

# Uniting the Church

## UNIFYING A SPLINTERED CHURCH

A Bible Study Series

### SPIRITUAL MEN AND FLESHLY MEN

#### 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

Do you know that your spiritual friends are not all the same? I mean that they are all at different levels of spiritual maturity. If you forget or ignore the level of spiritual maturity, then you will scratch your head and wonder what is going on. Each believer has to grow up in Christ, but it takes time and the blessing of God. Jesus wants each one of us to grow up in Him, but we each make decisions every day about how much we really want to grow. Today, we will see that you must be careful to distinguish your mature Christian friends from immature Christian friends. We will study 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 to learn about the difference between mature believers and fleshly believers.



1 Corinthians 3:1

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.”

#### Notice the Spiritual Maturity of Your Friends

Spiritual Christians will always be sensitive to the maturity level of their friends. In this case, Paul quickly summarizes the spiritual level of his audience, the church at Corinth. He described them as men of the flesh (“σαρκίνοις”) and as infants (“νηπίοις”) in Christ. If you do not evaluate the spiritual maturity of your friends, then you will not be

able to communicate with them effectively. You may even offend them. You must learn to speak to your friends at the right spiritual level.

### What Are Fleshly Friends?

In 1 Corinthians 3:1, page 1784, Paul shows us that you can always tell fleshly friends by what they do, but not necessarily by what they say. Of course, some of your friends will say things that let you know right away that they are not even Christians. For example, they may deny that Christ is really God in the flesh. Other unmarried friends may tell you stories about the great sex they have had, or the drugs they have taken, or the scams they have pulled, or how drunk they got partying with their friends. We should be careful to listen to and evaluate what our friends tell us. If we can see that someone is not really living for Christ, we should be careful about what we say to them. Paul described some believers as men of the flesh. He meant that they do not live under the control of the Holy Spirit. They live to please themselves. They tend to ignore God. They do the things that please their bodies and satisfy their own desires. Paul said that the Corinthians were fleshly men. He also called the Corinthians infants in Christ.

Who Are Infants in Christ? Paul also called some believers infants in Christ. Notice that the fleshly believers were also infants in Christ. We were all infants in Christ at one time. The level of spiritual maturity in our lives does not necessarily depend upon the number of years we have been saved from our sins. We have all known believers who still act like spiritual babies. Paul lets us know that we may still be infants in Christ, but we should concentrate on growing up in Christ.

Discipleship Points

Paul always made great points about discipleship. In this verse, Paul shows us that Christ desires us to grow up and act mature. This growth takes time and devotion to Christ, not just counting the years in Christ. Growing in Christ requires intentional faith in Christ.

## 1. Spiritual Age and Spiritual Maturity Differ

*You may have been a believer for many years, but that does not mean you have ever grown up in Christ. Spiritual maturity comes from eating solid food from the Word of God, and moving past a diet of just spiritual milk.*

## 2. Maturity Matters.

*Jesus intends for every believer to grow up, just like a child grows into a healthy, strong adult. If you think its is o.k. to live on milk alone, then think again. Jesus wants your love for Him to grow, so that you will love Him all the more.*



1 Corinthians 3:2

**“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.”**

### Infants Need Milk, Not Solid Food

Paul fed the Corinthians milk and not solid food. He understood that Christian babies cannot digest solid food, and so solid food should not be given to them. Some people still need milk, because they have not grown up in Christ.

### Some Friends Need Milk

In 1 Corinthians 3:2, page 1784, Paul talked about spiritual food. Paul told the Corinthians he only provided milk (“γάλα”) for them to drink, and not solid food (“βρῶμα”). Notice the levels of teaching and confrontation Paul provides here. He explained to the Corinthians that they were not yet ready for solid food. The spiritually immature believers could only handle milk. Paul did not mean this as a compliment to them, because he said they were still not able to take solid food. They had not yet grown up in Christ.

### **Some Friends Cannot Receive Solid Food**

Just like babies cannot eat solid food, so also young believers must start with the basics of Christianity. Notice the words “cannot receive.” Only as you grow to maturity in Christ can you start to accept solid food. As a baby Christian, you cannot receive the solid food of the Word of God. We need to remember that solid food will only be received by mature believers, and we should be careful to avoid feeding baby Christians with the solid food.

#### **Discipleship Points**

Paul emphasized that your friends need solid food for spiritual maturity, but some of them insist upon a diet of pure milk. Be careful to feed people the food that fits them. If they are spiritually immature, then feed them milk. As you feed them milk, remind them they are immature.

#### **1. Share with Your Friends about Spiritual Maturity.**

*Following Paul’s practice, you may have to tell people, even people with years in Christ, that they are immature, or even infants in Christ. Get ready for resistance.*

## 2. Recognize the Limitations of Flesh and Immaturity.

*Trying to feed solid food to the infantile and fleshly will never solve the problems because they are unable to receive solid food.*



1 Corinthians 3:3

“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?”

### Actions Reveal Spiritual Maturity

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, page 1784, Paul explained the principle of spiritual activity reveals spiritual maturity. He saw jealousy (“ζήλος”) and strife (“ἔρις”) in the assembly and immediately understood those spiritual activities reveal spiritual immaturity, specifically fleshly and infantile Christians.

### Some Friends Live in Jealousy and Strife

“Jealousy” indicates a contentious zeal or a serious rivalry. What you want or think you deserve is being given to someone else. When you see this kind of jealousy in your friends, think fleshly and immaturity. “Strife” means that the Corinthians were arguing and fighting among themselves. They each wanted what the other believer had. When you see strife among your friends, think fleshly and immaturity again.

### Some Friends Walk Like Mere Men

Walking (“περιπατεῖτε”) here means the way you behave and includes your patterns of behavior. Compare the command for every believer to walk in the Holy Spirit (Galatians

5:16). Paul does not compliment the Corinthians with this expression, because he expects them to be acting like spiritual men, and walking in the Holy Spirit.

## Discipleship Points

Paul showed us how we can distinguish between mature believers and immature believers. We can understand spiritual maturity often by the way people interact with other Christians. If Christians fight with Christians in a spirit of jealousy and strife, then they are fleshly and immature. We need to confront lovingly our immature spiritual friends with their acts of strife and jealousy so they can grow up in Christ.

### 1. Strife and Jealousy Point to Spiritual Immaturity.

*Actions really can speak louder than words. Born-again Christians can still live in immaturity. You can identify spiritual immaturity in your friends. When you see strife and jealousy, think fleshly behavior and spiritual immaturity. Only taking in the milk and growing into maturity will enable us to move past fleshly and immature behavior, so that we can begin to digest solid food.*

### 2. Remind Your Fleshly and Immature Friends that They Are Walking like Mere Men.

*As believers in Jesus Christ, we became new creatures in Christ. We were not fixed by Christ, but actually recreated in Christ. We became new spiritual beings in Christ. But, when we live in strife and jealousy with other believers, then we are walking and behaving just like mere men who have never been born again in Christ.*



1 Corinthians 3:4

“For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”

### The Problem of Following Men

In 1 Corinthians 3:4, page 1784, Paul identified the problem with following spiritual men. Do not misunderstand. Spiritual men can be great examples of the faith. But when any believer becomes a follower of man, and causes divisions based upon their identification with a particular man as their leader, then they act like mere men. Notice how the flesh and immaturity now control men to fight over who is the best teacher or spiritual leader. God calls such behavior fleshly and immature.

#### I Am of Paul

Some believers want to follow the person who led them to saving faith in Jesus Christ. In this case, some factions at Corinth want to follow Paul, who planted the church at Corinth. The “Paul Faction” did not get along with the “Apollos Faction.”

#### I Am of Apollos

Other believers wanted to follow the great speaker and teacher who came to Corinth after Paul. The “Apollos Faction” loved the speaking ability of Apollos, and were drawn to him, and loved to follow him. Some believers love to join a group, form a faction, and fight with the other believers.

### Discipleship Points

Paul started the church at Corinth by preaching there. God sent Paul, and God blessed the ministry

of Paul at Corinth. Paul never used his apostolic authority at Corinth to promote his own fan club. No, Paul always encouraged people to grow up in Christ and avoid all divisions built around different men.

## Following Men Indicates Immaturity

*Paul used the examples of people saying they were following Paul or others following Apollos. Paul tells both groups they should not divide along such lines. Paul and Apollos are on the same team, doing the same work of Christ. When believers fight over following any man, then they are only showing their fleshly and immature behavior.*

## Divisions Indicate Immaturity

*Spiritual divisions only prove that believers lack spiritual maturity. If you are spiritually immature, God wants you to grow up by putting aside all spiritual strife and jealousy, that lead to factions following men. Instead, believers should be unified together, and feasting upon the solid food of the Word of God.*

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## Conclusion

Every believer should concentrate on growing up in Christ Jesus. We should never give in to strife or jealousy among believers, and never follow men with great spiritual gifts if it divides the body of Christ into warring factions. Something is always wrong somewhere when the body of Jesus Christ fights among itself. The only cure will be to press on to spiritual maturity by feeding upon the solid food of the Word of God.

Many believers, however, can only handle spiritual milk because they still fight with each other and remain fleshly and immature. In Christ Jesus, we each need to encourage every



believer to grow into full maturity in Christ, and leave milk, jealousy, factions and fighting behind. We can all grow up into Christ and be unified in one love for our Savior.