

## THE PROBLEM WITH CARNALITY

### TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 3:1-8

#### INTRODUCTION:

1. We have been studying the book of I Corinthians and have noted that the church in Corinth was a carnal church.
2. And because of their carnality, there were many problems, and contentions, and factions, and divisions (cf. 1:11-13).
3. The word “carnal” is mentioned four times in I Corinthians 3:1-4.
4. In this epistle, Paul describes three types of people. There is the spiritual man, and there is the carnal man (3:1).
5. And there is the “natural man” (2:14).
6. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, “The ‘spiritual,’ i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God...and ‘carnal,’ ‘fleshly,’ i.e. the renewed man who, walking “after the flesh,” remains a babe in Christ (3:1-4). The natural man may be learned, gentle, eloquent, fascinating, but the spiritual content of Scripture is absolutely hidden from him; and the fleshly, or carnal, Christian is able to comprehend only its simplest truths, ‘milk’ (3:2).”
7. Furthermore, Scofield says, “A carnal state prevents spiritual growth.” That is a good summary of this passage of Scripture.
8. A Christian cannot be both carnal and spiritual at the same time. His carnality will hinder him from growing spiritually.
9. This is not to say that a spiritual man does not on occasion act carnally, because unfortunately this does happen from time to time.
10. But a carnal man is not growing spiritually the way God intended. Romans 8:8 says, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”
11. There were no chapter and verse divisions in the original Greek text. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul said, “But we have the mind of Christ.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (2:16b; 3:1).

12. In other words, those that are spiritual “have the mind of Christ” (2:16), but Paul says they didn’t have the mind of Christ because they were carnal. They had no spiritual discernment.
13. Albert Barnes said Paul was saying, “I could not discourse to you as to far-advanced and well-informed Christians.”

### **I. CARNALITY HINDERS SPIRITUAL GROWTH BECAUSE CARNAL CHRISTIANS ACT LIKE BABIES (3:1, 2).**

1. All of us were “babes in Christ” (3:1) at one time. Even the great apostle Paul was a babe in Christ when he first got saved.
2. But Paul advanced quickly. He immediately got baptized (Acts 9:18), and he immediately started preaching the Gospel (Acts 9:20).
3. Acts 9:22, 23 says, “But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.”
4. But there are many carnal Christians who never witness for Christ. There are men who ought to be leaders in their congregation, working alongside the pastor, but they are not serving in the church because they are carnal.
5. They are “babes in Christ” (3:1).
6. Some churches put carnal Christians in leadership positions and that is a big mistake.

## **II. CARNALITY HINDERS SPIRITUAL GROWTH BECAUSE CARNAL CHRISTIANS WILL NOT ACCEPT STRONG PREACHING.**

1. Little babies cannot digest meat, and carnal Christians cannot digest strong Bible teaching and preaching (3:2; cf. Hebrews 5:11-14).
2. Hebrews 5:14 explains why carnal Christians lack Biblical discernment. Strong preaching is for “them that are of full age” (mature). It is for those who “by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
3. Their powers of discernment have been trained by constant Bible reading, so they are able to distinguish good from evil.
4. Many professing Christians are not able to distinguish good from evil because they are basically Biblically-illiterate.
5. Our Lord said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). This is an important principle of teaching.
6. First of all, unsaved people have a difficult time understanding the Bible. Philip said to the Ethiopian eunuch, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30).
7. The eunuch replied, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:31).
8. Unsaved people cannot understand the Bible. First Corinthians 2:14 says, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
9. Furthermore, even saved people cannot understand the Bible if they are carnal. They are “not able to bear” Bible doctrine (3:2).
10. This has little to do with how long they have been saved, but rather it has much to do with the condition of their heart.

11. In other words, they have the ability to learn and to grow, but no real desire. Sadly, there are some Christians who are content to go just so far and that's it.
12. As long as they are content in their carnal condition they will not grow spiritually.
13. This is why there are so many churches that emphasize worldly music and entertainment – carnality.
14. This is why there are so many Christians that do not tithe and do not support missions.
15. This is why so many Christians seldom pray.

### **III. CARNALITY HINDERS SPIRITUAL GROWTH BECAUSE CARNAL CHRISTIANS ARE ENVOIOUS AND DIVISIVE.**

1. This type of “envying and strife” (3:3) is characteristic of worldly people, but unfortunately carnal Christians can be just as worldly as unsaved people.
2. Oftentimes one cannot tell if a carnal Christian is even saved because he behaves just like an unbeliever.
3. In forming cliques around preachers such as Paul and Apollos, the Christians at Corinth were acting worldly and carnal, so Paul asks them, “Are ye not carnal?” (3:4; cf. 1:11-13).
4. Paul and Apollos were “ministers” (3:5), that is, they were “servants.”
5. Jesus said, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (serve), and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
6. In the church at Corinth, they were dividing over “ministers” (servants) such as Paul and Apollos (3:4, 5).

7. H.A. Ironside said, “What, the whole family divided over servants? What absurdity! God’s ministers are the servants of the people of God; let them accept the service thankfully, but never let them put the servant in the place of the Master.”
8. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” (3:6). It is always God that gives the increase. His servants plant and they water, but the servant does not have the power to cause the Word to produce fruit. Only God can do that (3:7).
9. There is a tendency among Christians to exalt certain preachers. This is unscriptural, and it is a mark of carnality (3:4).
10. “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one” (3:8a). This speaks of Christian unity, but the Christians in Corinth were divided (3:3).
11. Romans 12:5 says, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” This is unity.
12. First Corinthians 12:12 says, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”
13. David said, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).
14. Satan brings disunity, and discord, and division, and disputes, and disagreements, and dissension. The Spirit of God brings unity.
15. Ephesians 4:3 says, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (cf. I Cor. 3:16). “Endeavor” means we need to work at it.
16. *We are not divided, all one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity.* (Sabine Baring-Gould)

17. Some day we will all stand together at the judgment seat of Christ, and we shall all give an account (cf. I Cor. 3:8, 13-15).

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. I was reading a sermon by W.A. Criswell and he illustrated our text by referring to a cartoon. I love cartoons. I grew up reading cartoons in the newspaper – Dick Tracy, and Li'l Abner, and Mutt and Jeff.
2. I grew up watching cartoons on the television – Foghorn Leghorn was (and still is) my favorite.
3. Pastor Criswell referred to a cartoon to make a point – on the inside of the doorway — halfway in the doorway, halfway in and halfway out — there were two men with a big heavy box, and the box just about filled the whole doorway.
4. And they were pushing and pulling, and huffing and puffing, and tugging and sweating and working hard, trying to move the box.
5. After a while they were so exhausted they set the box down and took a rest. Then one of them said, "I don't believe we'll ever get this box inside this door."
6. And the other replied, "Inside? Hey, I thought we were trying to take the box out."
7. Pastor Criswell said, "That's the church and what happens to us when one of them is pulling this-a-way and the other one is pulling that way — somebody is trying to go that way and somebody is trying to go that way. That's what Paul says when he says, 'You're babes in Christ when you do that.' You're acting like little children. You're carnal (3:1). You're not doing good. You're not going anywhere. You're just standing still. You're not growing."
8. The lesson: a church cannot go forward when the members are carnal.