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A1148 - November 27, 2011 - 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 The Man Of Flesh & The Fleshly

Once more I want to open by clarifying Paul's argument. There seems to be a lot of confusion on 1 Cor 2:6 and 1 Cor 2:12. In 1 Cor 2:6 the confusion is over who are the mature, the *teleios*? Is this a synonym for a believer or is this a reference to mature believers? The approach that takes it as a synonym for a believer is noted by Dan Wallace in his note in the NET Bible. He says, "In extrabiblical literature this word was applied to an initiate of a mystery religion (BDAG 995 s.v. τέλειος 3, gives numerous examples and states this was a technical term of the mystery religions). It could here refer to those who believed Paul's message, the mystery of God (v. 1), and so be translated as "those who believe God's message." If you take this approach then 2:12 is discussing the doctrine of illumination, that is, how a believer understands God's wisdom. Now, how a believer understands God's word actually is debated on this verse. One school argues that Paul is saying that all believers have received the indwelling Spirit of God and so it's by the indwelling ministry of the Spirit that believers understand. The second school argues that the Spirit who is from God in verse 12 is not the Holy Spirit but the human spirit that a believer receives at regeneration and so it's through the regenerate human spirit that we understand. But both schools agree that what Paul is talking about in verse 12 is that believers can understand the word of God but unbelievers can't.

The problem with that approach is that you have to make the mature in verse 6 refer to all believers. And that doesn't have any contextual support. Paul's argument is not how does a believer understand God's wisdom but when believers present the gospel story what should we appeal to? Should we appeal to human wisdom? Human rationalism? Paul's answer is no, we must appeal exclusively always and everywhere to God's wisdom. But where does that come from? The Scripture. That's where we find God's wisdom deposited.

But where did that come from? God revealed it to prophets and apostles through the Spirit. So Paul is arguing for the fact that he and others received divine revelation and it's this wisdom that they spoke to them, combining the old revelation contained in the OT with the new revelation coming in the NT. So that's our authority, our message is not from this world, it is from the Spirit who is from God who searches the depths of God, who knows the thoughts of God. And now, having received this revelation we are indebted to men and we speak these things to men.

So the other argument, and the biblical argument he's making in 2:6 on down is that there are mature believers, the *teleios*. And we were sent to speak advanced truths to mature believers but you Corinthians are not mature believers, you are still fleshly, 3:3; as far as their thinking was concerned, they were still immature babes. As A.T. Robertson says, "He wanted to speak the wisdom of God among the adults (1 Cor. 2:6), the spiritual (oi пуєщатької [hoi pneumatikoi], 2:15), but he was unable to treat them as пуєщатької [pneumatikoi] in reality because of their seditions and immoralities." The Corinthians couldn't handle advanced doctrine despite the fact that is what they were sent to proclaim, the deep mysteries of God, things heretofore never revealed.

Then the question comes, when they proclaimed these things publicly, how did people respond? And there are four basic responses or four kinds of men. Starting in 2:14 we have the natural man, in 2:15 the spiritual man, in 3:1 the man of flesh and in 3:3 the fleshly.

There are four kinds of men, four responses to the word of God and everyone in the human race is one of these four men, you are one of these people. I don't know which of the four you are but you are one of them. You can be classified. Now don't get Greek on me and say, well, where's the dividing line? And try to dismiss the whole thing. If you're sensitive to the word of God you'll know basically where you are.

Number one is the **natural man**, the soulish or, underlying that in the Greek, the *psuchikos* man. He's the man who James says is earthly minded, he thinks purely on an earthly level, he gets his wisdom from demons though he's unaware of it. He's clearly an unbeliever. And the result of this kind of thinking is bitter jealousy, strife and dissension, all things of the flesh. And

the reason is because he's dominated by his flesh. Paul says in verse 14, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God." He's simply stating a fact - the natural man, left to himself, is not open to the things of the Spirit of God, he's not open to the Scriptural story, he doesn't welcome it. You can tell him the Scriptural story as Paul did, but left to himself the natural man, without any special call of God does not accept the Scriptural story as the real story of history. Pilate would be a good example: when Jesus spoke of the truth about where this present world was heading and told him He was the King of the new world that was coming Pilate remarked, "What is truth?" Which is Pilates' rejection of Jesus' view of history. That is, Pilate, left to himself thinks of history as a pile of marbles, history is going nowhere, there is no truth. Now that's the natural man, he can't think beyond this realm, he's earthly minded.

And don't be surprised if you get this response from your unbelieving friends and family, that's the typical response of people down through the corridors of Church History. People didn't just start thinking in the 19th century and turn skeptical against the Bible. They've been doing that for centuries. So what, what's new? Every generation of believers has faced the same skepticism and they answered it. So go get a book and read. There are 100's of books written to answer the skepticism against the Bible. And it's naïve to think you're the first one to argue the Bible has a contradiction. Of course you argue that, you are a natural man, you can't conceive of God revealing Himself to man by the Spirit of God. Then Paul tells us why the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God and the reasons are two-fold. First, "for they are foolishness to him;" that is, because he's a natural man, a soulish man, he is earthly-minded, he's limited to the assets he has down here. First, human reason, and the problem with human reason is that it operates according to the flesh and the flesh is in rebellion against God. So when he uses his tool of human reason it's being manipulated by the flesh. So when he comes to the Scriptural story his human reason interprets it as foolishness. Second, "And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" or "inaccessible," he's walled off from them because of who he is in Adam. So the big point here Paul says is that if a man is left to himself he will never accept the things of the Spirit of God. God the Holy Spirit must override his natural bent to reject the gospel and bring him to faith in Christ. So the initiative rests with God bringing an unbeliever to salvation.

Second, Paul shifts in verse 15 to the **spiritual man**, or underlying in the Greek, the *pneumatikos* man; he is heavenly minded, he thinks on a heavenly plane, he gets his wisdom from the Spirit of God who has revealed things in the word of God. And the reason is because he is dominated by the Spirit in that he has learned to walk by the Spirit, he has grown spiritually to be classified as a spiritual man. Paul says in verse 15, "But he who is spiritual examines all things," all things being Scripture, the word of God, he's a Berean, "yet he himself is examined by no one. ¹⁶For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ." That is the spiritual man has the mind of Christ, not all believers have it, but spiritual believers do. And the point is that this man knows that the word of God is the final authority and standard for all of life and so it makes no difference to him if natural men or fleshly men evaluate him according to some human standard out there, he doesn't care what people think because he examines the Scripture and he lives before God with a good conscience. If he has sin, if he has failed to meet the standard of God's word he confesses his sin and is restored to fellowship with God. So it makes little difference if others judge him according to some other standard. He knows that even if he is condemned by men He is justified by God. He has the mind of Christ. He is on a diet of solid doctrine, the depths of the things of God and he wouldn't trade it for the world. He has grasped that all wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ and Christ alone. And he takes every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. He determines consciously in his mind not to know anything except Christ and Him crucified. All knowledge is taken captive and interpreted under the lens of Scripture. Each fact is given its meaning only as it has its place in the plan of God. He is a mature, adult believer who is oriented solidly to the authority of God in every area of his life.

Now we come to 3:1 and we see Paul's narration of his experience with the Corinthians and his evaluation of them both when he first came to them and now, five years later, and he gives the evidence behind his evaluation. Verse 1 begins with their spiritual pilgrimage. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. Now this is after they became believers five years ago. If you recall from Acts 18 Paul had come to Corinth, entered the synagogue, reasoned with the Jews and Gentile God-fearers and when they rejected he went into

the markets and so forth preaching the gospel, he had some converts among the Jews, many from among the Gentiles and a number of leading women. They began to meet in the home of Titius Justus next door to the synagogue and this was Paul's base of evangelism and discipleship, training the new believers. And he stayed with them for a year and a half. So verse 1 is covering a period of a year and a half, the first year and a half of their Christian life. And he says during that period I could not speak to you as to spiritual men. And we gather from verse 2 that what you speak to spiritual men is solid food, that's the depths of Christian doctrine. They just couldn't handle it at the time. So Paul gave them milk to drink, he gave them milk doctrine.

Now turn to Heb 5. We turned here a few weeks ago and I want to turn there again to show you that the NT depicts a discipleship program for new believers, what is referred to as milk doctrine. It was something like a Christianity 101 or a basics class. And Hebrews 5-6 gives us an idea of the curriculum. If you notice verse 10 the subject is the Melchizedekian priesthood. In verse 11 he says, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." You know when Christians don't grow up and learn how to think according to the basic categories of Scripture it's very hard to explain to them advanced ideas. There's pedagogy to Scripture, a series of lesson plans and you have to go through lesson 1 and lesson 2 and lesson 3 all the way up to lesson 92 before you can understand lesson 93. It's just like math, you don't start with algebra, you start with number and the concept of numbers, then you add and subtract numbers, then you build on that by adding multiplication and division. Only after you have these basics can you add the rules of operations and their relations by use of equations and learn algebra. But it's very hard to explain those things if you don't have the basics. And spiritually it's the same way. Sometimes people will come with a question about something in lesson 93 but they haven't gone through lesson 1, 2 and 3 and so forth. And what I do is ask some questions at first to get a feel for where they are, so if I do that I'm just trying to understand where they are spiritually and after making a prognosis try I try to explain to them the answer. The problem you face is that if the person asking the question hasn't gone through lesson 1, 2, 3 and so forth, they don't have the mental furniture in place to understand the answer. That's what he's talking about here in verse 11; you don't have the mental furniture to understand the priesthood of Melchizedek. We have a

lot to say about him but you haven't progressed to the point where we can explain it to you. Verse 12, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers," so there's an indictment here, you ought to be more advanced than you are in the spiritual life, you ought to be so advanced that you are teaching advanced truths to others, but you're not. Then he gives the anecdote "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." So they need to go back to the basic lessons, lesson 1, 2, 3 and go through elementary school again. They're like kids in school who failed 3rd grade and need to be held back a year so they can actually learn the material this time around. Verse 13, "For everyone who partakes of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant." A nepios, same exact word used over in 1 Cor 3, used of a spiritual babe in Christ. And just like a physical babe can only drink milk so a spiritual babe can only drink basic doctrine. And if you try to feed a physical babe solid food it can't handle it so a spiritual babe can't handle solid doctrine, it's too much.

Now this is the person who when they come in these doors and listen to these sermons, these content rich sermons they say, well, you're teaching is too hard, I can't understand it, and they indict me and then they hit the door. It's just a sign of immaturity, that's not to say we shouldn't have basics classes, basics classes are fine and important for new Christians. It's just that hey, you don't stay on basics forever, you grow up and when they come and say, it's too hard, I don't understand, rather than saying help me understand what they're doing is indicting me with their own indictment. All they're saying is I haven't grown up, I haven't applied myself to learn the word and I don't like it that you're trying to make me grow up, I'm happy over here sipping milk. And I want to quote from A.T. Robertson on the subject. A.T. Robertson was a great Baptist Greek scholar and he wrote some standard works on the NT Greek text. He says, "It is one of the tragedies of the minister's life that he has to keep on speaking to the church members "as unto babes in Christ" (ὡς νηπιοις ἐ ν Χριστω [hōs nēpiois en Christōi]), who actually glory in their long babyhood whereas they ought to be teachers of the gospel instead of belonging to the cradle roll."ii And all too often that is the case. As he says in another place, "Paul did not glory in making his sermons thin and watery. It is pathetic to think how the preacher has to clip the wings of thought and imagination because the hearers cannot go with him. But nothing hinders great preaching like the dullness caused by sin on the part of auditors who are impatient with the high demands of the gospel."iii If you haven't pressed on to maturity, now is the time.

Now, let me put together some of the distinctions Paul and others make; some of you are babes in Christ and that is fine if you are a new convert, but if you have been saved for 3 or 4 years there is no excuse for being a babe, you have failed to progress, and it's not my fault, it's not your wife's fault, it's your fault. You have not applied yourself to learn the word of God, you ought to be a teacher of the word of God but we have to go over the same basic doctrines again. That's why the author says in 6:1, "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works," - let's take that one - this was part of the basic curriculum a new believer would be trained in, Christianity 101. "...not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works." That is, a change of mind about earning merit with God. Are you still trying to earn merit with God? Not for salvation, not to become a Christian, but as a Christian? And most Christians say, no, I'm not doing that. But let's look closer. The Christian says I've honored the Lord in my work or I did something your way Lord, I've honored you and now I'm suffering and why am I suffering? I did that for you Lord, I honored you, and now why am I getting the short end of the stick? Oops, that's meritorious thinking, you don't earn your way out of suffering, suffering is the lot of all Christians. That's anti-biblical, meritorious thinking.

Another example, same kind of Christian, the Christian says, I've honored you Lord in my work and how I did this and he concludes, that's why I've got prosperity, that's why I've got material blessing or worse, God has given me these things so I can go enjoy them over here independent of Him. Uh oh, that's meritorious thinking; that's the idea that I'm getting a special privilege because I did this for God. That my friend is anti-biblical, meritorious thinking.

It can happen on a corporate church level with the finances. Oh, we've got plenty of money, that must be because we're doing things right around here, teaching the word. And even very sound Christian organizations have bought into this one. One famous organization, I won't mention the name but I've used it myself on one or two occasions; "God's work done in God's time never lacks God's support." Now let's think about that. The original intention of the

statement was to say that God will provide cash flow for organizations that are doing God's work. But let's just subject some of the people in Scripture who did God's work to this equation and see if it's true. Paul did God's work. And yet Paul was in weakness and in strength, in richness and in poverty and we're not going to say, well Paul, when you were in poverty that was because you weren't really doing God's work. Or take Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of God, to proclaim the word of God. Now, did Jeremiah get financial support from his nation? Absolutely not. How about Elijah? Absolutely not. All these people were cut off, absolutely rejected. How about Jesus? Did Jesus have a big cash flow because the Father looked down and said, boy, you're just doing such a good job Jesus? Absolutely not. God's work done in God's time sometimes does lack God's support, financially speaking. You can't measure whether an organization is doing God's work or not by how much money they have. That has never been a valid measuring device. I know plenty of apostate organizations that have lots of money. Now, if we meant to say God's work done in God's time never does lack God's spiritual support, now I'm behind you all the way, but God never promised good cash flow to people who follow his word. In fact, most of the people who follow his word don't have much cash flow. And so the idea that God is going to give good cash flow to the people that are doing His work the best is antibiblical, meritorious thinking...lay not again the foundation of repentance from dead works, meritorious thinking. You have to let that go, that's an infant doctrine. And the author goes on to list other infant doctrines, verse 2, "of instruction about washings and laying on of hands," those are things related particularly to Jewish culture, "and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment," so we have the doctrine of resurrection and the doctrine of judgment, basic, basic doctrines. The author says, let's press on to maturity. grow up! Backing up to verse 14 of chapter 15, here's what mature people eat, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of maturity," that should be translated maturity, "who because of maturity have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Now that's a mature believer and that's what Paul and the author of Hebrews wanted all believers to grow into; believers on solid food, advanced Bible doctrine, studying difficult things like Christ's Melchizedekian priesthood, like Christ's kenosis, like Christ's hypostatic union, like Christ's substitutionary blood atonement, all the advanced things. And why? So that our minds are filled with the word of God, so that we are cycling the word of God through our souls daily so that ultimately our minds

are set on the things of the Spirit of God and that translates into Him controlling our life and bearing His fruit so that we build reward status.

Alright, having seen that there is a basics curriculum and a more advanced curriculum let's come back to 1 Cor 3. Paul could not speak to them the advanced curriculum, that wouldn't make any sense to them, they were setting their minds on the things of the world, of the things of the flesh and therefore they were dominated by the things of the flesh and they weren't growing up spiritually. Originally, in verse 1, when Paul came to them, sure they were infants, not a problem, every believer starts off an infant and we all need milk doctrine, basic things about how to please God, how to walk by faith, about the resurrection, about the coming judgment, elementary things. But we should press on past all that. Verse 2 Paul says, I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, that's the earlier visit in AD51, for a year and a half Paul says I gave you milk doctrine. But now he shifts in the middle of verse 2 to five years later, AD56 when he's writing this letter to them, so it's been about three and a half years since he left them. He came in AD51, taught for a year and a half, probably left in AD53 and now it's AD56. And he says, Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly, sarkikos, the "men of flesh" in verse 1 are sarkinos, that was the Corinthians three and a half years before, now they are sarkikos, **fleshly**. So they were sarkinos, they are now sarkikos. What's the difference? Time. They have had time to grow from sarkinos to pneumatikos, from men of flesh to spiritual but they haven't! So now Paul is indicting them by saying they are sarkikos. So a sarkikos believer is a believer who has had time to grow but hasn't. Now Paul doesn't indict new believers. Paul recognized that it takes time for every new believer to grow. But Paul also recognized that it only takes 3 or 4 years for a new believer to grow and become spiritual. But they were still fleshly. So the difference between the "men of flesh" in verse 1 and the "fleshly" in verse 3 is the sarkinos in verse 1 haven't had time to grow up yet, but the sarkikos of verse 3 have and they are therefore rebuked for their failure.

Now let me give you an example in the physical realm so you will be more attuned to this serious nature of this rebuke in the spiritual realm. I want you to imagine an 11 or 12 year old still wearing diapers and pooping their pants or a 12 or13 years of age still breastfeeding. Now that's something that goes on in our country and when you see that I hope you are disgusted. If you're not I don't have any hope for you. There are kids like that in our

country today, I didn't make this up. This isn't Jeremy. Granted they may be extreme cases but it's not uncommon at all to find 6 year olds in diapers and 7-8 year olds sucking on mommy's breast. Now it's just not normal to fall that far behind in development. It is time to grow up. And the same thing is true in the spiritual life, transfer that disgusting picture over to the spiritual life and you have what a believer looks like who has been a believer for years but hasn't grown. And it's just disgusting, it's disturbing really, it's very embarrassing; they should have grown up years ago. But no, still wearing pampers and throwing temper tantrums. I don't want to study all those advanced doctrines, it's too hard, I don't like to study the Bible, I'm happy just sitting here sipping on milk and pooping my pants. Paul says it's way past time to grow up. Stop acting like a baby.

Alright, let's conclude with the evidence, vv 3-4. How did Paul come to evaluate them as still fleshly? Well, he had a report come in from the people out of Chloe's house. In fact, let's just go back to 1:11. See, this is all the same argument. He's not jumping around. He's still indicting them for the same crap they've been pulling. Verse 11, "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you." 12Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ." Four factions, they had divided into four factions, like teenage gangs, and they were quarreling with one another. The instruction he gave them earlier on was verse 10 and it's the key to everything that follows. "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." The point of that verse is to correct this problem of dividing into factions and quarreling with one another. He wants them to be united in doctrine and to live in harmony with one another. But the problem is highlighted in chapter 3:3, they are "still fleshly." They haven't grown up; they're still whining and bickering and moaning, a bunch of kids.

Now if you've ever had a household of children or your little one's play with other little ones at school or in the neighborhood you know what they do. Someone starts crying and it's because so and so did this or said this and all that is is a sign of immaturity. It doesn't matter if they're Russian kids, Australian kids, African kids or American kids, they all do the same thing, they bicker, quarrel, fight and cry and if they grow to maturity they grow out

of it. If they don't you have a real problem on your hand because now you have an adult brat. And our country is full of adult brats. It's just disgusting having to live here, I have to be honest with you, a bunch of idiot kids running around married and with drivers licenses, it's disgusting.

But the thing is that there are also Christian brats and they're the worst; they argue, split up and fight about every little thing, throw fits. And that's what he says in 3:3. I got this report and the report says, there is **jealousy** and strife among you, therefore, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? Like natural men dominated by the flesh? Indeed they were. Big boy Christians acting like spiritual idiots. Verse 4, For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? Aren't you just like unbelievers? Aren't you acting just like the surrounding culture? You sure are. You're brats. And therefore, on the basis of the evidence presented to me Paul says, you are still fleshly. You're behavior betrays your immaturity. "It is a bold and cutting figure, not without sarcasm, but necessary to reveal the Corinthians to themselves." iv

Now, let's put some of this together so we can have some tools to think with. There are four men here, four responses to the word of God. We are not so interested in the natural man, the unbeliever in 2:14, except to compare him with those believers who were at first men of flesh in 3:1 and are still fleshly years later in 3:3. Now the new believers who are men of flesh are not culpable for their condition, they are new converts, they have not yet had time to grow, this is an acceptable situation for a time, during which they need to be taught the milk of the word of God, basic doctrines so they can grow. At some point they should be taught advanced doctrines so they can become spiritual men, mature men who examine the Scriptures daily in their own personal study and analysis of Scripture. Paul desired all believers to become spiritual (Col 1:28). However, the problem is that if you have some believers who don't grow to become spiritual but end up like the Corinthians at the end of verse 3, walking like mere men, then their lifestyle is no different than the natural man! It is a serious thing for those who have been believers for more than 3 or 4 years to still be living like they are natural men. The difference then between the spiritual man and those who are still fleshly is that those who are spiritual are dominated by the Spirit while those who are still fleshly are dominated by the flesh. While walking by the flesh and walking by the Spirit are absolute conditions and can be spoken of in

existential terms, either you are walking by the flesh or you are walking by the Spirit at any moment, there is also a long term dimension to these terms, those whose lives are dominated by the flesh are still fleshly while those whose lives are dominated by the Spirit are spiritual, both are true. The key is to realize there are two dimensions of sanctification; the existential present and the long-term. While Paul primarily has in view the long-term dimension by citing their failure to grow over the last three to four years, this failure betrays their failure to daily walk by the Spirit.

We might say it this way; the Corinthian's were still fleshly in terms of their long term growth; the reason is because in the day to day existential moment they walked more in terms of the flesh than they did by the Spirit. The Christian life is not necessarily a continual upward trend although it should be! Paul's indictment is that they have had more than enough time to learn to walk by means of the Spirit and grow upward spiritually. They were failing. The evidence is they had taken up human loyalties, divided into factions and begun to quarrel against one another.

And to that subject we will turn next week. In summary, "He wanted to speak the wisdom of God among the adults (1 Cor. 2:6), the spiritual (of πνευματικοι [hoi pneumatikoi], 2:15), but he was unable to treat them as πνευματικοι [pneumatikoi] in reality because of their seditions and immoralities."

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¹ Biblical Studies Press. (2006; 2006). The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible. Biblical Studies Press.

ⁱⁱ Robertson, A. (1997). Word Pictures in the New Testament (1 Co 3:1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

iii Robertson, A. (1997). Word Pictures in the New Testament (1 Co 3:2). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

^{iv} Robertson, A. (1997). Word Pictures in the New Testament (1 Co 3:3). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

¹ Robertson, A. (1997). Word Pictures in the New Testament (1 Co 3:1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

