



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 2:14–3:3

1 Corinthians

“Christian, Carnality, and the Bible”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, it's time for us to begin. Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with thanksgiving that we have a heavenly Father to whom we can turn. We thank Thee for the way in which the Scriptures have unfolded the relationship that we enjoy with Thee through Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the constant presence of the Holy Spirit within us to teach us and to guide us, to minister to us the things that our great Triune God desires that we have. We thank Thee for the experiences of life. We ask Lord Thy blessing upon each individual one here that our lives may truly be the means by which come to know Thee better. We thank Thee for this opportunity to look into the Scriptures. We ask Thy blessing upon us as we study together in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] I should have made one announcement, the memorial service for Jim Dean is being held in the Chapel tomorrow at 1:30, and we encourage you to come and have the time with the family here. Really is something of a celebration of a very faithful life. In fact, I think that's the thing about Jimmy that I think of almost more than anything else, how faithful he was in the responsibilities of being a Christian and then having leadership as a Christian. We certainly will miss him.

Returning tonight to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14 through chapter 3, verse 3, and our subject is “Christian, Carnality, and the Bible.” And will you listen now as I read these verses? The apostle writes:

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

Well, we are studying together the apostle’s words to the Corinthians that concern essentially at this point, truth. Its content, which we have said last week particularly, is to be gathered around Jesus Christ and him crucified. When he talks about the wisdom of God, that’s essentially what he has in mind, Jesus Christ and him crucified. And so we’re interested then in truth, its content, the cross, and all that is involved there, and the perception of the truth, how we understand truth.

I defined last time three very important theological words. Probably you know the meaning of these things, but it’s good to review them because they come before us here in these verses the apostle writes. Revelation was the first of the words, and that is the unveiling of God’s truth to men. It also is used for the truth unveiled. Inspiration, that is the means whereby God secured an infallible or inerrant communication of the revelation. And then illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit in

giving understanding of the truth. These three great words are very important: revelation, the unfolding of divine truth; inspiration, the means by which we have through the Spirit’s work an infallible communication of the truth; and then illumination, which is so necessary because the truth is truth whether we understand it or not, but we of course want to understand it—should want to understand it if we don’t. And so illumination is necessary.

Now, we would imagine, of course, that if illumination is something given by the Holy Spirit to Christians that the way in which we live our Christian lives might have something to do with the unfolding of the truth. P.T. Forsyth once said, “The truth we see depends upon the men we are.” And I think we can see that in illustration here in this passage. The truth that we see depends upon the men that we are. Are we saved men? Are we spiritual men? Those facts have very, very significant relationship to how much of the truth of God we may understand.

Paul would certainly agree with Forsyth in that and perhaps he would add, if we do not see, we may be culpable. That is, blamable for not seeing unless it so happens that we are babes in Christ. In that case, there may be some excuse for being able to take the milk of the Word of God and not take the meat of the Word. In other words, a babe is the only person who can say I like the practical truth, don’t give me any systematic theology. Only a babe can say that. So if you come up and say that to me, I’m not going to have to say to you from now on, “You are a babe,” because, after all, the truth is given to us that we might know it, all of it. The sixty-six books of the Bible, they are important for us, all of us, in every part of our lives.

Now, the goal that the apostle has in these verses, it seems to me—he doesn’t say this specifically, but it seems to me that his goal is the specific relationship of spiritual maturity and carnality. That’s what he’s going to be talking about. And those verses that you read, at least to me, seem to be saying that.

Don Carson has an interesting little book, which it’s mainly some lectures that he’s given through a few of the chapters of 1 Corinthians, and he has a very humorous illustration of his difficulty of feeding his newborn son. Now, Dr. Carson is a fellow—is a man who is on the faculty

of Trinity Seminary, and he was on the faculty when I was there, and we became good friends. He has an illustration of the feeding of his children. He has at least two children. He writes about feeding Tiffany, his daughter. Tiffany, he said, was a dream. He could feed her in the midnight, for a midnight feeding in twenty minutes. He said he would zap the formula in the microwave, change her, feed her the whole eight ounces, and tucking her in the bed, and the feeding would last about twenty minutes. But his sons feeding, he said, was horrendous. He had an enormous appetite, but he sucked in three speeds, slow, dead slow, and stop [laughter].

Worse, he had to be burped every ounce or so, or he would display his remarkable gift for projectile vomiting [laughter]. Now, I'm not sure that we can really believe what Don said here, but he is not the man to exaggerate much. He said, “Without warning upchucking about fifteen feet across the room” [laughter]. Now, it just so happens that he mentions the Olympics in this, he wrote this book months ago, but he says if there was an Olympic medal for projectile vomiting, he would have had one of the medals. Further, Don said he never got back into the bed under an hour and usually an hour and a half to feed his son.

Now, Carson goes on to say, because he's not just telling a story for fun, he says that, “There are Christians who are international class projectile vomiters, spiritually speaking. They simply cannot digest what Paul would call solid food. Only milk will suit them. If you give them anything else, they will upchuck. They are infants still and display their wretched immaturity even in the way that they complain if you give them more than milk. Not for them the solid knowledge of Holy Scripture, not for them mature theological reflection, and they reveal not for them growing in perceptive Christian thought. They want nothing more than another round of choruses and a simple message, something that won't challenge them to think, to examine their lives, to make choices, and to grow in their knowledge and adoration of the living God.”

Well, I know that everyone in this audience has heard someone, some preacher say something about someone who comes up to them after a message and says, “Well, that was over my head,” or, “That was theological”—or if they don't say it to the preacher—some really say it to the

preacher, not too many but some do, but they say it afterwards, “That was over my head.” “That was theological.” Or, “I’m not interested in theology; I’m interested in life. I’m not interested in the doctrines for the Word of God; I’m interested in the person of Christ.”

We’ve said this so many times. It’s like Rush Limbaugh saying something a thousand times as he does in the course of six months. He’ll say it a thousand times. But if we don’t want to know Christian theology, we don’t want to know Christianity. That should be as plain to us as anything could possibly be, because Christianity is simply the doctrines of God concerning us and concerning himself. So what relationship does the kind of life that we live have to do with the perception of the Word of God and of course our submission to that Word of God?

Well, now in verse 14 through verse 16, the apostle talks about this human perception of the divine wisdom. God’s wisdom, we’ve been saying, is centered in the cross of Christ. It’s not something beyond us, philosophical. It’s simply Jesus Christ and him crucified. We tried to make that very plain. Notice verse 18 of chapter 1, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it’s the power of God. Verse 23: We preach Christ crucified to the Jews, a stumbling block, to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Notice Christ is the wisdom of God. He preached Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Verse 2 of chapter 2, I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. The wisdom of God. Verse 6, How be it or however we speak wisdom among those who mature, not the wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age who are coming to naught. And verse 8, which none of the rulers of this age knew, for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So God’s wisdom centered in the cross is what God wishes us to know.

Now, we in the last study noted specifically Paul’s underlining of that the fact that this has been now revealed to us by the Spirit. We reach verse 13—yes, verse 13 and that last statement comparing spiritual things with spiritual. And now and I’d like to correct something that I said

because I did it in memory without the facts before me, and I want to make one correction. That expression, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, is a possible translation, in which case it would support the idea that when we study the Word of God we are—if we are to understand the Word of God, we should compare all of Scripture, all that Scripture says about any particular truth. And by comparing all that Scripture says about particular truths, we would come to a fuller understanding of that particular truth. That’s a possible rendering, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Later in this very epistle, as I remember, the word is found in the sense of comparing.

Then I also tried to mention—I believe this is what I did not say. The word can mean “combining.” If it means combining—and that was a classical meaning of the term. Combining spiritual things with spiritual things would mean that the apostle teaches by comparing—by putting together, combining spiritual truths with spiritual words, and presenting spiritual truth in that way, combining spiritual truths with spiritual words.

A third interpretation—I’m mentioning this because if you’ll look at the translations that have been made of this particular passage, the New American Standard version, the Revised Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, The New International Version, they all differ, and then they have in the notes these alternatives, frequently all of the alternatives some; in some cases, only one other one. But it also may be interpreted, may be understood as interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people.

Now, personally I think that’s probably what he has in mind, but I would not want to claim that that is correct because it’s one of those things that sound students of the Word of God have wrestled with for centuries. I know you expect me to give you the final word on it, but I’m not going to do it because I don’t have the final word. And if I knew someone who did, I would just tell you that. But I don’t think anyone has been able to convince everybody yet.

If that last is the sense, then what Paul would be saying is that we, that is the apostles who are teaching you—we give a spirit-led utterance, a product of a spirit-led teaching. In other words, our words and our teaching are given by the Holy Spirit to us, and we are conveying them to you.

That certainly would make sense. And as far as I am concerned, it makes good sense. The apostle is teaching spiritual truths and he is teaching—he is teaching spiritual truths in the use of spiritual words that are suitable for them.

Now, more details. He starts in verse 14 talking about the natural man’s inability, But the natural man does not receive the things of the spirit of God. Who is the natural man? Well, the natural man is the unregenerate man. He’s the man who does not have the Holy Spirit. He is spiritless. And so, in not having the Spirit, he lacks the organ by which the words of Holy Scripture can be seen to be true.

Now, it’s possible for anyone without the Holy Spirit to see the words of the Bible. Anyone can look, open up the Bible and see words. You can see words. An unsaved man can see words. An enemy of the Scriptures sees words and criticizes them. But to see words as truths is something only the Holy Spirit can give us. The Bible is the Word of God. This is the Word of God. This happens to be the original text—basically the Hebrew and the Greek. And if I put the Bible over like that, I can say, “That is the Word of God.”

But now to understand the Word of God is something else. That requires the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It’s the Holy Spirit who brings conviction to the hearts of men that this, the Word of God, is true. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit in illumination. The natural man then is a person who not possessing the Holy Spirit can read the Bible. He can tell you what’s a subject and what’s a predicate. He can tell you what the verbs are. He can tell you the modifying phrases. He can even tell you what kind of clauses we have: purpose clauses, result clauses or whatever. He can analyze it grammatically. But knowing it as true is the product of the Holy Spirit. That is the work that the Spirit does. So the natural man then lacks the organ by which words can be—the words of the Bible can be seen to be true.

Now, I’d like for you to turn over to Jude verse 19 just for a moment because you might be wondering, Why do you say that the natural man is an unsaved man, because I just made that statement. If you were privately talking to me you might say, “Well, how do you know that?” Well,

that’s a perfectly good question: “How do you know that?” Well, Jude in verse 19 makes the statement that pertains to this, he says with reference to some individuals who are not very pleasing to him, these are sensual persons, it’s the same word, *natural*. These are natural persons who cause divisions—now notice—not having the Spirit.

James, in the 3rd chapter of his epistle, makes reference to *natural* and adds the word “demonic” with it. So we can say then, the natural man—the Greek word is the word for soul—the soulish man, the man dominated by the soul, not the spirit, but the soul, that man does not have the Holy Spirit, so he is a spiritless individual. And Paul says with reference to him, the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.

Now, the word “receive” is a word that really means “to welcome.” I’d like for you to turn over to Acts chapter 17, verse 11. Here we have some people who did receive the Word of God. We all know them. They are the Bereans. And in Acts chapter 17, verse 10 Luke writes: Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. This word is a word that means to welcome. They welcomed the Word of God.

Now, Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 says the spiritless man does not welcome the Word of God. He can read it, he might even have curiosity about it, but to welcome it is to understand by the Holy Spirit’s guidance that it is true, the Word of God. So he does not receive it. You can imagine that down through the years, we’re living in the year 1994, think of it. Our Lord lived 1900 years ago.

Now, the Christian church has been in existence since the Day of Pentecost in the fullness of New Testament truth from our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost. This one people of God entered into a special form of existence on the Day of Pentecost, every believing person possessing the Holy Spirit as a permanently indwelling presence.

Now, you know if you read anything about any kind of subject like this, as important as this, you would expect that, down through the centuries, there has been all kind of theological discussion

about the meaning of the Word of God. Great differences have been argued out. Some have come to a resolution in some of the councils of the past, certain teaching concerning the person of Christ has come to resolution. And Christians generally believe it, whether they are Roman Catholics or Protestants or whatever, there are certain things they hold together.

Now, you can, I'm sure, appreciate the fact that this question was raised often. In what sense can we say that we know the Word of God and in what sense can we don't know him? Because Paul says the natural man, the unsaved man, does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, and yet, if you go to our theological seminaries, in our theological seminaries in which believing teachers are teaching, and believing young men are listening to their lectures, they will be told by their professors to go and consult such and such a volume which if you read the volume you'll discover that the individual may not have the Holy Spirit as his teacher. And yet teachers will say you will profit from that. Is that possible? Yes, it's possible.

How is it possible? Well, it's just what I was speaking about, that there are certain things that anyone can understand. You can read this and you can see what the subject of the sentence is. You can analyze, in fact, you can diagram these sentences, the modifying clauses and phrases and put it all together, and say this is grammatically and syntactically what the apostle has said. But to know it as true is something else. To know it as specifically the Word of God brought in conviction to my heart, so that I respond in faith and believe the truth, that's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Lutherans in discussions over this and debates over this distinguish between the *materia* of Scripture and the *forma* of Scripture.

Now, I think—I'm not sure I have a full treatment of this in connection with this, but what they were seeking to point out was just what we're talking about, that we can understand specifically what Scripture says, but to understand really what Scripture says in its theological sense is something only the Holy Spirit can give, because people do say the natural man doesn't receive the things of the Spirit of God. Well, but they do read it and they see it, what is it, is this some mystical kind of thing? No, it's not a mystical kind of thing. It's an objective ministry of the Holy Spirit who enlightens us

through the Word of God, convincing us that this word is true. Like the Bereans, we welcome the Word of God when the Holy Spirit causes us to receive it as truth. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him.

Gordon Clark who was, as many of you know, here in Believers Chapel. For some meetings on one occasion, Dr. Clark has pointed out that it's entirely possible for some of the students who are studying in our institutions to be actually disobedient to the Word of God and opposed to the Word of God and yet understanding it better than those who believe it as true. He gives an illustration of a student in class who gave the best answer concerning the nature of justification by faith. But the whole semester he had fought against the doctrine and still was fighting against it, but he was a careful student. And so he understood the grammatical statements of the Word of God, but he just did not believe that they were true, the things that were said. In fact, here's another thing: a person can actually understand what Paul is saying but still consider it to be outrageously false. That is, he can understand what I teach about the depravity of man.

Now, I teach, and the Christian church has taught, that men are depraved. A large number of the men who have taught the truth have taught that men were totally depraved. Not that they couldn't do anything good according to human standards, but they could not believe anything in a way that God approved of it. They couldn't believe it out of faith, and they couldn't believe for the glory of God. They couldn't do anything that came from faith if they did not have faith, and the things that they did, though the world approved of them and praised the things that they did, if they were not done for the glory of God, they're not good works.

So it's entirely possible for me to do something and you say, “Isn't it a marvelous thing that he did?” But if I did it for my own glory, is that a good work? That's not a good work. That's a deceitful work. And if I do something that does not come out of faith, that's not a good work, either. The Bible very carefully points out that a good work is something done from faith for the glory of God. So no unsaved man can do such a work. It's beyond him. He cannot do it, makes it difficult. Makes for some interesting discussions. But nevertheless that's true.

Now, notice further what Paul says. He says, the natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. So I explain to him the doctrine of the depravity of man. And that is not true at all. As a matter of fact, what are we told generally in our society? We are told generally that men are basically good over and over again, basically good. They need to raise the level of their self-esteem, parenthesis, equals pride. They need to be proud—prouder, but basically men are good, over and over. If I were to collect illustrations out of the paper, and out of the magazines, I could be clipping all of the time, basically good, not all. They are foolishness to him. Now, notice, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Now, notice what Paul says. He does not say he does not know them. He does not say he will not know them as if stubbornly he refuses to know them. He says he cannot know them. Cannot. He's unable to know them. The natural man, then, is a man who thinks of the things that you and I regard as true—we believe that they are true—he said, to him they are foolishness. He may not admit it, but he believes that they are foolishness. And not only does he not do them or will he not do them but he cannot know them. They are spiritually discerned. But as they are discerned through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit enables us to see the Word as true and to feel its power.

There are many illustrations that an individual might give of what we are talking about here. There is an illustration that I, particularly, like of the Bible, and what it means to have the Holy Spirit illumine us. Someone has pointed out that the Bible will be as different as if you looked at a pile of stones under common light or under ultraviolet light. If you consider what the Bible appears to be apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and what it appears to be with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Take a pile of stones into a dark room and turn a common electric light on them, and they reveal nothing unusual. But shine ultraviolet rays on them, and they become amazing objects of beauty, a host of new colors and shades replaced the old drabness of the rocks, and they live in a new beauty. The light adds no new qualities to the stones but causes certain inner qualities of the stones to fluoresce. The ultraviolet light ray is the unseen part of the violet end of the spectral band of light

and is a perfect illustration, so our author has said, of both the position and action of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the pages of Holy Scripture. The Bible is fluorescence to the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It contains truth that does not respond to the light of human intelligence, but the instance the light of the Spirit is turned upon the Word of God, then it fluoresces with a new and remarkable beauty. That’s the way the Bible is to those to whom the Holy Spirit has brought the ministry that causes them to see the truth, the Bible as true as the Word of God.

Years ago—and many of you, I know, have done this—we went to Carlsbad Caverns. The bats of Carlsbad Caverns, as you probably know, winter in Mexico, in May they return, about five to eight million strong it has been said—I don’t know whether there are more bats now than there were when this account was made in the National Geographic. But bats each evening would stream out of the caverns for water and food, among the surest fliers in the world, so are the bats. They moved accurately in the blinding darkness of Carlsbad Caverns by what our author called echolocation. That is a sort of natural sonar in which they send out squeaks catching the echoes that bounce off the stalactites and stalagmites, and they can fly in and out in utter darkness—and it is utter darkness when you know as you go in the caverns and have the lights turned off, you cannot really see your hand before your face. That is certainly true there. But the bats fly around and the stalagmites that rise up from the ground and the stalactites, the floor coming down from the top, they fly in the midst of them and are able to do it. Why? Because the bats can, by means of the squeaks that they utter which you and I cannot hear, they’re able, bouncing those sounds off of those stalactites and stalagmites, are able to move in and out among them. There are things, of course, that we cannot hear.

The Bible is like that in this sense, that we need the Spirit in order to understand that it is true. We know there are many illustrations of this, and the very fact that we cannot hear the radio waves that are in this room because of our hearing; it’s obvious that there are things that may exist without my being cognizant of them.

If I as a man, who is growing more and more deaf as the years go by, were appointed a judge of an orchestra's quality of music, that would be a big, big mistake. And for the individual who does not have the Holy Spirit, for him to judge Holy Scripture is even more ridiculous than for me to judge the music of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, for me to make a comment, so Don Carson says, on the harmony of Beethoven's Fifth or on the voice and technique of Pavarotti would be foolish, but thus is the man who seeks to judge the Word of God who does not possess the Spirit of God.

We often see illustrations of this. I went to Charleston, South Carolina, over the weekend. That's on the way to heaven, [laughter] but it's a long ways from heaven. But anyway I was there over the weekend. And we got into one discussion. And the name of a family member was brought up who is/was—he's now with the Lord—but he was a godly man. He was a preacher, and he was a painter, both of them at the same time, and such a magnificent preacher that the crowds would come from everywhere, but he was a very—well, I don't want to use the word strange man, but he was very much of his own man, and he could never probably been a pastor of a church for very long because he would speak too plainly.

When Statesville, North Carolina asked him if he would paint a picture for the new library for them because he was the local painter, he did. He painted one for them. And when they saw it, they had to turn it down. It was a painting of the Lake of Fire, and the painting had pictures of individuals that you could recognize [laughter], and the angel was tossing them with a pitchfork into the Lake of Fire [laughter]. One was the face of Harry Emerson Fosdick, a noted liberal of about thirty years ago. And so they had to turn it down. But whenever Mac Long would preach—when he was known he was a Presbyterian minister whenever he would preach—crowds would come. They knew it was going to be interesting, and it would be truthful, too, basically. When his name was mentioned, an individual said he was really a nut [laughter]. Well, in one sense he was, but he was a Christian nut [laughter], and a lot of us are that, aren't we? Christian nuts, but he really was a Christian man. Well, anyway we'd better get on here. He was a very interesting fellow.

He says, the apostle goes on to say that, verse 15, He who is spiritual has the power to judge all things. That is, things that have to do with the Word of God. It doesn't mean that he is able to judge what NASA is doing or something like that, but things that have to do with what he's talking about, the wisdom of God. To judge those taught by the Lord is to infer the ability to teach the Lord, because we, Paul says, have the mind of Christ. I'd like for you to notice that particularly because he says, but he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged of no one...who does not have the Spirit, is the point.

In other words, the person who does not have the Holy Spirit who seeks to judge the Christian man, he's judging the man who has the mind of Christ, and he doesn't have the capacity, the ability, to judge the man who possesses the Holy Spirit. So he who is spiritual judges all things. That is, that have to do with the wisdom of God, yet, he himself is rightly judged by no one who does not have the Holy Spirit.

So to judge those taught by the Lord is to infer ability to teach the Lord, for the Lord has given us the understanding not of his Word of God, but the Word of God. And for someone to judge us who have the truth of God is to give for themselves or to arrogate for themselves something that they do not realize that they are doing. It's to assume that they are able to instruct the Lord.

He says at the end, For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him, but we have the mind of Christ. Well, that's a most interesting statement: we have the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ is to have the mind of the Lord. This text in the Old Testament is a reference to the Lord Jehovah, but who has known the mind of the Lord that we may instruct him. But we have the mind of Christ. It's obvious that the apostle's thinking, he's thinking that Christ is the Lord of the Old Testament, the Yahweh of the Old Testament. Remember in the Epistle to the Hebrews we pointed out that “Yahweh,” the term translated in the King James version “Jehovah,” is a term that refers to the essence of deities, the personalities are Father, Son, and Spirit. So we can say the Father, the Lord who is the Father; the Lord who is the Son; the Lord who is the Spirit. So here

Paul says but we have the mind of Christ. Well, what about the condition of the Corinthians? Paul says, and I, brethren, could not speak to you as the spiritual people, but as to fleshly, as to babes in Christ.

Now, this is a resumption of the words he gave earlier about contention in the church at Corinth. Because in verse 12 of chapter 1 he said, Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ” as Christ divided and so on. And now he turns again to the question of contentions. And he introduces a third category because we have individuals who are natural—that is, unsaved individuals. And then we have spiritual individuals, he’s mentioned them, verse 15, he who is spiritual. That is, he possesses the Spirit, is the meaning. But there is a third category. That is, there are those who are Christians but they are babes, and they’re involved in contentiousness, and he calls them carnal, fleshly. So the discussion continues. I just want to look at it.

So in verse 1, And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual people but as unto carnal, fleshly, as to babes in Christ. As distinguished from the world, we are spiritual because we have the Spirit, but as in distinctions from one another, some of us may be mature, spiritually mature, others may be carnal babes, yet in Christ.

Now, what difference does that make? Well, he says in verse 3, I’ve fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it and even now you are still not able. So the Corinthians, because of their fleshliness, because of their contentions, because of their party spirit, because of their factionalism, I am of Paul, I am of Peter, I am of Apollos, I am of Christ, what does that reveal about them? That they are carnal. They’re walking according to the flesh.

You ever hear Christians say things like that now? Do you think that has ever occurred since the days of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians? Do all Christians—have they all learned this? No, they haven’t learned this. We have constantly this in the Christian church. I am of so and so. We don’t quite put it that way, because if they know the Bible, you don’t use Bible terms with biblical people who understand the Bible. It’s too easy to find you out. If you say, “I am of Dr. Donald Grey

Barnhouse,” or “I am of R. C. Sproul,” or “I am of...” whatever it might be. It might be some ignoramus. You’d say, “I am of S. L. Johnson.” I get some letters like that, you know. You have been my teacher all these years, radio fifteen years. I’ve listened to all of your systematic theology tapes. And I say, my, I’ve taught all of those tapes and he hasn’t learned yet that point [laughter] that we are really to be followers of Christ and of the Word of God.

So anyway, a person who is carnal is one who in Paul’s teaching here is preeminently a factionalist. He has party spirit. What are they? Where are they? They are stuck at the milk stage, at the milk and pabulum stage of spiritual life. That’s where they are. They are just stuck right there. John Calvin made a very interesting statement. He said, “Christ is milk for babes and strong meat for men. Every doctrine which can be taught to theologians is taught to children.” Christ is milk for babes, strong meat for men. There is enough in Jesus Christ and the teaching concerning him for babes as well as for those who are absolutely at the top of the stage of spiritual maturity and ready to go home, our Lord Jesus Christ.

What’s interesting about this is that the apostle is writing this four years after this church has come into existence. And so four years later, now with the apostle’s ministry, Apollos and Peter and all of the great men of the early church, four years later they’re still weak. And not only weak, they’re willfully weak. That’s what he means. You are still carnal for where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? The evil preeminently as I mentioned as factionalism or the party spirit but nevertheless they have not advanced to maturity, the proof of it is those statements that they were making, I am of Paul, I am of Peter, I am of Apollos, and the specific confirmation is again noted in verse 4, for—this is evidence—for when one says, “I am of Paul” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal? They are living though they are changed men, because they have the Holy Spirit, they are living like unchanged men. They are living in immaturity. They’re carnal.

There’s been a lot of discussion of this question. Is it possible for us to say that there are divisions of mankind that we can call non-Christians, Christians, and carnal Christians? A lot of, to

my mind, foolish things have been said about this, and people have made some statements that probably could be justly criticized, but this certainly says that there is such an individual as a believer who is living in a carnal way. So it would seem, from Paul’s own language here, that one could say, with reference to a person, that it appears that there is such a thing as a carnal Christian, and you may know such that you feel reasonably sure there are such because some even talk in a way that reveals that that’s precisely what they are.

But to say that this is acceptable to God is something else. And it is true that it is often conveyed in the way in which this kind of person is referred to, the idea that that’s acceptable. In fact, I’ve known of individuals who will say, if you want to stir them up to take an advance and to learn a few of the theological doctrines of the Word of God other than they have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, they frequently say or have said, Well, I’m just afraid that I’m not interested in that. If there is such thing as a carnal Christian, I’ll just be a carnal Christian. The apostle would have been very unhappy with that. God would be very unhappy with that. Carnal Christians exist. That is, they are babes, he says, and they are in Christ, but they’re walking in a fleshly way.

Well, our time is just about up. Let me just mention something by way of summary. The Corinthians, then, are afflicted with a case of arrested development. They have been called to fellowship with a living God. Chapter 1, verse 9 makes that, but now their lives are blighted by seemingly innocent and insignificant factionalism and party spirit. *Seemingly?* It doesn’t seem so bad to say, I follow Paul, or, I follow Peter. But the apostle said, no, that is really an attack on the one body of Jesus Christ whose one head is our Lord Jesus Christ. Though we are all in the flesh, we’re never to live according to the flesh.

As Barrett comments, “Mere lapse of time doesn’t bring Christian maturity, though one might hope that it would do so and a rebuke is implied. Carnality, worldliness are constant foes seeking to turn us from growing—turn us away from growing up. It’s foolish to adopt our world’s shibboleths, dote on its heroes, admire its transient stars, seek its admiration.” What all this means is, don’t spend all your time watching the Olympics. [Laughter] And if it’s not the Olympics, the

Cowboys. If it's not the Cowboys, the mysteries on Thursday night. Martha's not here. I can talk about that. She listens every Thursday night one hour. We don't have apostolic permission for that, but she thinks she does, [laughter] and maybe she does. That's not too bad. But the point is that we can waste so much time on things that are not pleasing to the Lord, certainly do not put him first, seek the world's admonition, play up to its applause. Let's talk up Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's the wisdom of God. And let's do that from the perspective of those who have truly tasted divine grace in the gift of the Son of God to die for sinners on Calvary's cross. Remember Forsyth's words, “The truth we see depends upon the men and women that we are.”

I have a question. I'll answer it very quickly, part of it, not all of it. Part of it is, did Jesus depend on revelation for his knowledge, or, did he know innately that knowledge that Father wished him to know? Our Lord did not depend on revelation in the sense that being the second person of the divine Trinity as the divine person he is the eternal God. He knows the end from the beginning. He is possessed of all of the attributes of deity. And so in that sense, he would know. But he, himself, tells us that there are certain things that he did not know. So obviously, being the God-Man, there are certain things that he, as a fully—as fully man kept from himself.

This hypostatic union introduces a lot of things, and I want to reserve further answer next time for this because it requires more than a few minutes. But it is true to say that our Lord knew all of the things that he learned. But as our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God taking to himself a human nature and being fully man, he, himself, subjected himself to submission to the Father and thus learned things that he, as the divine Son, knew. That's why he knew the end from the beginning, but, nevertheless, he kept—he submitted himself to the Father and the Spirit's ministry and thus did not know the time of his coming.

That's a very difficult question, but if we understand who Jesus Christ is, the God man, fully God, fully man, then of course we'll understand. The question would arise, Is he a divine person, or is he who took to himself an additional nature, or is he a human person who took to himself a divine nature in some way? Well, of course the answer the Christian church has given to that is that Jesus

Christ is the divine person who at the incarnation took to himself another nature. He did not abandon his eternal deity, but he took to himself an additional nature, a human nature, and he lived in dependence upon the Holy Spirit and went through the experience as a sinless man of being taught by the Spirit the things that God wished him to know.

And even at the cross you can see an evidence of this for he cries out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me, taking the words from the Old Testament Psalm 22 and offering them up again as a prayer to the Father, his Father in heaven. He often says, you know, that he taught the things that the Father gave him to teach, he did the things that the Father directed him to do, so he was the perfectly submissive Son who's also the eternal Son. I'm sure you understand all that. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this opportunity to be together. We thank Thee for the greatness of the Word of God, and we thank Thee Lord for bringing conviction to us that it is truly God's Word. And we thank Thee for its message, Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, and him crucified who is our Savior.

We pray in his name. Amen.