

WHAT CAUSES CHURCH DIVISION? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a)

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal:”

The cause of division in the church at Corinth was more than external, worldly influence. The problem was not external, the problem was internal. They were “carnal” in their mind, and they were “carnal” in their actions. The word “carnal” means “fleshly”. They had succumbed to the pressures and enticements of their own flesh.

Paul speaks to them as “brethren” and indeed they were brethren. The word “brethren” means “fellow believers”. That is a term of recognition and of love. Paul reminded his brothers in Christ that they were still saved, that their carnal actions had not forfeited their salvation. But their actions had hindered their growth in a very serious way. Paul did not diminish the seriousness of their sins; he rebukes them for their immature sinfulness. But he does this in a manner as not to leave them with the impression that he is judge and jury. He stood with them as a brother, not over them as a judge. He was a very wise teacher.

One writer said, “They had come through the door of faith but had gone no farther.” This can be seen very clearly in verse one. Paul “could not speak unto” them as he would to a “spiritual” believer. A “spiritual” believer is a “mature” believer. The Corinthians were not mature in the faith. Therefore, Paul spoke to them as “babes in Christ”. They were “babes in Christ,” which means they were “spiritually ignorant”.

The Corinthians were not unintelligent. Their problem was not a lack of knowledge, nor a lack of sound teaching. They were not ignorant of the faith because they were dumb, but because they were fleshly. They lived after the pleasure of their fleshly desires.

In verse two, Paul said, “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat.” When Paul first preached to the Corinthians, he first “fed” the Corinthians “with milk and not with meat”. In other words, in the beginning he taught them the elementary truths of doctrine. They could not digest the “meat” in the beginning because they “were not able to bear it.” They were babes in Christ.

Years later, Paul says to the same people that he taught in the beginning the milk of the Word, “neither yet now are ye able” to bear the meat of the Word. This is sad, sad indeed. There is no difference at all between the milk and meat of the Word, except in detail and depth. There are not two sets of truth. It is all one truth, the same in all ways, except the meat goes deeper in detail and deeper in meaning.

Why was there division in the Corinthians church? Verse 3, “For ye are yet carnal.” When believers do not mature, it breeds division.