

Series: 1 Corinthians

Title: Hungry, Harmless Babies & Discerning Men

Text: 1 Corinthians 3: 2-3

Date: October 15, 2015

Place: SGBC, New Jersey

1 Corinthians 3: 1: And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 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.

This is so sad! After so long a time, their spiritual growth was hindered. And they were the ones who had hindered their spiritual growth. How so?

1 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?

This is not that false doctrine some teach—the so-called “carnal Christian.” Some say there are regenerated believers who leave the gospel of Christ, leave God’s people and live to their flesh—yet they are “carnal Christians.” Others even say that some of God’s elect will never be regenerated in this life until they die, so they go through life as “carnal Christians.” Neither of these doctrines is taught in the word and that is not what Paul is declaring here.

Those to whom Paul wrote were regenerated believers. He calls them “brethren.” They were united in attendance with the other members of the church to hear the word preached. But their carnal hearts were set on carnal things rather than having their new spirit set on spiritual things taught in the gospel. So they were not growing as believers.

Now, here is the point for us to get from this message. If we would grow in grace as children of God, then as the Holy Spirit feeds us the gospel of Christ through the preaching of the word then we must continue feeding upon the word of Christ rather than feeding upon carnal meat.

Our subject is “Hungry, Harmless Babies & Understanding Men.”

It is good for believers to be as babies in our hunger for the word of God. Also, it is good for believers to be as babies in regard to the malice of our flesh. But in regard to spiritual understanding and spiritual growth, it is good to be men—we are to seek to be spiritually mature believers.

BABIES IN HUNGER FOR THE WORD

First, it is good for believers to be as babies in our hunger for the word of God—**1 Peter 2:1: Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2: As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:**

In chapter 1, we see why the Holy Spirit puts such importance on believers desiring the word of God.

One, it is because it is by the word of God that we were born-again—“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” (1 Pet 1: 23) We did not give ourselves spiritual life: we could not do so. Carnal man cannot and will not receive the things of the Spirit of God. It is by the word of God, the incorruptible seed, that we are born-again. So we see the word is of utmost importance to our new life!

Also, our carnal flesh, with its very best glory, is dead and dying. It will soon wither away like grass. But by the word of God, we not only have spiritual life, we have life forever!—"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever." (1 Pet 1: 24-25) So we see another reason why the word is so vital to a believer. It is by the word that live and abide and endure forever.

Three, "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Pet 1: 25) We preach the Word of God. It is Christ the Word who is declared throughout the entire written word. We preach the Word of the word. Can we live without Christ? No way! Neither can we live without the word whereby the gospel of Christ is preached unto us.

So the Holy Spirit says through Peter knowing it is the word by which you were born again, knowing it is the word by which you have eternal life, salvation from your dead, dying flesh, and knowing it is the word by which the Christ the Word is preached unto you, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:" (1 Pet 2: 1-2)

But some at Corinth had done just the opposite—they laid aside the word of God and fed upon this poisoned, carnal meat—**1 Corinthians 3: 2...neither yet are ye able to bear [stronger meat] 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?**

True believers, born of God, have a responsibility and a necessity, not to feed on these carnal things, but to feed our inward man by the word of God: through hearing the gospel preached, through reading the scriptures concerning what we have heard and by asking God to grow us.

Someone might say, "But we trust the God who is sovereign!" Yes, but naturally speaking, my sovereign God is the only one who can make the food I eat nourish my body. But when I am truly hungry, the sovereignty of God does not stop me from sitting down to eat. I have a responsibility to eat and necessity to eat. So it is with the word of God.

Brethren, there is no doubt, we worship the triune God who rules all heaven and earth absolutely. God our Father chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world and none shall pluck them from his hand. Christ redeemed his people by his precious blood, we are raised in him to God's right hand—of all that the Father has given to Christ, he shall lose nothing, but shall raise it up again at the last day. The Spirit of God must invincibly, irresistibly regenerate God's people and give us faith, he shall preserve us, he shall turn us from our flesh to Christ and he shall grow us in grace as he will.

But there is such a thing as our carnal flesh quenching our new spirit within. Paul said, "Quench not the spirit." (1 Thess 4: 19) For instance, as believers, we hear the word preached. The Holy Spirit strengthens our inner man in Christ by the Word! But if we leave here and lay aside this word and we spend our time feeding our old carnal spirit rather than continuing to feed the new spirit by feeding upon what we have heard in the word of God then which spirit will be quenched and which will be stirred up?

We must feed the new spirit with the word of God. Paul told Timothy—"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee..." (2 Tim 1: 6) So this is number one, of utmost importance! Rather than feeding upon carnal meat, lay aside the old man and "As newborn babies, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby."

BABIES IN MALICE

Secondly, it is good to be babies in regard to the malice of our carnal flesh—**1 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?**

Christ had sent the gospel to the Corinthians: the gospel of God's free grace, the gospel of free justification, through the free-gift of faith, in the precious blood of Christ. They had preachers who Christ sent freely. They had brethren which God gave freely. In everything they were enriched by the grace of God freely given them in Christ. And they had God's promise to confirm them to the end freely by his grace. (1 Cor 1: 4-9)

Yet, despite all this they envied one another—even envying their brethren because of the gifts that God gave their brethren freely by his grace. They had strife with one another—strife in the midst of the church that God freely chose, freely redeemed, freely regenerated, freely gifted and freely preserved by his free grace. They were divided into cliques—they exalted themselves over other cliques when it was God who freely took them all off the same dung heap, who separated them all from this world by his grace, and who united them all together into Christ's body by his grace.

Do you see, brethren, how utterly foolish it is when believers, who are one in Christ by God's free grace, allow our carnal flesh to cause us to envy and strive and divide with our brethren! It came from their carnal flesh, the same as it comes from ours.

So Christ teaches us that when it comes to our carnal flesh—contentions, malice, envy, strife, division—it is good to be babies. Christ's own apostles were divided the same way. They were arguing over who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, while they had nothing but what they received freely from God. So Christ took a little baby, an infant, set him in their midst and said,

Matthew 18: 2: And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3: And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4: Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5: And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6: But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Brethren, whose little child are you? Whose little helpless infant child are you? You are the little child of our sovereign heavenly Father!

So when our flesh would envy our brethren, remember God is your Father. God can exalt who he will and abase who he will. So as a little child, receive whatever providence comes from your Father's hand and rejoice with your brethren. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." (1 Pet 5: 6)

When our flesh would strive with our brethren, remember God is your Father. Our Father rules everything all the time. Is there something right now causing you to have strife in your heart with one of your brothers or sisters? Even this is coming to pass under your Father's sovereign hand! Maybe your sister is just having a bad day! Maybe your brother is doing what he thinks is best for the whole congregation. Maybe your Father is giving you an opportunity to give your brother much needed encouragement! But if we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God our Father, we will find that our Father will teach his child, correct his child, and teach you in the process.

When our flesh would divide us from our brethren, remember God is our Father—God gave his only begotten Son to make us one with him and with our brethren. Christ said, "whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that*

he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Am I sure I want to talk about one for whom Christ died? Am I sure I want to divide brethren for whom Christ was made a curse?

Oh no. When it comes to the malice of our carnal flesh, let us be converted from our flesh and in our new spirit become as a little child. It is good to be God’s baby! Let us humble ourselves therefore under the hand of our mighty Father. As God’s helpless, dependent, adoring toddler let us receive whatever God our Father is doing and know it is for our good, for our brethren’s good and for God’s glory! The Holy Spirit puts this spirit in God’s little child, teaching us,

Colossians 3: 12: Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13: Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. 14: And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15: And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another [not in our personal fleshly words, which stirs up envy, strife and division] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17: And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” (Col 3:12-17)

So when it comes to hungering for the word of God it is good for believers to be as newborn babies, desiring the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. And when it comes to our carnal flesh, Christ says it is good for believers to be as little baby children in malice.

AS MEN IN UNDERSTANDING

But lastly, when it comes to spiritual understanding, be men—**1 Corinthians 14: 20: Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.**

Oh, may God give us grace to heed this word. “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” It is not time to babies when it comes to spiritual discernment. This is the time to be men.

Now, it is only by God’s grace, by God’s Spirit, by God giving us his word like he is doing here tonight, that God grows us in understanding. The Hebrews were having the same problems as the Corinthians. In Hebrews 5, he declares how God mature us in understanding:

Hebrews 5: 11: Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. 12: For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. 13: For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14: But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

God exercises our spiritual senses. The Holy Spirit makes us hear and see Christ in the gospel. He makes us smell the sweet odor of Christ’s one offering for his people. We are made to taste that the Lord is gracious in all that he has, is and shall do for us. We feel and handle the word of Life in our salvation and in all our trials and shortcomings. Over and over we learn that Christ is always faithful and true.

So this “word of righteousness”, this “discerning between good and evil” is discerning between what glorifies Christ and what does not glorify Christ. As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, we discern between law and Gospel, between the doctrines of men and the doctrine of Christ. As trials arise, we

discern between when to speak and when to remain silent; we discern between when we are walking in our flesh and when we are walking according to God's word; we discern between when we are looking to self or looking to Christ. The more we have our spiritual senses exercised upon Christ the more we become skillful in discerning between when we ought to be babies and when we ought to be men. All of this by discerning what glorifies Christ and what does not.

But this spiritual maturity in understanding does not come by feeding on our carnal flesh, nor by being strong in the malicious spirit of our flesh. The flesh profits nothing.

Wherefore lay it and all its hindrances aside. And as newborn babies, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby. Feed on the word everyday like we do our daily bread.

And as little dependent babies, receive the kingdom of God, being children in malice, being children depending upon the mighty hand of God our Father. Whatever God our Father is doing in his kingdom is right so receive it as such.

Do this so that in understanding, our God might make us to be men, spiritually mature! Ask God to take this word and feed us and to exercise our spiritual senses thereby. Ask God to grow us up into Christ in all things, in his grace and in knowledge of him. Oh, to know Christ more! Oh, to glorify Christ in all we say and do! Christ is our Meat! Christ is the Kingdom of heaven we desire to receive! Christ is the Mark toward whom we press!

Amen!