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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 Bv – 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 **Ak – 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**.[80] 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**.[81] 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*