

# 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3:1-7

“God Gives The Increase”

The bible breaks the people of this world down into 3 basic categories. 2 of which were drawn to our attention in our time together last week.

As we were coming to a conclusion we were speaking on the subject of the *spiritual man*. Paul begins to speak of him in Vs 15-16 of Ch 2 as he references “he who is spiritual.” The spiritual man is the man who’s come to recognize his absolute desperate and despondent disposition *before* the Lord, who has opened his heart *to* the Lord, repented of his sin and has been saved *by* the Lord. He walks *with* the Lord, receives direction and correction *from* the Lord, and seeks to lead his life in sensitivity *to* the Lord. Remember Jesus said, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*” John 10:27 and So the spiritual man takes on the *characteristics* of the Lord and begins to exude the *qualities* found *in* the Lord. **His/her life is earmarked by such things as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. and It’s not that there’s never a failure on the part of the spiritual man, or that these qualities are exemplified with out exception. But as a general rule there is an others oriented, self-sacrificing spirit about them. They seek to walk in line *with*, being as it were ruled over *by* the Spirit of God via the principles of the Word of God for their life.**

Now just prior to that Paul placed before us the *natural man*. The natural man is the unregenerate man, he’s never *received* Christ, he doesn’t *know* the Lord, or walk *with* the Lord, he’s never opened his heart *to* the Lord. He’s just cruising through life; he’s lost, having no hope being with out God in the world. **This is the “natural” state of every human being on the planet; it’s how we’re born into this world. Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh, the problem is that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because sin is intrinsic, or inherent with in human nature having been passed on through the fall of Adam.**

and The bible is clear that corruption can’t inherit incorruption, so we’re faced with a dilemma. Because we’re born corrupted by the sin that is present with in us from the moment of conception, we’re born corrupt, it’s the natural state of mankind even from birth (and if you can receive it) from before birth even while in the womb. **So there has to be a transformation somehow that takes us from “natural man” to “spiritual man,” from being positionally corrupt to being positionally incorrupt, that is from unsaved, to saved. and That transition takes place through the “Born again” process as by the Spirit of God. We’re born of the flesh when we come into this world, but the bible says that we need to be born *again* of the Spirit. and It’s a real simple transition, it happens like this. You hear the gospel, that Jesus died for your sins according the scriptures, was buried and 3 days later rose from the dead according the scriptures. You believe the message, you trust the Lord for the work that He’s done on your behalf, you open your heart to Christ (repent of your sin) and the Holy Spirit enters into you and you are “Born again” as by the Spirit of God. and Just like that you go from being dead in sin to alive in Christ; you’ve been given new life. “...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Cor 5:17**

So there’s the spiritual man, and there’s the natural man. and We might be tempted to think that was it, I mean what else is there? You’re either saved or you’re unsaved.

That's true, but the bible makes for a 3<sup>rd</sup> category; the carnal man. The carnal man by definition belongs to the same family as the spiritual man in that he's saved, he loves Jesus, and has given his heart *to* Jesus.

But the sad and tragic reality that earmarks this man's life is that he still thinks, and in many ways prioritizes his life like the natural man, he's driven and dominated by the desires and the mindset of the flesh.

The question that obviously confronts us with in the context is which category do you belong to? If you're the spiritual man, praise the Lord, continue to follow God with all of your heart. If you're the natural man I pray that before our time is finished here today that you'll surrender your heart to Christ, being as it were born again into a life led in the Spirit, that you might come to enjoy the love, grace, and forgiveness of God. and If you're the carnal man may the Holy Spirit quicken you today, that you might repent of a life led in compromise, renew your 1<sup>st</sup> love relationship with Jesus and find yourself sold out, on fire for Him once again.

This is the category that the Corinthian believers found themselves in, Paul couldn't perceive them as spiritual, that much was obvious, that left only one option, they were carnal Christians, notice.

### Vs1

So he identifies them as being in the family, Vs 1 tells us that they were "brethren" and that they were "in Christ." The problem is that he couldn't address them as *spiritual*; that is, as if they were filled *with* and being governed *by* the Spirit. But rather he had to address them as *carnal*; that is, as if they were wholly given over *to* and rooted *in* the flesh. That's what that word, "Carnal" means, it means "fleshly" if you're "carnivorous" it means you're a meat eater, you eat flesh. So a believer who is carnal is one who is driven by the desires and the mindset of the flesh. and Though they'd been walking with the Lord for a while (Paul was there over a year and a half), and obviously it's been a while longer even now, he says it's like they're babes in Christ. That is they refuse to grow up. The carnal man digs his heels in (as it were) and refuses to simply "grow up" in Christ.

In other words you might expect a new believer to display worldly tendencies. Someone who's been recently born again, but hasn't really walked with God, isn't really familiar with the Word of God, you're going to expect some "overlap" if you will from time spent in the world. But as time goes by it's only right to expect signs of growth and maturity. I've got 3 kids, 2yrs old, 6 yrs old, and 15. Now all 3 are at different places physically, mentally, emotionally, I don't expect my 2 year old to function on the level of my 15 yr old. My 2 yr old is still learning to navigate through the English language. He gets to running so fast he can't keep his legs under him and 1/2 time he's not even paying attention to where he's going, runs into things, trips all the time. His reasoning and rationale is just limited, and right now it's kinda cute. He throws a temper tantrum and his little face scrunches up, and its real common for him to not really worry about bladder control.

But as time goes by those things should begin to resolve in such a way as to be less and less until eventually walking, running, throwing fits, and bladder control are pretty much mastered. and He'll gain victory over some areas more rapidly than others and as he's growing he may lapse in one area or another from time and again.

But 5 yrs from now, if he's still exercising no bladder control, not because he can't but because he doesn't like the inconvenience of finding a restroom, then we're going to have a problem. Because it's right for us to expect signs of growth and maturity as time goes by.

So to as it pertains to the things of the Spirit in a person's life, a baby believer might get ahead of themselves, throw a temper tantrum, make a mess now and again, allow the flesh to dictate their direction. But as time goes by there should be signs of growth and maturity. Paul wasn't seeing that in the Corinthians, they were in essence being big babies, notice.

**Vs2**

"I couldn't feed you with solid food then, and these years later I still can't, you still need milk." Now the bible refers to God's Word in a # of different ways, it's likened to milk, it's likened to bread, it's likened to meat, even honey. and The essence that's being communicated in each of those illustrations is that the Word of God is nourishment to our inner man, our spirit feeds on God's Word like our physical body feeds on physical foods. and Even as you need physical food to grow, be nourished, and strengthened physically, so to you need God's Word in order to grow, be nourished and strengthened spiritually. So if you're not doing so well spiritually, one of the 1<sup>st</sup> places you need to take a serious look into and evaluate honestly is, "How much time am I really giving to bringing nourishment to my inner man via time spent in the Word of God?" and It may well be that you'll discover that you're really not devoting time to the diet of God's Word, and if not than it only stands to reason that you're going to grow spiritually weak and anemic.

and The difference between milk and meat isn't a doctrinal thing, but rather an ability to digest the doctrine that's being delivered to me. In other words, there's not more than one gospel, one for the babe, the other for the mature, one for the simple, the other for the super spiritual. The same gospel that's taught in seminary can be shared in Sunday school. A baby starts out on milk, or formula, then it advances eventually to jarred food, you open the jar and it's supposed to be green beans, but it looks predigested. It's just real simple to take in, but it's able to nourish just the same, it's just that the body isn't ready to take on bite size pieces yet. But as the body grows, teeth start coming in, now I want the actual green beans, solid food. So I don't have to have the food all ran through the strainer so that I'm spoon fed anymore, just throw that steak on my plate and let me at it. My body is able to digest a meal that's a bit more complex. and My appetite increases for solid food. But what Paul is saying here is that they're still needing spoon fed the basics, things that are really broken down and simple when they should be moving on into things a little more palatable to the mature. Not just resting on their salvation, but finding out what's involved in their salvation, what are it's implications and applications to me personally? Considering and growing in practical sanctification, they should've grown beyond the formula, but they've yet to develop an appetite for the solid food Paul was trying to feed them.

You see it wasn't that Paul wasn't willing to supply it, it's that they were unable to receive it. You know there's another reason why a child will lose his/her appetite for a solid nourishing meal and that's when they've filled themselves up with junk-food.

So to with Christians, there are times when a person will come into an atmosphere like this where we just go through the Word of God, feed on it, and glean nourishment from it and they go, “Man, this is what I’ve been missing, I’ve been running on ‘E’ for so long having just taken in so much junk, people feeding me cotton candy, sweet to the taste but no substance to it, it just doesn’t last.” and They’re excited to take part in a nourishing meal. But then other’s come in and they don’t like the taste of what’s going on here at all, they’re not able to receive it. Because their spiritual taste buds have been so conditioned for junk that that’s really all they have a taste for. and It’s not that this is the only place a person can be fed, but the point is that some people won’t receive from you unless you’re filling them full of the kind of junk that seeks to convince them that God wants them to be rich, never afflicted, always healthy, or they want to be entertained through worldly type wisdom, rationale or eloquence. They don’t want to be convicted, confronted, challenged, or changed, so they won’t receive the simple instruction of the Word of God.

So one evidence of the carnal Christian is found in what his/her diet consists of, the type of food they take in *spiritually*. Another evidence is found in how they get along and interact with their brothers and sisters in Christ, that is the local assembly, *practically*. Look at Vs 3 Vs3-4

Or to understand what he’s saying another way; a sure sign of immaturity and carnality is the inability to get along with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Again I think of my 2 yr old, he gets pretty stirred up when things don’t go his way, signs of envy leading to strife surface with out much of anything provoking him. It’s a sign of immaturity, and when you’ve got someone who refuses to reconcile, but would rather create strife and division in the congregation, having a temper tantrum (if you will), being contentious and all, they’re being carnal, there’s just no way around it. It doesn’t mean we have to see eye to eye on everything, but when you’re willing to pull the rip cord and divide over an absolutely non-essential issue it’s a problem. and What was going on here is that they were willing to take sides and divide the body over who they thought the best teacher/preacher was and who they were to be identified with as a body. Paul is saying that’s ridiculous, it’s not about Paul, it’s not about Apollos, it’s about the person of Jesus Christ

and It’s not always a person that people divide over, sometimes it’s a program, which is even *more* ridiculous. Perhaps they don’t agree with a certain program, or they’re offended that a particular program isn’t going to carry on, and they were all about that program. Or they can’t see a reason for the program or whatever. So they get all uptight and offended, the situation becomes contentious and divisive, it’s full of strife and struggle. But the bottom line is that our ultimate aim and objective isn’t a program either, it’s the person of Jesus Christ But people get all uptight about peripheral issues. Now if something is unbiblical that’s altogether different, but when it comes to a matter of personal opinion, that’s all it amounts to. There’s no reason to be all divisive, contentious and full of strife with regard to secondary matters and peripheral issues.

and Really there’s *never* a justification for envy, strife and divisions with in the body, those are earmarks of carnality, immaturity, stunted growth spiritually. As a matter of fact its symptomatic of being infiltrated demonically, signs that the enemy is at work in your midst.

Listen to what James said, *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* James 3:13-18 The fruit of righteousness is not sown by those who break peace, but by those who make peace, through purity, not bitterness, by being peaceable, not contentious, gentle and willing to yield as opposed to harsh and staunch in your position, full of mercy, not unforgiveness and hard heartedness.

Believe me the confines of carnality aren't limited to envy, strife, and divisions in a believer's life, these are just a few of the problems that were most prevalent among the believers in Corinth. But carnality could be expressed in virtually any area where we bow to the whims and wishes of the flesh in a manner that's spiritually unhealthy for us. Be it in volleying for power, platform, or position, it could be made evident through lust or uncleanness, surfing around on the internet in places you ought not be, covetousness, and on and on it could go. For the Corinthians it was manifesting itself in their refusal to get along and willingness to divide over menial, non-relevant issues.

and I like what a commentator by the name of William Barclay said on this point. He said, *“This is extremely significant because it means that you can tell what a man's relations with God are by looking at his relations with his fellow men. If he is at variance with his fellow men, if he is a quarrelsome, argumentative, trouble-making creature, he may be a diligent church attender, he may even be a church office-bearer, but he is not a man of God.”* and W/in the context he wasn't saying that he wasn't saved necessarily, but that he wasn't the spiritual man, ruled over and governed by the Holy Spirit. But rather given over to the dictates and desires of the flesh, a carnal man, a fleshly man. But what a sobering point to ponder, that our attitude towards one another, and our ability to get along with one another is a dead give away as to where we're at with the Lord. and The point that's being made there is that if you love God, you're going to love God's people. John said, *“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”* 1 John 4:20-21 and The fact is that when I'm unwilling to yield on my end when it comes to secondary matters and peripheral non-essential issues, when I'm not willing to as much as depends upon me, live peaceably with all men, than I'm being carnal and behaving as a mere man.

What does that mean, *“Behaving like mere men?”* It means to be behaving like we might expect the non-regenerate unsaved man to behave, just all about self. Willing to do whatever, to whomever stands in their way in order to promote their own agenda. But in Christ you've been called to a higher standard, you've been called to a life of holiness, to a life of selflessness, to a life of self denial, self sacrifice, that will promote unity, health, and healing in the body of Christ.

Paul told the Ephesians, “...*put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*” Eph 4:22-24 You see there was time when we just kinda did what we needed to do in order to get where we needed to be and if someone got their feathers ruffled along the way, than so be it, to bad so sad for them. But in Christ that’s not who we are anymore. We’re to place the needs of others before our own, and that sounds real spiritual, but it’s tough, it takes the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. We have to be willing to be submissive and subservient to His leading, to the authority of God’s Word over our lives. But the whole idea here is that we should be seeing the big picture, that it’s not worth doing damage to the body of Christ if that’s what it takes to get our own way. Because in reality in the full scope of things we become so self absorbed that we’re willing to do grave damage over miniscule matters. Check it out.

### Vs 5-7

Now I’m not going to spend a lot of time here because this is sort where I want to pick up next week. But the general gist of what he’s communicating here is, “C’mon you guys let’s look at this thing from the proper perspective. Paul and Apollos aren’t the ones on whom you believed, but through whom you believed.” In other words, “We’re just the mailmen, we’re just carrying the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but we’re not where the focus is to be placed.” He says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but it’s God who gave the increase.” Which is to say that the work isn’t mine, nor is it yours, it’s the Lord’s; he says in Vs 7 that the one who plants is really nothing, and the one who waters is really nothing, the one who’s to be exalted is God who gives the miracle of life, the increase.

It’s like taking my hands and holding them out before you with nothing in either one of them and everyone here holding a debate as to which hand is holding the greater nothing. It’s an irrelevant waste of time that’ll only make for strife, disputes and division.

and Yet that’s exactly what happens when we focus on the instrument rather than the one who wields it. It’s like we’ve spoken before when it comes to having had a life saving surgery, say a heart transplant. You don’t go back to the instrument tray once your life has been saved and begin to adorn and magnify the scalpel. “Thank you Mr. Scalpel for being so sharp, and you’re so shiny, you did such precision work, you were clean and germ free, I owe you my life, I want to take you home and place you on my mantel. and Mr. Clamps, I want to praise you for not letting me bleed out, I wouldn’t have made it with out you.” We don’t do that. Why? Because we realize that those instruments in reality did nothing for us, if it were for the fact that the hands of a skilled surgeon picked them up and began to utilize them to make a life saving impact on our lives they’d have done nothing for us. and So we realize that the instruments are really only as valuable, and able to perform as the hands that wield them. Therefore it’s not the instruments that we give thanks to, or that we exalt, but it’s the one who’s using those instruments that we recognize.

So to (Paul is saying) when it comes to the work of God in and among us, or on behalf of us, I may be an instrument through whom God administers a life saving surgery on the soul of man.

Or you may be the instrument through which God administers the chemo-therapy of the His Word through which He destroys the deadly characteristics of carnality in a person's life as they're finally able to see a certain situation for what it is and they're humbled before the Lord and led by His goodness to repentance. **and There are times when people want to thank you, and show gratitude to you. and It's not that that's wrong in and of itself, it's encouraging and often times God uses it in times of need to undergird you and strengthen you when times are tough personally. But understand that you're just a vessel, I'm just a vessel, we plant, we water, we cultivate, we pull weeds, but the fact is that it's God that brings the increase to your life.** He's the One to whom we offer thanks, and praise, adoration and exaltation, because He's the One who does the work. Be it in your life or my life personally, or in our midst collectively, practically, or spiritually; God gives the increase, so may we glorify and magnify Him, to *God* be the glory great things *He* has done.

#### Prayer Points:

God help us to maintain the proper perspective, that all the honor, all the praise and all the glory might go to You. You're the One at work in our lives personally, in this place as we gather corporately. Help us Lord to walk in the Spirit, to be filled *with* and governed *by* Your Spirit. Help us to crucify the flesh and carnal tendencies and may You create a deep spirit of unity, one heart and one mind among us, the mind of Christ. May Your priorities be our priorities, and may the power of the Holy Spirit be at rest upon our lives for Your glory, and Your names sake.

**Today if you're here and you've never given your heart to Christ, you've not been "born again" as by the Spirit of God. I want to open that door of opportunity to you right now. God** loves you, and has given His only begotten Son for you, He was crucified for our sin, was buried, and rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and extends the invitation to forgiveness and everlasting life to all who will believe in Him and trust *on* Him and His work on their behalf. So if today you're willing to trust in the Lord, give your heart *to* the Lord, then let me encourage you to do that now.