

The Carnal Nature of the Corinthians | 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

- Verse 1 –
 - In previous verses (2:13-16) Paul compared the *psychikos* to the *pneumikos* thinker. That is, the one who draws conclusions from *psychological* forces (experiences, memories, pain, victory, etc.) and those who draw conclusions from *spiritual* forces (God's Spirit and God's Word).
 - Here, Paul even lowers the level of the Corinthians as he says he had to speak to them as **carnal**, that is, fleshly. This level is even one level below the *psyche* level, which analyzes thoughts, feelings, experiences and comes to conclusions, while the carnal level only responds to current physical experience.
 - Paul uses the term **babes** to adequately communicate the carnal nature, as a baby only responds to current stimuli, not analyzing past experience. The Corinthians are **babes in Christ**, and may be very mature in other arenas of life. This solves the question of whether one can be a *carnal Christian*, since that is precisely what the Corinthian believers were. The debate about carnal Christianity is strong among evangelicals.
 - Typically the reformed/Calvinist camp rejects carnal Christianity while the grace camp accepts it as a reality.
 - Example: "Simply put, there is no such thing as a "carnal Christian."
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/no-such-thing/>
 - The cry that some teaching is *too deep* is the cry of **babes in Christ**. While a topic may be more advanced than a particular believer's level of knowledge, the advanced level of learning calls the healthy to *dig deeper* in order to comprehend.
- Verses 2-3 –
 - Here Paul gives two evidences of the carnal nature of the faith of the Corinthians. First, they had to be fed with **milk, and not with meat**. Second, the **envying, and strive, and divisions** were indications of their carnal nature.
 - As believers mature, two things happen. First, they desire more solid Bible study. Paradoxically, it is more solid Bible study that will mature a believer. A pastor is responsible for making sure he feeds the flock the food that will enable them to mature. As those believers grow in the Word, they will grow in unity because they have the same worldview.
- Verse 4 –
 - To make factions of one man over another, when both hold the same theology and purpose, is **carnal**.
 - This does not, in my opinion, prohibit following a teacher because his doctrine aligns with Scripture. Both Paul and Apollos taught the same doctrine, just doing different parts of the ministry (see v. 6).

Laborers Together | 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

- Verse 5 - Better rendered in the YLT, *and to each as the Lord gave*. There is nothing mystical about this, simply that some increase was given under Paul, some under Apollos, but all was a gift of God (v. 6).
- Verse 6 - In the end, planting and watering is all that a minister of the Word can do. When we attempt to bring **the increase** we begin to use manipulation rather than sound principles of discipleship.
- Verse 7 - This should serve as a reminder of humility for even the greatest pastor, teacher, or missionary because **neither is he...anything**.
- Verse 8 –
 - **Now he that planteth...are one** - Just as in a marriage two become one, in a ministry two (or more) can be working for the same purpose, doing different jobs.

- ...and every man –
 - The subject of Christian rewards is difficult, and answers will not fully be known until the day of rewards. However, there is certainly a **reward according to his own labour** for every believer.
 - Note that, while it is possible that a Christians rewards are given in a future day of rewards, it is not required by this verse. A believer should work in such a way that there is joy in seeing something that will bear fruit, even if only in this temporary realm.
- Verse 9 –
 - I would translate, **labourers together of God** rather than *with God*. That is, *we are fellow workers of God...together you and I are serving as God's workmen*.
 - Because Paul changes from **we** to **ye** he must be saying, "Paul and Apollos are **laborers together**...and ye Corinthians are **God's husbandry**." A **husbandry** is a field that is worked by a certain farmer.

Building on the Foundation | 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

- Verse 10 –
 - **Masterbuilder** - The word ἀρχιτέκτων [archetekton] is the "beginning technician."
 - Paul is always bold to declare that his work is not built upon the work of another, but is uniquely different.
 - How does this compare to Ephesians 2:20-21, in which Paul says that the foundation is **the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone**? Is Jesus the foundation or the cornerstone? Is Paul's ministry unique or built on the foundation of the **apostles and prophets**? Clearly (on the basis of comparison of facts), Paul is using an illustration here that is different from the illustration he uses in Ephesians 2.
- Verse 11 –
 - This is Paul's claim that the foundation of the Corinthian ministry, which he himself laid, is **Jesus Christ**.
 - Those who claim that people who *rightly divide* give too much focus to Paul and not enough to Jesus should be reminded that Paul claims that Jesus is the foundation to all his work.
- Verse 13 –
 - As in v. 8, it is possible that **the day** is a day of the distribution of rewards. However, it is equally possible that Paul simply means, "your works will bear fruit in time, or show to be futile in time.
 - **by fire** - On a number of occasions in the New Testament, "fire" is used in a metaphorical sense, including 1 Peter 1:7. It is a picture of trial. Fire is not necessarily to be immediately associated with hell. This is important to the understanding of fire in v. 15.
- Verse 14 – Our goal should be a work that abides, whether the reward is on this earth or heavenly.
- Verse 15 –
 - Because the foundation is Jesus Christ (v. 11), the salvation must be secure.
 - Even in his salvation, however, no man is able to bypass trial. The "trial by fire" will come to every man, and the man who's work abides through this trial **shall receive a reward** (v. 14), and if his work doesn't abide then **he shall suffer loss**. No word is given as to the type of judgment nor the type of loss. The point of the words **yet so as by fire** is simply to remind the Corinthians that their salvation did not equate to a life of ease, free from trial.