

Marks of Spiritual Infancy

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, July 21, 2013

Please take your Bibles and turn to 1 Corinthians 3. We continue our series regarding the dangers of being banished to an island of spiritual infancy and this morning I would like to address the issue of marks of spiritual infancy.

Before we look at the text, may I draw your attention to a few considerations. Many Christians are fascinated with the explosive growth, the numerical growth of churches that have embraced the principles of evangelical pragmatism. As you may recall, pragmatism is a philosophy that basically believes that results determine what is true, what is valuable, what is useful. So, whatever works, should be valued. In light of that, churches have discovered, based on that philosophy, that whatever draws a large audience, whatever brings in more money so that you can build larger campuses, have more programs, do more outreach and so forth, is to be considered evidence of God's blessing. Rather than allowing Scripture to determine the nature of the church, they turn to secular marketing techniques that help them understand how that they can attract what they would call consumers to a church.

We have discussed the dangers of these things on numerous occasions so I'll not necessarily cover that ground again this morning, but rather what I wish to investigate is a very fascinating phenomenon and that is, why do some genuine Christians love these kinds of churches and others find them reprehensible? There are many of them, even in our middle Tennessee area. One has gone from 0 to over 5,000 people in just three years; others are much larger than that. They have satellite campuses where the preachers preach on flat screen monitors and people come from all over to hear this, to be a part of it. What's the attraction for some and the revulsion for others?

I spent a great deal of time studying this. My own personal observation and experience with over a dozen of these kinds of churches reveal the following types of things. First of all, most of them have sound doctrinal statements, although they're very short, they have kind of the bare minimum. They have very well organized programs, very seldom will their screens not show the words to the music like ours did today. They are very professional in terms of their advertising, their communications, their marketing. They are big on fellowship groups. They have lots of community outreach and mission trips. And, of course, one common denominator is that all of them have a very high energy, kind of a rock concert atmosphere, many people waving their arms and their hands, lots of times they're jumping around. There's also a huge emphasis on attire and, of course, it is very casual and sometimes shockingly immoral. The audience is made up, by and large, as I look around at these places, of teens and young adults. You do not see the multi-generation demographics of a normal church, certainly not what you would see in a New Testament church in the early days of the church. The worship centers are typically very dark, most of them have no windows so that they can have lights; they have multi-colored lights that are flashing somewhat of a light show that's a part of their service. And most of them have this, I don't know what you'd call it, but it looks like smoke or fog that will come up from time to time to kind of add to the drama of what is going on.

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Most of them have at least two massive screens that will allow the audience to see what's going on up front when you're sitting way back in the cheap seats as we would call them.

And as you listen to the sermons, they are short, they are funny, they are typically very conversational. The pastor will interact with the people but from my humble perspective, they are as shallow as a mud puddle. Lots of humor, lots of anecdotes, many times pop culture video illustrations. Often they will have short skits but I would find it, along with many of you that have been to these places, it's just painfully boring. You have to kind of force yourself to endure it and yet, thousands of people love it. There is certainly nothing transcending about it; nothing really Christ exalting. It's a very man-centered type of service, not a God-centered service and a true exposition of the Word of God, frankly, would seem out of place. It would be like pausing for prayer in the middle of the David Letterman show.

Scripture is only used to illustrate what the preacher wants to say. There is really no consideration for the context of the Word, for the principles of hermeneutics, for the author's intent and sadly, almost without fail, the text that they do use is butchered and nobody understands it, nobody realizes that. The pastors are typically very good communicators, they are engaging, they seem to be nice, enthusiastic, well-meaning but it's obvious that they do not know the Word of God or if they do, they're certainly not preaching it. I seriously doubt if most of them would be allowed to teach a Sunday School class in this church, yet thousands upon thousands flock to hear them.

I notice also that they talk a lot about Jesus but very seldom will they use the term Christ or Lord. Certainly, the focus is primarily on God's love, not his authority as Lord. You will not hear messages that call people to deny themselves and follow Christ, to hate your sin, to hate the world that you love, be willing to give up everything to become a slave for the Lord Jesus Christ. And, of course, the goal of their service is primarily to make the unsaved feel comfortable in their sin and hopefully add Jesus and church attendance to their resume.

One of the things that I find is really fascinating is when you go to the internet and you go to the "get to know the staff" section of the members. They have questions like these and I just wrote a few of them down: what was your most embarrassing moment? What is your greatest indulgence? What's your favorite junk food? What's your favorite music or band? What's your top five favorite movies? What's your favorite restaurant? What's your favorite kind of coffee? Sports team? Hobby? And so on, as if these things are important.

Can you imagine asking your surgeon these kinds of questions before he performs surgery on you? Yet, how much more important to know those who are the physicians of the soul, who have been charged by God to give watch care over your soul? And in most cases, their answers are actually and unwittingly answers that would flaunt their juvenile and misplaced priorities yet people love it. It's almost as if they're saying, "Look how

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worldly I am. And you can come and love Christ and the culture that despises him.” It’s not an either/or situation.

Now, I know that most of the people that will attend these churches are false professors, I understand that, they’re tares amongst the wheat but why would genuine believers want to be a part of this kind of so-called church which, frankly, bears no resemblance to a New Testament church? I’ve talked with folks who have been a part of these churches, I’ve gotten to know some of the pastors, some that have come out of that, a lot of leaders that have come out of that and they will admit that numerical growth and activity was really the litmus test for God’s blessing; they will admit that they do not discipline sin and sin is rampant amongst them; they will admit that there’s lots of bickering and jealousy and strife and divisiveness along with immorality, addictions, worldliness and so forth. They will also admit that there is no shepherding. The pastors and elders are just not involved in the lives of the people. The flock knows very little about the personal lives of the pastors, the pastors’ families. Certainly, you could never get to know them if you’re going someplace and all you see is a guy on a flat screen tv.

It’s all about the big Sunday event, they tell me. That’s the big push; that’s the big priority; that’s the big draw. And basically they will admit that the main thing is kind of a rock-n-roll event on a Sunday morning and then it’s more of a religious social club and rescue mission the rest of the week. One pastor that built his church on these principles of pragmatism admitted tearfully, “I’ve got a church full of either unsaved people or spiritual infants and I don’t know what to do.” By the way, as a footnote, these same kinds of dynamics can be seen in small churches, traditional churches, mainstream churches.

But my question is, Why do many genuine believers feel comfortable in these kinds of churches? The Apostle Paul gives the answer because there were similar issues at the church in Corinth. He says in 1 Corinthians 3:1 that they are “men of flesh, they are babes in Christ.” They want to be entertained, not edified. They want to be cuddled, not confronted.

And this morning, I would like to address this issue by looking at the marks of spiritual infancy and by contrast, the marks of spiritual maturity that God reveals to us in his Word. Follow along as I read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 that we will use for our text here this morning. He says,

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?”

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As we look at the marks of spiritual infancy, I would like to draw out of this text three things: first of all we're going to look at his character, what are the attitudes of this kind of person's heart; secondly, we are going to look at his appetite, what are the things he craves, what are the things he rejects; and then finally we're going to look at his need, what are the things God wants him to crave and what needs to be done to help him develop an appetite for those things?

We must understand the context from which Paul is writing. The city of Corinth was located in southern Greece, in a Roman province of Achaia. It's about 45 miles west of Athens and you can see to this day there in the city, about an 1800 foot, like a little mountain and on the top of that was what was called the Acropolis which means a high city. It was the Acrocorinth, the place where there was like a fortress but also a place of worship where they worshiped in the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. It's estimated that there were about 1,000 priestesses that lived and served there as religious prostitutes and they would come down into the city in the evening, in the night, to ply their trade. In fact, Greek writers in the 4th and 5th centuries BC characterized Corinth as a city of commercialized love. In fact, the term "Corinthian girl" was synonymous with a prostitute. Even the pagans used the name "Corinthianized" to describe the worst kinds of immorality and drunken debauchery. So this is a great place to go preach the Gospel, right? And that's exactly where God sent the Apostle Paul.

The church was founded by the Apostle Paul in his second missionary journey; we read about that in Acts 18. But the church had a real problem: they struggled with breaking free from the wicked culture in which they existed. The most serious issue could be summarized in one word: worldliness. They had a hard time separating themselves from the influences of the pagan culture in which they lived. And, as you read 1 and 2 Corinthians and other passages of Scripture, you will see that they were plagued in that culture with things like we have in our culture: immorality, sensuality, even in the church they had this, carousing, drunkenness. They just couldn't seem to detach themselves from the kingdom of darkness from which they had been delivered. Rather than confronting their culture, they conformed themselves to it, accepting the values of those who are at enmity with God, those who are spiritually dead. And, of course, when this happens, Christians lose their ability to discern between good and evil, Christ is dishonored and believers are chastened and unfortunately, those believers will remain in a state of spiritual infancy.

So, they walked by the flesh rather than by the spirit and so it's no surprise that the church was plagued by all of these kinds of things. Of course, one sin leads to another, right? Evil is never content with its boundary. Like every tyrant, it will seek to conquer every region of a person's life.

In chapter 6, we read how that they were taking each other to court. In chapter 11, we read about the divisions and factions there existed within the church. Arrogant believers that were rude and selfish and kept others away from them, considered themselves more

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spiritual than others. In fact, it is summarized well in 2 Corinthians 12 beginning in verse 20. There the Apostle speaks of strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. He says, "I'm afraid that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced."

Furthermore, we know that they misunderstood and they abused some of the temporary sign gifts of that day, especially the more showy gifts like speaking in tongues. Instead of being empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak divine revelation in a language that was foreign to them and have it translated so others could be edified all in an effort to authenticate both the message and the messenger, proving that they were indeed sent from God, they began to show off by using ecstatic gibberish which was a common counterfeit even in their own culture. We see this today in many quasi-evangelical churches around the world. And because of this abuse, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:20, "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature." So, don't be driven by your emotion and your pride, displaying the fruits of the flesh rather than the Spirit and so forth.

So, with this background, we can better understand what Paul says here in verse 1, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh," sometimes translated carnal, "as to babes in Christ." So, this brings us to number one: what is the character of a spiritual infant? Well, they are men of flesh; they are controlled by the flesh not by the Spirit. In a word, they are worldly. They live for themselves. They live for the here-and-now, even though they know Christ.

His indictment must be understood in light of what he has already said. In chapter 2:6, he says, "we do speak wisdom among those who are mature." Actually, that term is referring to believers here. It could be translated perfect or complete. It was also used to describe a person who had been fully accepted or initiated into a group. And so, here it's speaking of genuine believers, those who are complete in Christ, not those who are somehow spiritually mature in their faith. So, he says, "we speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this world or of the rulers of this age who are passing away." And he went on to say in verse 14, "But a natural man," referring to an unsaved man, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised," which means they have no capacity to discern spiritual truth. The term in the original language is a judicial term and it means that they are incapable of rendering a decision because they cannot recognize the facts.

So here, in chapter 3:1, he is saying something like this: "Unfortunately, brethren, I am obliged to speak to you as if you belong to that group, to that group of unbelievers." Now, he doesn't use the term "natural" because these are brothers in Christ. Instead, he uses another term that describes the nature of the natural man and that is fleshly, they are

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carnal. You will remember, that our flesh is constantly at war with our new nature and that will continue on until we are one day glorified and fully conformed into the image of Christ. This is why we continue to long for the redemption of our body, right? Romans 8:23. And even as pigs like mud and love slop, our flesh is naturally attracted to the standards, to the values, to the ways of the world. That is our natural bent, those things that appeal to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, the boastful pride of life.

The Apostle Paul, himself, spoke of this in his life. Remember, in Romans 7 beginning in verse 15, he says, “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.” He went on to say in verse 19, “For the good that I wish, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.” Can’t we all identify with that? He went on to say in verse 22, “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind.”

So, what Paul was saying to the Corinthians believers, “Look, you’re not natural men. You’re not unsaved but like them you are fleshy.” This is the antithesis to being spiritual. Like the natural man, you seem to be unable to discern spiritual truth. You’re still thinking and acting as if you had never been born-again. He says, “As to babes in Christ.” It’s as if you’re still just a brand new Christian, just a spiritual baby which would still struggle to fight against the natural inclination to pursue their own self-interest and the desire to be self-sufficient and independent of God. That’s what babies do; that’s how they think.

Earlier, from chapter 1:18 through 2:16, he exposed the consequences of their carnality, namely, all of the divisive factions that were going on in the church. Why was this happening? Because they were worldly and they had an ongoing infatuation with human wisdom that would tell them what they wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear. That’s what babies want.

How many of you who have had a little child finds them willing to say, “Thank you, Mommy and Daddy. You know, I didn’t want to do that, but I can see that that is the best way to go. Thank you for that. I will gladly submit to that.” That’s just not their natural bent. They are self-absorbed, self-centered, undiscerning and many times baby Christians can be that way. Their flesh that still bears the curse, wants to rule over their new nature so they are spiritual immature, they’re ignorant, they’re undisciplined so they must be taught, they must be shepherded, they must learn how to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh.

And so, Paul is rebuking them here. And you must understand, he had taught them for 18 months. Can you imagine that? To have the Apostle Paul teach you for 18 months. And the great teacher, Apollos, had taught them as well. So, what’s the problem here? Why are you so unjustifiably immature? The answer is: you’re still fleshy. They ignored the truths that they had been taught. They were forgetful hearers as James 1:25 would say.

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They refused to separate themselves from the influences of the world, of their culture that were so appealing to the flesh and instead submit to the Spirit.

That's their character. But number two, we need to understand the appetite of the spiritual infant. And basically, his appetite is milk, the elementary basics. I think of the commercial that used to be on television, "Got milk?" And you would see the milk moustache. That's kind of where they were. Don't get too deep; don't get too detailed. Notice, in verse 2, he says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it." There's a distinction here between milk and solid food but what is it? Well, when Paul first came to them, he had to feed them milk. This refers to just the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ in particular. You can read more about that in Hebrews 6:1. The easy to understand, easy to digest, A B Cs of the faith. Not the solid food, not the meat of deeper and more detailed truths that, shall we say, only adults in the faith will crave and digest.

But you must understand that both milk and solid food refer to true biblical doctrine. The only difference between the two lies in the depth and the detail of treatment. There is no such thing, dear friends, as milk doctrines and meat doctrines. Sometimes you will hear that; I've heard people erroneously argue that. Like, for example, they will say, "Well, the doctrines of sovereign grace, predestination and election, those are meat doctrines that should only be served to pastors and theologians who can digest them." Poppycock. That's not at all true. Weren't we told in Acts 20:37 to "teach the whole counsel of God"?

But how we teach these things and the depth in which we teach them will vary according, really, to two things: 1. a person's level of understanding; and 2. and this is the more important thing, their commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The attitude of the heart is far more important than the intellect of the mind. So, we should never shy away from the solid food but rather introduce it incrementally. I, for example, will tell new believers that God has chosen you from the foundation of the world; that he has written your name in the Lamb's Book of Life; that he has done this according to his uninfluenced will and this is an amazing truth and you need to rejoice in it but I will leave it at that. And then, over time, as they understand that great truth and they begin to walk in it, then you begin to introduce to them the great themes of the doctrines of grace, the inscrutable mystery and the compatibility of sovereign election and man's responsibility, but first they must master the basics. And that mastery will be proven not by some test that they can take, but by the fruit of Christ's likeness that they will bear in their life.

It's one thing to serve the milk of Jesus being the Son of God, born to Mary and laid in a manger. That's true, ah, but dear friends, what a life changing thrill to eventually introduce to them the meat of understanding the hyper static union of the two natures of Christ, why Christ had to be theanthropos, why he had to be both God and man, why he had to, therefore, be born of a virgin and the implications of all of that with respect to the atonement whereby he could be our substitute and be the satisfaction of divine wrath. I

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mean, now you take it to a whole new level that thrills the soul of anyone who understands these great truths.

But, the milk and the meat pertain to the same doctrine, both are true, but the meat will not be understood and appreciated by anyone until they have mastered the A B Cs of the Gospel, until they have digested those great truths and that will never happen if they remain in a state of carnality, then they will only want milk. Friends, let's face it, there is "Jesus loves me this I know" and then there's Handel's Messiah. There's "twinkle, twinkle, little star" and then there's Chopin's Grand Polonaise Brillante in E flat major. I mean, there's a difference here. But, there's a time for these things but there should be a longing for these things that will only develop as a person truly begins to mature in their walk with Christ.

Now, we must also understand that you can be immature and still crave some of the meaty doctrines. I know people who have a robust soteriology when it comes to the doctrines of grace. They have a reformed theology yet their lives cannot be distinguished from the people in the world, the ungodly culture. So they might know the meat of one doctrine but they certainly are still on the milk when it comes to understanding, for example, the doctrine of sanctification or the doctrine of the church, of ecclesiology and so forth.

So, the problem with the Corinthians was that they should have been farther along in their spiritual development because, my friends, by now it's been five years. Five years and they've still got a milk moustache, they're still fleshly. So, he couldn't speak to these believers as spiritual men but as babes in Christ. We see this illustrated with respect even to the unbelieving Jews in Hebrews 5 beginning in verse 11. There we read, "Concerning him," referring to Jesus, "we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."

So, again, Paul says here in verse 2, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food for you were not yet able to receive it." And then he says, "Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly." You're still stuck in your immaturity; you're still caught up in the world. This is inexcusable.

Now, the Spirit of God uses this analogy because it is so easy for us to understand. I want to think it through for a moment. Think of why we give an infant milk and not solid food and I think you will readily see that parallels in the analogy. First of all, infants must be fed, at first, because they are incapable of feeding themselves. Mothers milk is a matter of life and death to them. Likewise, with a baby Christian, they need careful discipleship, they need sound preaching to help them get started in their newfound faith. But also we

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know that infants are physically incapable of swallowing solid food. They will choke if you go too deep, too fast, so-to-speak. This is the same thing with new believers. For example, a new believer must understand as even our children will understand, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man and they will then begin to understand a little bit more the difference between law and grace. And then eventually you will be able to explain to them why, for example, God ordained to allow evil to come into the world. So, you can see the progression there. But first they must understand, for example, that Jesus is coming again and then later on you get into the more meaty things of the doctrines of eschatology.

But, I might add, that the speed at which a baby Christian can handle solid food is not dependant upon his intellect. It's dependent upon his humility of heart, his willingness to humble himself before the Word of God, to submit to the Lord as he understands him even in those early stages.

But, also as we look at the infant and milk analogy, think about it, God has designed mother's milk to meet all of the physical needs at that particular stage of development. The same is true with spiritual milk. A level one introduction into the basics is fine early on, that's what they need to get started. In fact, if you think about it, an infant doesn't even have hunger for solid food. He's perfectly content with the milk. They don't know what they're missing. The same is true with the newborn believer. But we also know with infants, they have to be weaned from that milk or their growth will be stifled, they will not mature properly, they will become malnourished. A healthy baby will naturally and rather quickly begin to develop an appetite for solid food but we know that this requires a gentle introduction to the child. And we learned, early on, that you probably need to wear a mask when you do that and it's good to have a camera because those first bites of solid food produce some wonderful shots whereby you can embarrass them later on at their wedding.

But once they get mature enough, they want solid food, they can't get enough of it. Forget the milk, they start pursuing it themselves. And I might add parenthetically, this is why a mature believer is both bored as well as offended when they go into these types of services that I described earlier on.

But still, the parent must direct the child or they will eat anything they can get their hands on and not everything that is solid food is going to be good for them. There are some things you don't want them putting in their mouth. It's important to help new believers develop that kind of discernment as well. You just don't turn them loose on the internet; you don't just say, "Hey, go down to the Christian book store and get some books that you find interesting." No, you have to help them understand that there are charlatans out there that will feed you rat poison.

And as a child grows then, we know that he needs to be instructed with respect to a balanced diet otherwise all he'll want to eat is ice cream and cookies and potato chips and

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sodas and those types of things. He has to develop some discernment here and he will gradually learn that if he eats the right things, he's going to feel better and he's going to get stronger. He's going to learn, for example, that if you drink sodas and sweets and fast foods it's going to be very unhealthy and you're going to ruin your body and so forth. Well, believers, likewise as they mature, they gradually learn those things that are both delicious spiritually, those things that are nourishing and after awhile the believer will get to a point where he will crave filet mignon, he won't want anything to do with cotton candy. That's just the way it works.

Back to our text. Early on, Paul could not give them the solid food because not only were they young in their faith but because they were, again, too tied to the wickedness of their culture. They were, he said, "men of flesh" so the Holy Spirit was grieved in them and this stunted their growth. And to be sure, a newborn baby is precious and we like watching them do all of their little baby things. We get out our cameras and we laugh and we take videos of those things but if they continue to think that way and act that way, when they become adults we get very, very concerned and ultimately we put them into institutions for special care. Unfortunately, this is what was happening in the Corinthians church of that day. They were still acting like spiritual infants; they were men of flesh; they weren't committed to the Lordship of Christ; they were still hanging onto the wickedness of their pagan culture that satisfied their fleshly appetites.

Frankly, this is what is going on in many churches today. The worldliness. I want you to think about it: the seeker sensitive churches believe the lie that you must somehow become like the world in order to win it. It's kind of a summary way of thinking about it. So, they deliberately design their services and their church to be attractive to unbelievers who are slaves to their flesh and then unwittingly this encourages believers to feel comfortable walking in their flesh and remaining in that state of spiritual infancy.

So, they literally provide an environment for sin to flourish, where you can suddenly be conformed to this world which we were warned not to allow happen in Romans 12:2. And as a result, you see people never growing up in Christ and this was certainly the character of the Corinthians. So, there was strife, jealousy, anger, tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances, impurity, immorality and sensuality that they were practicing.

So, again, verse 2, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food," that was their appetite, that's all they wanted, "for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able." And we've seen that the best way to determine a mature Christian is by looking at his diet. What does he eat? The fleshly, immature, worldly Christian will have no appetite for solid food, for the deep things of God. They simply won't want it. They will choke on an exposition of the Word like you're hearing this morning because it will make them feel uncomfortable and it will expose their sin as it exposes mine, as it exposes yours.

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As Paul said in Colossians 3:1-2 that we've studied. They don't realize that they've been raised up with Christ, that they're not people that are seeking the things above where Christ is, they're not setting their mind on things above. They are setting their minds on the things of the earth and so they choke when they come to churches like ours. And we shake our heads in dismay when we go to churches like theirs.

One of the hallmarks of these kinds of churches, as you've heard me say, is just the staggering superficiality of the teaching. In many cases, in fact, in most cases, it's pretty much an evangelistic service with a watered down Gospel every time you go or some variation of the prodigal son or something on giving or some other kind of psychologized topic. But inevitably the worship is casual and giddy and flippant and shallow, kind of the cutesy, cotton-candy, make them feel good sermonette focused on man and his needs not God and his glory. And, my friends, none of this bears any resemblance to the kind of worship we see in the Bible. When you go to these kinds of places, there is nothing that produces true worship in your heart which essentially is honor and adoration directed toward God. There is nothing in these services that would evoke reverence and fear. There is nothing transcendent that would give a person a vision of the glory and the greatness of our holy God; nothing that would cause a man or a woman to tremble at the great gulf between his sin and God's holiness; nothing that would call a man to repentance and cause a person to long to have a richer communion with the lover of his soul.

And yet God spoke through his prophet Isaiah rebuking the hypocrisy of his people saying in Isaiah 66:2, "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." Beloved, this is the power of solid food. I might add: this is the power of Spirit empowered preaching that puts the glory of God on display so that we will gladly, we will joyfully submit to the Lordship of Christ. You see, we must understand that our great King does not want us to just obey him out of duty but out of desire. He doesn't want obedience based upon some servile fear of his authority or some begrudging submission to a standard of righteousness that we really don't share. That's not at all what he wants. Where there is no joy in the subject, there is no glory to the King.

But this kind of glad-hearted obedience, this calling to be separated from the world and subduing the flesh will only happen when the King's subjects behold the irresistible spectacle of his majesty and grace, a glory that one day will fill the earth. And, my friends, this will never happen to you if you prefer the world and your flesh over the Spirit. It will never happen. If you don't get yourself weaned off the milk, you will never grow, you will never even want the solid food much less digest it. This is why we are committed, for example, at Calgary Bible Church to expository teaching and preaching, solid food preaching, preaching committed to the Word of God, not the word of man. I might add that this is preaching that is rooted in a sense of desperation knowing that the eternal souls of men are at stake, knowing that it's only the power of the Word of God that can save a man and that can sanctify a man, not the word of man.

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Marks of Spiritual Infancy

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

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And I confess as a preacher of the Gospel and I can speak on behalf of all, we never feel equal to our work, we're never sufficient in ourselves. Like Paul, we come in weakness and in much fear and trembling. We know that we are God's instrument of righteousness for saving sinners and growing saints. My friends, there is nothing giddy about the preaching of his Word. I think I've got a pretty good sense of humor and sometimes maybe some of it will squeak out during a sermon but, my friends, this is no time for stand-up comedy. This is a time where we need to be focused on the glory of our great God and while there is great joy and gladness in the message of the cross, I also confess that there's a great burden in the heart of every preacher knowing that there are those within the sound of his voice who are rejecting that Gospel.

Please hear me, my friends, the church is not to be a nursery for the carnal. It is the household of God for the saints, the pillar and the support of the truth. A place where we come together to worship in Spirit and in truth and it baffles me to see so many preachers of our day that will go to such great lengths to look like and act like and talk like the subculture of our society. They feed on the most vile forms of music and entertainment. I know first hand from talking with them; I've heard the vulgar language, I've heard some of it come from a pulpit on numerous occasions. I can't understand that. I know about staff meetings where it's more of a beer fest. No wonder their churches are men of flesh.

How inconsistent with what Paul said to Titus (Titus 2), the young pastor, beginning in verse 6. He says, "Urge the young men," young men hear this now, ok? "Urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us." And he goes on and explains why. Beginning in verse 11, he says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us."

Ah, but dear friends, the immature, the carnal has no appetite for these things. As Paul says in verse 3, "for you are still fleshly." You are not pursuing the things of the Spirit but of the flesh. And then gives some proof of it, "For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" You must understand that selfish pride is at the heart of fleshly attitudes and behaviors. "I want what I want when I want it. I am the center of gravity around which everyone must orbit. If I don't get my way, I'm going to pitch a fit." If you want to see this, you can go into the nursery and you can see it firsthand. It's kind of funny in there but it is not funny when we're adults. Jealousy or envy is merely an example, one of many examples of a self-centered, demanding heart, a heart that is ruled by the flesh. Jealousy is the heart attitude that inevitably results in strife, a term that refers to verbal disputes which would

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be the outward display of selfishness. This is common in immature congregations that can't handle solid food.

So, because of worldliness they had no appetite for the deeper things of God, so they remained in a state of spiritual infancy evidenced by their jealousy and strife. Notice he says they are "walking like mere men." We won't look at it today but he goes on to illustrate how they were aligning themselves with what they foolishly perceived to be certain religious celebrities and they would bicker over their affiliation. The kind of thing the world does. They were like Peter. Remember when Jesus condemned him for being a stumbling block? In Matthew 16:23, he says, "for you," Peter, "are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." That's what they were doing.

I close this morning by looking at the need of the spiritual infant very briefly. We've seen his character and his appetite. There are a variety of things but can I give you the most important one first? Then we will leave it at that: in a word what they need is shepherding. They need to be shepherded. Even as a child needs parenting, the spiritual babe must be disciplined, must be taught, must be confronted, they must be held accountable so that they can eventually be weaned off of the milk. Didn't Jesus say in the Great Commission "teach them to observe"? Not just know, "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Paul addresses this in that great text in Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 11. He talks about how that, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." In other words, "I've given you pastor teachers, I've given you elders within the church to help you know the deep things of Christ so that you will become more like him." And he goes on to say, "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

Beloved, if you still prefer milk over solid food there is a problem in your spiritual life. You must repent and be weaned. You need to find a church with shepherds that will nurture and feed you. Find a church where the pastor is committed, for example, to the responsibilities laid out for him in Scripture. In 1 & 2 Thessalonians there we read that a pastor needs to be doing this: praying, evangelizing, equipping, defending, loving, laboring, modeling, leading, feeding, watching, warning, teaching, exhorting, encouraging, correcting, confronting, rescuing. And then as you are shepherded, you will become more responsible and disciplined in your own spiritual development.

I want to leave you with this thought: please understand that theological acumen is no measure of spiritual maturity. The true measure is Christ-likeness, manifesting the fruits

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of the Spirit in your life. And when you do this, and many of you understand this because you are in this process, you are maturing, we have many mature saints here in this church, but you are going to experience how the Word will stir your spiritual affections and you will experience a deeper appreciation for spiritual things. You can't get enough of it; you can't go deep enough. You will see more clearly the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. God will become increasingly precious and real to you and then through the eyes of faith you will see more vividly the ineffable glories of his sovereign throne. You will marvel at his attributes. You will desire him more than anything else on earth. You will hunger for him. You will long to see him face-to-face. You will find that the world will lose its grip on you and you will lose your grip on the world. You will just want to go home. Your soul will become increasingly alive and will crave an ever increasing taste of his supreme love and beauty. You will love to commune with him. And you will routinely find yourself moved to tears with conviction as well as tears of joy as you contemplate just the consummate perfections of his glory and all that he has in store for you. You will develop a greater love for God's people. You will develop a greater love for the lost. And you will have an ever increasing longing for Christ to return.

Bottom line, dear friends, spiritual maturity is marked by a movement of the affections and the will. If none of this describes you, you have either never been born-again or you are a spiritual infant. You are fleshly, you are immature, a spiritual babe that has never been weaned off of spiritual milk. And so I would challenge you this morning, dear friends: examine your heart before the Lord. Go before him in humble repentance and he will forgive, he will cleanse and he will reveal himself in such a powerful way, in ways that will on an increasing basis, cause you to experience this deep joy in your soul. You will desire him more than anything else on earth and you will long for him alone. Isn't that we all want? Absolutely.

Let's pray.

Thank you Lord, for these great truths. Thank you that by your grace, by the power of your Spirit and your Word, you have grown us. But, Lord, we confess that we have so far to go. So, we pray that you will continue that amazing work of sanctification whereby you continue to conform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that I pray with thanksgiving. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible teacher and author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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