

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

## *You Must be Born Again!*

*“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.” [Lloyd-Jones]*

*“In my lifetime I did not care to hear that word that cut me most, and showed me my lost estate aright. I was vexed to hear my sins mentioned, and laid to my charge. I loved him best, who deceived me most; who said, Peace, peace, when there was no such thing.” (Jer. 5:30,31).  
[Bunyan, John. A FEW SIGHS FROM HELL]*

[www.sermonaudio.com/crc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/crc)

[www.unholycharade.com](http://www.unholycharade.com) (blog)

[www.lightfordarktimes.com](http://www.lightfordarktimes.com) (blog)

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## *Be Renewed in Your Mind*

*July 7, 2024*

**Sermon Text:** 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

**Scripture Reading:** 1 Corinthians 3-4

1Co 2:15 The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

Last time we ended by looking very briefly at this important verse, and we emphasized how helpful it will be to us if we firmly grasp what Paul is saying. He means that when we are born again and thus indwelt, led, and taught by the Spirit through God’s Word, *our eyes and mind are opened to judge, to evaluate, to understand, ourselves, mankind in general, and the unsaved person. We are, by the Spirit through the Bible, enabled to know God, to understand His plan*

*of redemption in Christ, to know and believe that Christ is coming again. All things, you see.*

But these things are a fog to the natural man. He is blind to them. And yet, he insists upon judging, analyzing, evaluating you, the Christian, even though his conclusions are absolutely false. He sees you as a fool, and yet you have the wisdom of God. He regards you as a troubler of Israel, when, like Ahab, he himself is the troubler. The unregenerate man is absolutely incapable of rightly judging the person who is in Christ.

You are going to be judged and pronounced guilty, regarded as a fool, if you know Christ. If you are a new man in Christ, a new creation, then you are an alien and stranger to this world, and the world does not like you at all. You will be blamed, you will be maligned and accused – *but you are not to be judged by the worldling.* The man who rejects Christ is the fool. He is the troublemaker.

This morning then we want to

move on into this third chapter of Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. It begins this way:

1Co 3:1-9 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. (2) I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, (3) for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

(4) For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

(5) What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (8) He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. (9)

For we are God's fellow workers.  
You are God's field, God's  
building.

The first thing we need to do as we come to this chapter is to address a very common and even widespread false teaching which is based upon Paul's opening words here:

*“But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh”*

And you will notice that he repeats this:

*“you are still of the flesh”*

And –

*“you are still of the flesh.”*

From these statements, in 1943, the president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer, wrote a book entitled, He That is Spiritual, which had a rather wide influence in conservative churches. Dallas Theological Seminary, has had a very significant influence upon the evangelical church. The

Bible College and Seminary that I attended, Multnomah Seminary, in Portland, Oregon has its roots. Chuck Swindoll became the President of Dallas at one time. And another very widespread error originated at Dallas a few decades ago – the so-called Lordship Salvation theme which claimed that because salvation is *entirely of grace*, it is a false gospel to include *repentance* in the gospel. That a person can be saved by faith and never actually obey Christ by submitting to Him as Lord.

But this is how Chafer's book opens:

THERE is an obvious difference in the character and quality of the daily life of Christians. This difference is acknowledged and defined in the New Testament. There is also a possible improvement in the character and quality of the daily life of many Christians. This improvement is experienced by all such Christians who fulfil certain conditions. These conditions, too, form an important theme in the Word of God. The

Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, has divided the whole human family into three groups: (1) The “natural man,” who is unregenerate, or unchanged spiritually; (2) the “carnal man,” who is a “babe in Christ,” and walks “as a man”; and (3) the “spiritual” man. These groups are classified by the Apostle according to their ability to understand and receive a certain body of Truth, which is of things “revealed” unto us by the Spirit. Men are vitally different one from the other as regards the fact of the new birth and the life of power and blessing; but their classification is made evident by their attitude toward things revealed. In 1 Cor. 2:9 to 3:4 this threefold classification is stated.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. He That Is Spiritual . Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Chafer taught the so-called “carnal Christian” doctrine and claimed that Paul taught it here in our text. Chafer said that there are two kinds of Christians – the carnal and the spiritual. He insisted that Paul was

teaching, in this passage, that some Christians are of an actual category – carnal. Of the flesh. That this state is their actual condition.

Listen to Chafer again:

BY various terms the Bible teaches that there are two classes of Christians: those who “abide in Christ,” and those who “abide not”; those who are “walking in the light,” and those who “walk in darkness”; those who “walk by the Spirit,” and those who “walk as men”; those who “walk in newness of life,” and those who “walk after the flesh”; those who have the Spirit “in” and “upon” them, and those who have the Spirit “in” them, but not “upon” them; those who are “spiritual” and those who are “carnal”; those who are “filled with the Spirit,” and those who are not. All this has to do with the quality of daily life of saved people, and is in no way a contrast between the saved and the unsaved.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. He That Is Spiritual . Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Now, why should we be so concerned with this error? *Because where it is taught and embraced, unsaved people who claim to be Christians but whose life is characterized by the flesh rather than the Spirit, are going to be pronounced saved.* And this is exactly what is so typical in the churches today. “Well, he/she is just a carnal Christian. He/she believes in Christ but has not attained to this higher state of the ‘spiritual’ Christian.” And thus unregenerate people are misled, the church invites unsaved people into its membership, salvation in Christ becomes a kind of easy believism, no repentance required.

Further, a kind of spiritual elitism is established in the church by this error. There are the lower class carnal Christians, and then there are the spiritual, the higher class, the ones who have “attained.” Have you not seen this kind of thing promoted among Christians? In many local churches, there will be individuals for instance who are regarded as special. As being of a higher level than most of the rest of the members. They are the ones

who claim to have a deeper understanding of the things of God, whose prayers are particularly spiritual, and so on. This kind of arrogance effects much damage to others and hinders the rest in their walk with Christ. “Oh, she is soooo spiritual. I could never be like her.” “If you want to understand the deeper things, he is the one to go to.” In fact, there is NOTHING spiritual about such thinking. It is arrogant and fleshly. Just give it time and look behind the veil of such “spiritual” people who consider themselves better than the lower types. What will you inevitably find? *The flesh! Sin!*

And so it is very important for us to realize that this teaching has been around in conservative churches for quite a long time and its effects are still felt among us.

How then do we conclude that this division of Christians into carnal and spiritual classes is false? That this is not what Paul taught here? It really is not that difficult to understand what he intended when he told the Corinthians “*could not address you as spiritual people, but*

*as people of the flesh.”*

Is this how Paul characteristically describes the Corinthians? No! Let me show you:

**1Co 1:1-2** Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, (2) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

**1Co 1:4-7** I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, (5) that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, (6) even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, (7) so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

**1Co 1:30** But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and

**righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,**

And particularly note this statement:

**1Co 2:14-15** But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (15) But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.

How many kinds of people are there, according to Paul? Two and only two. The natural man and the spiritual man. The unsaved man, and the saved man.

And you can go right on through this epistle to find that Paul addresses the Corinthians in these same kinds of terms:

- Those who have been sanctified in Christ
- You are not lacking in any gift
- You are in Christ Jesus

And notice in particular this:

**1Co 3:16** Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

And again:

**1Co 6:11** Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

There are many more such statements in this letter and in Paul's second letter to Corinth as well which underscore the same thing. The Corinthians, for all of their wrong, worldly thinking which was still influencing their behavior, were spiritual people *because the Holy Spirit had regenerated them and indwelt them*. They were the temple of God! Their church did not consist of two categories of Christians.

Listen to R.C. Sproul on this:

One of the great and ghastly errors—not just error but heresy—that permeates the evangelical world today is the doctrine of the carnal Christian. The doctrine of the carnal Christian was first set forth in a theological framework that taught this: that at regeneration the Holy Spirit can come in and save a person without changing the person at all. There had to be a second stage where there was lordship introduced on the throne of the soul for a person to be Spirit-filled and so on and not be carnal. But the idea was that you could be a believer and be altogether carnal. Now the Bible says we are carnal, we're sold under sin, and as long as we're in this life we still have a certain “fleshiness” that accompanies our walk as Christians, but if you're 100 percent flesh and 100 percent carnal, you're 100 percent unconverted. [Ligonier Ministries]

And again, also from Ligonier:

Continuing our discussion of perseverance, we will today focus on the issue of the “carnal”

Christian. Advocates of carnal Christianity teach that people can receive Jesus as Savior without necessarily submitting to Him as Lord. Essentially, this means that a person is saved if he confesses Christ, even if he never tries to live according to Jesus' commandments.

Such an understanding marks a significant innovation in the history of theology. We who are heirs of the Reformation affirm the necessity of good works in the Christian life, even though these deeds can never merit God's favor. Advocates of carnal Christianity say that to affirm that good works are required of the believer is to deny that justification is by faith alone.

This claim reveals how seriously the proponents of carnal Christianity misunderstand the doctrine of justification. Scripture clearly teaches that we are justified not by works, but by faith alone ([Gal. 2:16](#)). Yet it also tells us justifying faith is living faith, revealing itself in good works of obedience to Christ ([James 2:17–](#)

[18](#)). We cannot be saved and utterly fail to follow the way of Jesus. To love Christ is to obey Him ([John 14:15](#)) even though our obedience will be imperfect until we are glorified. Many who claim to be Christians lack saving faith ([Matt. 7:21](#)), and proponents of carnal Christianity provide false assurance when they say we can trust in Jesus as Savior without following Him as Lord.

A war within between the Holy Spirit and the flesh (our old sin nature) characterizes the life of the true Christian ([Rom. 7:13–20](#); [Gal. 5:16–24](#)). Sometimes the flesh seems to be winning more battles than the Spirit ([1 Cor. 3:1–4](#)), especially when we are spiritual infants. This does not mean we are not saved; that we desire to serve Jesus and have some good works proves otherwise. This desire and its attendant praiseworthy deeds do not justify us, but they are fruits of the change of life that ensues when God declares us righteous in His sight by faith alone. And as we grow into maturity, the victory over sin Christ won for us on the cross will be increasingly manifest



in our lives as by the Spirit we put to death the desires of the flesh ([Rom. 6:1–14](#)).

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/carnal-christian-tt>

Alright then, so what DID Paul mean when he said this? –

**1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.**

He simply meant, in this rebuke, that the Corinthians were still thinking like the world around them. They were listening to the Greek cultural world with all of its philosophers and false concepts rather than putting those ideas away and hearing the Spirit in Paul’s teaching and preaching. Gordon Fee explains:

“Paul makes a frontal attack and pronounces the Corinthians as not spiritual at all. Indeed, they are just the opposite; they are ‘fleshly’ – still thinking like mere human beings, those who do not have the

Spirit. *With this charge, Paul exposed himself to centuries of misunderstanding.* But his concern is singular: not to suggest classes of Christians or grades of spirituality, but to get them to stop *thinking* like the people of this present age. Secondly, he wants them to stop *behaving* like the people of the present age, which is the point at hand. Their quarrels become Exhibit A of Paul’s charge. Their behavior is that of ‘mere humans.’ Paul of course does not mean to say they do not have the Spirit. They do; and that is the problem, because they are thinking and behaving otherwise. The argument has considerable bite, therefore, because his ultimate point is: *‘Stop it! People of the Spirit simply must stop behaving the way you are!’*” [First Corinthians, Gordon Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament].

What then was the condition of the Corinthian church? Well, it was the same as that of so many local churches today!

**1Co 3:2-3** 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, (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?

- The Bible, God's Word
- Prayer
- Keeping the Lord's Day and faithfully assembling together in the local church
- Baptism
- The Lord's Table
- Hearing the preaching and teaching of God's Word

Jealousy. Strife. Acting like worldlings. Paul had originally given them "milk, not solid food." He gave them the fundamentals of the gospel which they had believed and by which they were saved. But instead of building on that foundation and growing in Christ, they, like so many professing Christians today, remained in infancy.

Apply yourself carefully now and think about this. *Unless we apply ourselves to the means of grace that God has provided for our spiritual growth and maturation, we will remain in infancy and our sinful flesh will continue to rear its ugly head.* What are these means of grace?

Carelessness in using these means of grace will inevitably result in continued spiritual infancy, a worldly mindset, and sin. Infants are the favorite target of wolves. The wolves had been zeroing in on the Corinthians, alienating them from the Apostle Paul's ministry.

*Carelessness in the means of grace will hinder our ability to grow and hinder our ability to discern truth from error. The careless Christian will be unable to receive more of God's truth. He will gag on it.*

**Heb 5:11-14** Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (12) For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need

again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (13) For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. (14) But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

well. Next time we will plan to look at what Paul taught them, and which the Lord insists that we learn too.

Do you understand particularly this last verse? *Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.* What is that practice? It is the diligent use of the means which God has given to us for our growth in Christ.

With this rebuke, Paul now begins to teach them – about who Apostles and teachers and preachers really are, about who they themselves were and about what their church really is, and about Who really gives the growth of the church. It was long past time for the Corinthians to get their heads put on straight regarding these things, and we all need these very things as