

THE LORD'S BABIES

I Corinthians 3:1-8

Having laid down the general principles which guided and characterized his ministry, Paul returned to the subject of the divisions which existed in the church at Corinth.

In the closing verses of the previous chapter and in the first verse of this one, men are divided into three groups: the "natural," the "spiritual," and the "carnal." Each of these groups of men deserves our serious study. They are mirror-men in whom we may discover ourselves.

I. The Natural Man.

The "natural" man is an expression which includes in its scope all who, however estimable they may be in all other respects, are unregenerate. The "natural" man may be civilized and cultured. He may be educated and improved. But all of his culture and improvement are within the realm of his nature. He lacks the taste for the things of God. He neither receives nor has the ability to understand spiritual truth. He has only the natural power of the unregenerated mind.

The "natural" man represents life on the level of instinct, moderated more or less by conscience and environment. He lives the one-dimensional life of self and sense. His own emotions, desires, instincts and appetites govern him. He lives on the plane where selfish desire is the lion that roars and rules, where people frankly want their own way and, so far as they can, they get it. The man who is living on this level and is content with it lacks the capacity to understand and appreciate spiritual values and virtues. To him they are folly. Consequently, he is indifferent to them, or spurns them, or perhaps even scoffs at them.

"Natural" man at his best, with all of his respectability and amiability, cannot understand divine things. When you talk to him about the wondrous truths of God's Word, he will look at you in amazement and will say, "I do not see the importance of these things."

What every "natural" man needs is life from above. This life is spiritual and comes through the experience which we call the new birth. When one is born again or from above, he becomes a member of the second group.

II. The Spiritual Man.

The "spiritual" man is one who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. He possesses physical life and spiritual life. He is no longer dominated by self, but is guided by the Holy Spirit. He has spiritual discernment that will enable him to recognize the things that differ. He is able to see the difference between what is of God and what is of man, what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit, what is of the new and what is of the old nature. He has the ability to appreciate spiritual truths. He knows how to enjoy spiritual things.

III. The Carnal Man.

The "carnal" man is a Christian who is dominated by the fleshly part of his being. He is a Christian in whom the life of faith is mixed with survivals, here and there, of the old selfishness. Self has had its back broken, but it is still able to kick.

The "carnal" man has been regenerated, he has received a new nature, his spirit has been quickened into newness of life, but the man finds that he is still under the

power of the old fleshly nature in a large measure. He is a saved man, but behaving like one who is not. He is a man in Christ, but living like one in the world. He refuses to yield to the Spirit and conform to His wishes, choosing rather to follow in the wake of his own conceptions and carnal promptings.

Paul addressed the Corinthians as "brethren" and then referred to them as "babies." Does a greater joy ever come to a home than the advent of a baby? We love babies, but none of us wants them to remain such. All the joy of babyhood passes when there is no growth. One of the great delights of parents is to watch the development and growth of their little ones.

The Corinthians were Christians, but they had not made any progress toward spiritual maturity. They were in a condition of arrested development. They were in a state of spiritual infancy. They had not grown up. They were still immature spiritually. Paul declared that when he was with them they were not strong enough for the solid food he was prepared to give, and their condition had not improved at the time of his writing them. Since they were just spiritual babies, he could not unfold to them the things that he wanted to reveal. Instead of being able to consume solid food, they were weak, anaemic, milk-drinking infants. Because they could not assimilate adult food, they had to have a diet adapted to babies, so Paul had kept them on milk. Not only had he fed them with milk, but they were still unable to be fed with meat. They were still just big babies. In like manner today, every pastor has a number of the Lord's babies in his church. If he dares to give them the strong meat of the Word, they have spiritual dyspepsia.

Some characteristics of the Lord's babies:

1. They are basically selfish.
Paul tells us that the carnal man behaves like a baby. How does a baby act? To prove to you that a baby is basically selfish, I submit the laboratory of an ordinary living room floor. Put down some toys, invite some friends who have youngsters, put them on the floor with your child and his or her toys and watch the experiment develop. Unless there is some outside interference you may expect trouble, for that baby of yours will resent another child taking what belongs to him or her. His selfish nature will not permit him to do anything else. The toys are his and any attempt to share them with another is not according to his nature.
2. They are jealous.
Try to get a baby to let you pick it up and it will refuse you. But take another child into your lap and immediately the first one will get jealous and demand that you take it. Jealousy is to be distinguished from envy in that an envious person desires to deprive another of what he has, whereas a jealous individual wants to have the same or the very same sort of thing for himself.
3. They demand attention.
Babies require that others shall do a lot for them. Walk into a nursery and observe the squalling babies that want something done for them. They demand that somebody look after them. Our Lord's babies in the church want their pastor to visit them in their homes, even though they never visit him in the church. They are quick to want the church to do something for them, but they are very slow about doing anything for the church.
4. They have to be coaxed to do things.
You can give a child a package of chewing gum or a lolly-pop and he will do almost anything you ask him. Many Christians are just like that, they have to be coaxed and begged to do something.
5. They want to have their own way.

Give them their way in things and they will play, but cross them in the slightest and you are headed for trouble. Like Diotrefes, they want to be first. Did you ever see a church member like that? With many, so long as they are leading the meeting, or heading this or that, they are cooperative. But let them be obliged to take second place, or yield to another's wishes in a matter, and their feelings are hurt. Like spoiled babies, they get angry, draw up in a corner and sulk, refusing to have anything more to do with the church or scarcely anybody else. Spoiled babies either cry or pout, and sometimes they do both. Which ever they do is very unbecoming. Many of the Lord's babies get mad at the preacher, or at somebody in the church, or at the church itself, and then go home and sulk. These peevish babies are always complaining about the preacher ~~or the preacher~~ or the preaching, the saints or the singing, the time or the temperature, the milk or the meat.

6. They require amusement.

Babies are fond of toys. They must have their playthings even in church. They constantly want somebody to attend and amuse them. So it is with church babies. They want baby talk instead of spiritual food. They do not want scriptural sermons. They like the tinsel better than the truth. They like the showy better than the scriptural. They like the catchy rather than the consecrated. They like the world better than they do the Word. They do not see any harm in the questionable things of the world. The deeper truths of Scripture are not of any concern to them.

7. They are governed by feelings.

Church babies are moved by their moods rather than by principles. They come to church when they feel like it. They attend church because they like the preacher. Don't count on them if the weather is not just right. Poor things just must not take any chances. Don't count on them if the sermon doesn't suit them. The little darlings might get tired. Don't count on them at all if money is mentioned. The little dears never have any money. Don't count on them to take a stand for Christ, His Word or His church. The poor little things can't stand. Don't ask help from them. The poor little things need help. Be satisfied to give them a bottle and keep them quiet while the church grown-ups keep busy with the Lord's work.

8. They tattle on one another.

It is a characteristic of children to tattle on their playmates. Many immature Christians continually tell tales about others. Did you ever belong to a sewing circle; one of these stitch and chatter societies, where they take one stitch to every six chatters? Many of the Lord's babies seem to enjoy such tale-bearing.

Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.

Our Lord's babies are of various ages. Some of them have faces that are wrinkled with age. Many of them are too big and too old for baby carriages, but not too old for church nurseries. It is a tragic picture to see men and women who have been saved for years, and yet acting like spiritual babies. When they should be feeding others with the solid food of the Word, they themselves are feeding from bottles. They are milk-drinkers and not meat-eaters. What a pity that so many Christians are parasitic consumers. They are content to have someone find their food for them. Many of them have ceased to pray, being satisfied with having others pray for them. They refuse to do any church work because they say they pay their preacher to do it for them. One of the tragedies of the minister's life is that he has to keep on preaching to church members who actually glory in their long babyhood, whereas they ought to be teachers of the gospel instead of belonging to the cradle roll.

When Paul focused his camera on these carnal Christians he caught them fussing and quarreling over certain leaders in the church. They spent their energy discussing and defending the virtues of men rather than proclaiming the message. Instead of being united around their Lord, they were divided over their leaders. Instead of unity in Christ, it was division into factions. That sort of thing is a public scandal to the cause of Christ. Their mistake was in putting men before the message. While each was clamoring for his

man, they were all forgetful of the fact that, after all, Paul and Apollos and Cephas were only water-boys in the garden of Christ's church, and that God alone can give success and fruitfulness to the Christian enterprise.

As one thinks of people fussing and wrangling in a church, he is reminded of the little girl's prayer: "Lord, make the bad people good; and, please, Lord, make the good people nice."

What about these men around whom they were forming their cliques? Paul said that he and Apollos were "ministers." They were men running errands for someone else. They were under authority, going where they were sent, doing what they were bidden. Were they the servants of men or of God? Doubtless you have heard preachers say they were the servants of the people. If they were, they ought not to have been in the pulpits of New Testament churches. If preachers are the servants of the people, then they must do the will of the people and speak their minds. On the other hand, the servant of God wears no chains and is not bound by any commitments. It is his business to do God's will and speak God's mind and message. God will bestow upon him the reward that his labor deserves.

Now that I have brought before you a word picture of these three men, you can easily classify yourself. On which plane do you live, natural, spiritual or carnal? If you belong in the first class, never having experienced the new birth, look now to Christ Who "bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Receive Him now as your Saviour. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

If you are yet carnal, then pass from that plane to the spiritual. Starve out the old nature. That is the only nature which causes anybody to act the part of a baby. "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Then, feed the new nature with the Word of God. The sad thing about so many Christians is that they starve the new nature and feed the old one.