

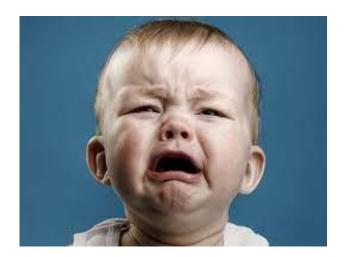
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The Immaturity of the Worldly Believer 3: 1-4

The immaturity of the worldly man DIG: What does it mean to be a worldly believer? What did the Corinthians do to cause Paul to call them worldly? Why is this unacceptable for true believers that are born again? What does Paul mean by "spiritual babies?" "Milk?" "Solid food?" How are "worldly" verses "spiritual" people defined here?

REFLECT: Do you know someone who acts in a worldly manner like the Corinthians? How do you handle that? How is the church like a family? If the church was like your natural family, what would be some of its characteristics? What is the difference between respecting a leader in the congregations of God, and the problem Paul is dealing with here?

The Corinthians were saved; but they were immature, acting like spiritual babies.



The Church has often thought of **worldliness** only in terms of dancing, alcoholic drinking, and the like. But **worldliness** is much deeper than bad habits; it is a way of thinking and believing. Basically, it is buying into **the world's** philosophies and human wisdom. It is looking to **the world** – to human leaders, to influential and popular people, to neighbors, to associates, or fellow students – for our standards, attitudes, and meaning. **Worldliness** is



accepting the world's definitions, the world's measuring sticks, and the world's goals.

The second great obstacle the believers face is **the flesh**. **The world** and **the flesh** are closely related. In fact, it is **the flesh** that produces the bridge **the world** uses to reach us. When we are given **Messiah's** divine nature, our **flesh** is not removed. That will not occur until we are glorified (see the commentary on **Romans**, **to see link click Cl** - **Our Bodies and Redemption**). Until then, our **flesh** resists and opposes our new heart.

The cause of division - the flesh (3:1-3a): The Corinthians had surrendered to the pressures of the world, but they had also surrendered to the temptations of their own flesh. Before Paul chastised them for their immature sinfulness, he reminds them again that he is speaking to them as brothers and sisters in Messiah. Their sinning, terrible as it was, did not forfeit their salvation (see the commentary on The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer). He stood with them as a brother, not over them as a judge. 76

As for me, brothers, I couldn't talk to you as spiritual people but as worldly people (Greek: sarkinos, meaning people of the flesh), as spiritual babies, so far as experience with the Messiah is concerned (3:1). Paul wanted the Corinthians to stop thinking like the world. Picking up the theme of being spiritual (see Aq - The Maturity of the Spiritual Believer), Paul declares that they, by-and-large, were not spiritual people at all. Indeed, they were not only not living as people of the Spirit, they were just the opposite, they were fleshly... worldly.

They also needed to stop behaving like the world, which is the point at hand. In the present argument, therefore, their quarrels became "Exhibit A" of the charge of being worldly people (3:1). There is a difference between our justification, or our position in Messiah, and our sanctification, or our practice of being conformed into the pattern of Messiah (Romans 8:29b). Our justification happens once at the moment of salvation (Romans 10:10); our sanctification takes a lifetime. The Corinthians were justified, but they weren't walking by the Spirit (see the commentary on Galatians By - Walk by the Ruach, and Not the Desires of the Flesh). Paul wrote elegantly about his own struggles (see the commentary on Romans Cc - The Reality of the Inner Conflict), and the Corinthians were living it. Big time.

Paul shifts images to pick up on their (apparent) accusation that he had fed them only with milk, not with "wisdom." He said when I first came to you, I gave you milk, not solid food, because you were not yet ready for it. But you aren't ready for it now either (3:2)! For you are still worldly (3:3a)! Paul didn't separate believers into two



different categories: lower-level beginners who need to be fed a diet of theological pabulum, and upper-level elite who could receive advanced doctrine, as if **the Good News** was some sort of pagan mystery. In **15:3-7 he** reminded **them** that **he** delivered to **them** as of first importance **Messiah's** death, burial, and resurrection. Could there be any greater truth for the believer than that?

Paul believed that the message of the cross exposed the truth about his listeners more than anything else. Those who cling to the "wisdom" of the world are left to their own devices apart from the Holy Spirit. They do not recognize the Good News as the wisdom of God, but instead, dismiss it as foolishness (1:18). The world cannot stomach the cross. Believers are the only ones who hold on to the wisdom of the cross. The Corinthians' failure to understand the wisdom of the cross was not due to the fact that Paul had withheld anything from them, but was a result of their own inability to digest what was offered. If Paul's message looked like milk to them, it revealed that they weren't as mature as they thought they were. They didn't need a change in their diet, they needed a change in their perspective.⁷⁷

The symptoms of division - jealousy and quarreling (3:3b-4): Paul cautioned: Isn't it obvious from all the jealousy and quarreling among you that you are worldly and living by merely human standards (3:3b)? Immature, fleshly, worldly believers are never a result of deficient genes or a spiritual birth defect. They are the way they are as a result of their own choices. One of the worst and most disappointing problems a church can have is a congregation of spiritual babies, believers who are not growing because they seek to fulfill fleshly appetites. Because self-centeredness is at the heart of fleshly behavior, jealousy and quarreling are always found in immature congregations. These spread like cancer throughout the body.⁷⁸

This is what **their** Sunday potlucks had become. **They** were acting just like **the world** acts. There was no difference between **their** worship service and some mean-spirited city council meeting. Factions had fractured **their** fellowship (see <u>Ak</u> - **Splits and Division in the Church at Corinth**). **I am of Paul**, some cried. Well . . . sniff, sniff . . . **I am of Apollos**, boasted another! **Paul** couldn't believe it! It was as if a year-and-a-half of **his** ministry to this church meant nothing. **He** could only address **the Corinthians** as **immature** because that was exactly how **they** were acting.⁷⁹

For when one says, "I follow Paul" and another, "I follow Apollos," aren't you being merely human (3:4)? Paul finally returns to the problem he had raised earlier in 1:12. He had allotted eight verses (1:10-17) to the party dispute and does not return to speak about



it until **3:3**. This created suspense. If **they** were as wise and mature as **they** thought **they** were, **they** would see the relevance of the intervening discussion about the word of **the cross**. **Paul** chalks that up to merely being **human**, and calls **them** to a higher standard **(1 Cor 1:2** and **30, 6:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17) - spiritual ones not lacking in any spiritual gift (1:7).** But, as it stands, **the Corinthian** unrest revealed a spirit that is all too **human**. As **Paul** will go on to point out a bit later in **3:18**, **they** were being **deceived**. **They** need to become **foolish** from **the world's perspective**, so that **they** may become truly **wise** and full of **wisdom** found in the crucified **Messiah**. Shouldn't we do the same?

Dear Heavenly Father, All that happens in the world of our lives seems so very important. We need to remember that life is but a vapor. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes (Jas 4:14). The wisest way to live our lives here on earth is to live with an eye to our eternal future home. Sometimes our problems seem so big to us that we forget what a great cost Jesus paid to leave heaven and come to live humbly as a man (Phil 2:6-8), bearing shame and pain on our behalf. We need to live relying on God for strength and wisdom (Jas 1:5) in a way that honors our precious Savior who gave His own life to ransom. Yeshua, the initiator and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame; and He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary in your souls and lose heart (Heb 12: 2-3). We love you dear Heavenly Father and we desire to use our time, money and thoughts to please You! In Yeshua's holy name and power of resurrection. Amen