

7. Are you childish?

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Confrontation is never easy. Whether you are the one who confronts or the one being confronted. If you are confronting someone, you have the fear of being rejected by that person. And if you are the one being confronted, you would put up a defensive wall. Either position, I don't want to be in unless I have to. But being a pastor means that I sometimes have to do it. However, if I do with the love of God, humility, and the concern for that person, it is a lot easier.

If the Lord speaks to you and convicts you today, you have a couple of choices:

1) The right action: Repent of your sin; confess to Him and ask for His forgiveness. And make it right.

2) The wrong action: Be defensive, make excuses, be argumentative, and not repent from your sin. But expect God's correcting hands in your life.

Here in this chapter 3, we find the apostle Paul confronting the Corinthians and calling them, "Carnal" and "babes in Christ," and telling these grown-up Corinthians to grow up.

A. CARNAL CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

The Corinthian Christians were a part of the family of God without a doubt. Though they had the Holy Spirit in them, they were not behaving like spiritual people, but carnal – that is, fleshly people, like immature Christians.

I've seen many of carnal Christians in my Christian life. They can quote Scriptures, talk about spiritual things in front of me, especially when they find out that I am a pastor. But I can tell they are carnal by the way they talk and behave. These Christians are thinking and acting according to their carnal nature, not according to the teaching of the Holy Spirit in the Bible.

Then, there is a million dollar question: Are the carnal Christians really Christians? It is not my place to judge their faith status, because the Lord knows their hearts. The late British theologian Alan Redpath said so eloquently regarding this, "The carnal Christian is a child of God, born again and on his way to heaven, but he is traveling third class. Romans 7 is a portrait of the carnal Christian; indwelt by the Spirit, but mastered by the flesh."

There is a difference between "being fleshy" – "sarkinos" in Greek that was used in 2 Corinthians 3:3 and "being fleshly" – "sarkikos" in Greek that was used here in this passage.

- Fleshy is simply "made of flesh"; it can speak of the weakness that is common to every fallen human.
- Fleshly, when used to describe a person, means "characterized by the flesh." It speaks of the one who can and should do differently, but chooses not to. Paul says that the Corinthians were sarkikos.

The apostle Paul was the “spiritual father” of the Corinthian Christians in the first century. During the eighteen months he ministered in Corinth, Paul had tried to feed his spiritual children and help them mature in the faith.

As a baby grows, his food changes from milk to something more solid, then he starts to eat meat. The “milk” here represents simple truths in the Word, while “meat” represents the hard doctrines. The Word of God is our spiritual food: “milk” in 1 Peter 2:2; “bread” in Matthew 4:4; “meat” in Hebrews 5:11-14; and even honey in Psalm 119:103. Just as the physical man needs balanced meals if his body is to be healthy, so the inner man needs a balanced spiritual food.

It is not difficult to determine a believer’s spiritual maturity, or immaturity, if you discover what kind of “spiritual food” he enjoys. The immature believer knows little about being obedient to the Word of God and loving Him back with one’s life.

A few weeks ago, when we started our Inductive Bible Study on our Midweek services, I noticed a big increase in the attendance. Many of you guys wanted to know how to study the Bible by yourself. Your desire to know the Word of God made me be proud of your spiritual maturity and hunger.

There is another way to determine maturity: a mature Christian practices love and seeks to get along with others. Children like to disagree and fuss. And children like to identify with heroes, whether sports heroes or Hollywood’s movie super heroes. The “babes” in Corinth were fighting over which preacher was the greatest – Paul, Apollos, or Peter. It sounded like children on the playground: “My daddy can fight better than your daddy! My daddy makes more money than your daddy!” Childish!!

By the way, at the beginning of this study, I mentioned about confronting someone who is in sin or immature. Please keep this in mind when you confront someone next time:

1) Base the charges on absolute truth, not your own preconceived opinion or rumors.

Take time to get all the facts before you point your finger.

2) Wait for God’s timing.

Confronting a person too early, while emotions are turbulent, can do more harm than good. Better to wait for God’s green light.

3) Use wise wording.

Prophet Nathan didn’t accuse king David for his adultery right away. He softened his heart with a word picture. Plan your words carefully before you talk to the person.

Proverbs 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

4) Do it with love, humility, and courage.

No one likes to be confronted. We always run the risk of straining a relationship or even losing a friend a family member. But the risk is well worth the reward when the person is restored.

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Most of all, do all confrontations to restore that person in love, not just to shoot down.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

B. 3 PORTRAITS OF CHRISTIANS

The apostle Paul follows the steps of the Master Communicator Jesus Christ. While addressing the Corinthians' problems in 1 Corinthians 3:5-17, he uses three word pictures they would easily have grasped and that apply to us today.

1) Growing into a healthy plant

1 Corinthians 3:5-9 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

The immature Corinthian Christians would rather identify themselves with the teachers of the Word than the God of the Word and it shows their childish immaturity. The people who planted seeds and who watered are not important, because they were nothing more than fellow workers of God. And those servants were not competing against one another, rather working together.

Competition starts from pride, wanting to prove that you are better than someone else. It flourishes in pride. If you win, you stroke your pride. But if you lose, you grind an ax in your heart against the winner. They say, "Healthy competition is good." It might be true in our physical world, but not in Christianity. We all work together for the Lord, no one is less, no one is better, only God is good and He alone deserves all the glory, no one else.

2) Building a solid foundation

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul uses the Corinthian congregation as a building in his word picture, emphasizing on the quality they should strive for in constructing their spiritual structure.

- **The first phase: Foundation** – v10a

As a wise builder, the apostle laid down the foundation. There is only one foundation for the church. If it isn't founded on Jesus Christ, it isn't a church at all.

- **The second phase: Construction** – v10b-12

Paul's focus is on the quality of the building, because of the excellence of the foundation, he urged them to use only the best materials – long lasting ones, such as gold, silver, and precious stones instead of the cheapo wood, hay, and straw.

- **The third phase: Inspection** – v13-15

The apostle tells us why it's so important to maintain high quality control on the building materials, because every believer's work will be inspected. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, God will reward believers for their work.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The purpose of the inspection is not to decide whose work has earned salvation – our salvation is sealed the moment we put our faith in Christ. The fire strictly determines the rewards we will receive. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not the same one as the Great White Throne Judgment. The Judgment Seat of Christ is for the believers and it will take a place in heaven, while the Great White Throne Judgment will happen on earth after the Great Tribulation against the every single condemned sinner in human history who has not accepted Jesus as one's Savior and Lord before and all of them will be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

It is very important for us to understand and remember this:

God sees the hearts of men, He knows the motives of what he or she does in the name of God. It might be godly in outward appearance, but God sees the intention of the accomplishment. If it was done with a selfish motive, that work will be burned and the person who did that will not receive rewards in heaven.

3) Assuring a purified temple

Paul's third image describes the Corinthians as more than just a building. To show the high value God places on the purity of the local church, he calls them a temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

- **The facts:** Paul tells the Corinthians that they are the temple of God, that the Holy Spirit indwells them. As a church body and as individuals, they were supposed to be walking, breathing temples of His holiness.

I know some Bible teachers isolate this v16 to talk about not defiling the individual believer's physical body, but they are taking it out of context. Because the apostle has been talking about the church in the previous verses and will continue in the following verses. Paul will later speak as individual Christians being temples in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Additionally, the word "you" at the end of v16 is meant to be plural, not only in English, but also in the original Greek word, "este" – plural present. In other words, it is not about the individual, but the body of Christ which is the church.

- **The warning:** Next, Paul warns them with the tough truth. This is not referring to believers who commit suicide, but to those who desecrate the temple. The idea is that anybody who causes dissensions and strifes in the church – individual church as well as overall with heresies, the part God has declared sacred, will be destroyed.

C. APPLICATIONS

Now I need to speak to those who consider yourself mature in the Lord. Christian maturity cannot be measured by your own mind while you are in a comfortable situation. It only can be measured by the Lord while you are in hot water and how much you rely on Him. The people around you will see and notice how you handle your turmoil. Trust Him, put your faith in Him, wait upon the Lord, then, move as He shows you the way.

For those who know that you are not mature in the Lord, why do you remain immature in the Lord if you've been saved for some time? The Lord gave you everything you need to be mature in Him, especially the Bible. The only reason that you are not growing in the Lord is that you are not putting your time and energy into the things of God and you'd rather make excuses.

Let's take the admonitions from the apostle Paul what we learned today and live wholeheartedly for our Lord Jesus. Remember this, please.

1 Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?