind is enmity against God. Rom. 8.
- Romans 8:5-6—the problem with the Corinthians is that they were being “carnally minded” and where thus minding the things of the flesh. Therefore, Paul states in I Cor. 3:1 that he had to speak unto them “as unto carnal.”
- *Even as unto babes in Christ*—the Greek word translated “babes” in I Cor. 3:1 is the word *nēpios* and it means an infant, little child, a minor, not of age. The word is used metaphorically to denote childish, untaught, or unskilled, according to *Strong’s Concordance*.
 - I Corinthians 13:11

- Ephesians 4:14
- I Corinthians 3:1—when Paul was in Corinth he spoke to the Corinthians as though they were spiritual babies.

I Corinthians 3:2

- **I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.**
- *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat*—again note the past tense on the verb translated “have fed.” When Paul was in their presence in Acts 18 he fed them with milk and not with meat.
- The English word “hitherto” means “in any time, or every time till now; in time preceding the present,” according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*. So Paul is telling the Corinthians that “in the time preceding the present” I was not able to feed you with meat because they were not able to “bear it.”
- Why not? Because they were “babes in Christ” in verse 1.
- *neither yet now are ye able*—note the shift between the past and present tense. Even now ,at the time of Paul’s writing them this epistle, they were still not able to “bear it.”
- Paul says in verse 2 that he fed them with milk and not meat because they were not mature enough to eat/digest meat. Paul concludes verse 2 by noting that their spiritual condition had not changed, they were still carnal babes in Christ not yet capable of eating meat.
 - Hebrews 5:12-14—the Bible often uses milk versus meat to illustrate the issue of spiritual maturity.
- I Corinthians 2:6-8—this explains why Paul was not able to speak “the wisdom of God in a mystery” to the saints in Corinth. They were not capable of digesting it. Therefore, Paul limited himself to the milk of the word.

I Corinthians 3:3

- **For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**
- *For ye are yet carnal*—Paul tells the Corinthians that in his estimation they are still in the state of being carnal and fleshy.

- *for whereas* there is *among you envying, and strife, and divisions*—Paul cites the envying, strife, and divisions that exist among the Corinthians as proof of their fleshly conduct and lack of spiritual maturity.
 - Galatians 5:19-21
- *are ye not carnal, and walk as men*—verse 3 begins with a statement regarding the spiritual state of the Corinthians “For ye are yet carnal” and ends with a question. In other words, on the basis of the fact that envying, strife, and division exist among you aren’t you carnal and walking as men?
- The word translated “men” in verse 3 is the same word translated “man” in I Cor. 2:14 when Paul speak of the “natural man.” The fundamental problem with the Corinthians that they are living as though they were not saved. They are walking as they knew to walk as Gentiles in the vanity of their own minds.
 - Ephesians 5:17-22
- I Corinthians 3:3—this verse ought to take you back to I Cor. 1:10-11.
- I Corinthians 1:10-11—Paul’s entire reason for writing the book of I Corinthians was to beseech the saints in Corinth to put away their fleshly contentions and divisions so that they could speak the same thing, as well as be of the same mind and judgment.
- How are the Corinthians going to be able to be of the same mind and judgment and speak the same thing? By functioning with the mind of Christ that they had been given in I Cor. 2:16.
- Philippians 2:1-8—the cure for what was ailing the Corinthian church was the faith application of the mind of Christ.
- I Corinthians 3:1-3—essentially what Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for here is their failure to function with one another on the basis of the mind of Christ. If the Corinthians had been functioning with the mind of Christ there would not be envy, strife, an division among them because they would be having the same love and mind.
- I Corinthians 2:15—remember when I said that one way of understanding this verse was as follows, if you and I as believers will take care of judging all things for ourselves we will have no need to be judged by another believer?
- That is exactly what the Corinthians failed to do. Instead of functioning as the spiritual men that they were they went out and lived as natural men and the result was chaos, discord, and animosity among the brethren in the assembly.

- Now on the basis of the lack of spiritual maturity and failure to judge all things for themselves the Apostle Paul does for them what they failed to do for themselves and judges them with the goal of setting them straight.
- As believers we need to learn from the example of the Corinthians.