

MR. CARNAL

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-3

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.

For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

There's an old American folk song called "Billy Boy."

Here's a stanza, "Oh, where have you been, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? Oh, where have you been, charming Billy? I have been to seek a wife, she's the joy of my life, she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother."

Here's more, "Did she bid you to come in, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? Did she bid you to come in, charming Billy? Yes, she bade me to come in, there's a dimple in her chin. She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother.

As the song goes on you learn this "*young thing*" has a dimple... makes cherry pie... has ringlets in her hair.

But there's a problem. Charming Billy is in love with a girl who is apparently too young to leave home. "*She's a young thing and cannot leave her mother.*" *The line gives you the impression Billy's girl is still a teenager...*

But listen to the final stanza, "How old is she, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? How old is she, charming Billy? Three times six, and four times seven, twenty-eight and eleven - she's a young

thing and cannot leave her mother.” Billy’s girl is not such a “*young thing*” after all.

Add it up... *Three times six, plus 4 times 7 - that’s 46. Then 28 and 11... Billy’s “young thing” is 85 years old.*

All of a sudden you’re concerned about Billy’s girl. This is a folk song about a dysfunctional personality.

By the time you’re 85 you’re expected to grow up and move out. If you’re still clutching on to your mama’s apron strings at 85 there’s something wrong.

It’s time to stop being a “*young thing*” and mature!

And the same is true for us spiritually!

This was Paul’s concern about the Christians in Corinth. The church was full of dysfunctional believers.

At this stage in the development of their faith, Paul expected them to show some maturity. Instead, they were acting like “*babes.*” They were legitimate believers, but their spiritual growth was being stunted.

Paul coins a term to describe them. In Chapter 3, Paul refers to the believers in Corinth as “*carnal.*”

1 Corinthians 3 begins, “*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*” Paul had hoped to speak to the Corinthians as “*spiritual people,*” but he could not.

Realize, in today’s world a lot gets categorized under the banner of “*spiritual.*” The term has been broadened to include anything relating to the non-tangible world.

Everything from animism to altruism - from yoga stretching to the occult - from Buddhism to belly-button meditation gets labeled “**spiritual.**” It’s become a catch-all term for anything *non-material*. When folks today talk of being “**spiritual,**” it could mean anything from them attending an AA meeting to being a white witch.

But Paul’s idea of “**spiritual**” and “**natural**” is far more specific. The spiritual man has the Holy Spirit, not just *any spirit*. He carries in him, “**the mind of Christ.**”

As Paul said in 2:8, the spiritual man recognizes the Jesus, who the rulers crucified, as “**the Lord of glory.**”

Remember in chapter 2, Paul divided humanity into two groups - the **natural man** and the **spiritual man**.

The **natural man (or woman)** is the person who doesn’t know Christ. Humans are sinners by nature. We’re born alienated from God. In fact, Paul says that to the natural man the things of God are foolishness.

On our own, the natural man or woman has no supra-natural ability. Thus, left to themselves they spiral toward destruction. Sin and rebellion - ignorance and prejudice - *just come **natural** for the natural man.*

The natural person’s only input is what’s physical, and cosmetic, and temporal - that’s where he or she leans for fulfillment. It destines them to disappointment!

But eye has not seen, nor has ear heard what is available to the man or woman who has God’s Spirit.

The **spiritual man (or woman)** is animated by the love of God. The Holy Spirit dwells inside them to convey the deep

things of God. He gives them the desire to please God and to loves others. The Spirit of God makes us privy to “**the mind of Christ.**” The Holy Spirit is the Christian’s extra-sense, his *super power*.

Of course, this doesn’t mean, the *spiritual person* is a *perfect person*. He or she still lives in a body prone to sin. And when they commit the inevitable, it grieves them - for their sin goes against the new nature God has given them - a nature that loves Him and others.

This is why every Christian needs to grow in faith - and learn to live out who they really are in Christ!

There’s the **natural man** and **spiritual man**, but now in Chapter 3 Paul brings up another type of person.

He calls this man or woman the “**carnal**” person.

The Latin word “**carne**” means “**flesh.**” And I think Latin whenever I eat a bowl of Kathy’s chili. My wife puts meat in her chili - *lots of flesh* in the chili - that’s what makes it “**chili con carne**” or “**chili with meat.**”

“**Carnal**” describes a *believer* - a potentially “**spiritual**” person - but who’s life is oriented toward the flesh. **He or she knows God, but they live as if they don’t.**

Realize in his letters, Paul uses two very similarly sounding words in different ways. In 2 Corinthians 3:3 Paul speaks of God writing His law on human hearts.

God’s Spirit writes His will on “**tablets of flesh.**”

The Greek word is “**sarkinos**” or “**fleshy.**” It means “**human**” and “**living**” as opposed to “**stone tablets.**”

Realize, there's nothing intrinsically wicked about the human epidermis - *or flesh*. God never said there was anything evil about the human body and its functions.

It was a heretical group called the Gnostics that adopted the unbiblical dichotomy that *spirit is good and flesh is evil*. Thus, *praying or reading your Bible* is more pleasing to God than *eating or having sex with your wife*. That's not necessarily true. Both are holy and pleasing to God when done to His glory and honor.

Enjoying a day in the park with your kids can be just as "*spiritual*" as a day fasting and praying in church.

The "*spiritual*" person doesn't stop living in the real world. He or she is still *fleshy*. We like to eat, and sleep, and groom, and work out, and enjoy the *fleshy life* that God has given us. "*Fleshy*" isn't sinful.

Yet here when Paul writes of being "*carnal*" he uses a different Greek word. Rather than "*sarkinos*" or "*fleshy*," it's "*sarkikos*." It's from the root word "*flesh*," but it carries a different sense. Translate it "*flesh-ly*."

There's a difference between "*fleshy*" and "*fleshly*."

It's one thing to be human, and live the life God gives us... but it's another to do so with our backs to God, as if all that exists is what's physical, and outward, and temporary - as if the only satisfaction obtainable to us is what's to be had from this life. To be "*carnal*" or "*fleshly*" is to have God, but to live life ignoring Him.

The carnal Christian possesses God's Spirit, but the Spirit doesn't possess him. He hasn't allowed God to shape and

color his outlook. Rather than live submitted to God and to the glory of God, the carnal person is still governed by his sinful urges and her natural appetites.

The course of his or her life is always drifting away from God, rather than navigating towards Him.

Actually, the NT will often speak of a person who tries to please God, but does so “in the flesh.” As if it’s up to him and his strength. He’s leaning on human effort, rather than God’s power. It’s all about his pride.

You can even *serve God* while being “carnal.”

Sadly, you see this all the time. Christians doing things for God, even in the name of God, but not in the way that Jesus taught us to do them. When a Christian bullies, or manipulates, or pressures - rather than rely on God’s Spirit, and being spiritual - we act carnal.

This was the problem Paul saw in Corinth - no one was under the influence of the Holy Spirit and relying on God’s power - no one was maturing in their faith.

As Paul put it, they were all “*babes in Christ.*”

A couple of years ago, I saw an NBC News article entitled, “Big Baby Boom: Supersize Deliveries Have Doctors Worried.” It seems that over the last few decades there’s been a spike in the birth of big babies.

Recently, a Pennsylvania woman had a 13 pound 12 ounce “*little*” girl... A German baby weighed in at 13.5 pounds... This year a Florida baby set a hospital record, Avery Ford was born 14 pounds and 1 ounce...

In the last 7 years baby weights have risen 16%.

But not even Avery Ford tops the British baby, "*little George*." George King weighed 15 pounds, 7 ounces at birth. His father, Ryan, took back the infant clothes they had, and brought him home in PJs meant for a six month old. At six weeks George was 26 inches long.

Today, hospitals are seeing a rash of **big babies, but so are churches**. There are believers in Jesus who appear to be grown, but spiritually they're still infants.

Understand, it's okay to *be born a big baby*, as long as you don't *stay a big baby!* We need to mature.

Nowhere in the Scriptures will you find playpens, or pacifiers, or teething toys in heaven. Between *getting saved* and *going to heaven* God wants us to grow up!

When my daughter-in-laws were pregnant they both got an interesting baby shower gift - one that I'd never seen. It wasn't around when I was parenting little boys.

It's called a "**pee-pee teepee**." The name alone gives away it's purpose. It's a device that assists in the changing of a baby boy's diaper. A washable cloth cone caps off a certain part of the male anatomy.

It protects the diaper-changer from being fired on by an uncontrolled bladder. I can't believe it's just now been invented and being marketed to new parents.

I'm sure a regular diaper-changer's first priority is to help their little boy get his bladder under control - but until then, **the pee-pee teepee** is a good idea.

And this is God's immediate goal for the Christian.

He wants us to live *under control* - *under the control of the Holy Spirit*. He doesn't want us to be carnal, or live *fleshly* - oriented toward the things of this world.

Just spraying about - living randomly without a clear aim - with no real purpose... No, God wants our lives targeted on the things of His Kingdom. He wants you and me to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

A **spiritual person** is *under control* - whereas, a **baby** and a **Carnal Christian** are two people *out-of-control*.

And often we assume our out-of-control immaturity is the result of an insufficient diet... *If we were just being fed better we'd be stronger! If the pastor did a better job spiritually feeding his flock then folks would grow! His sermons must lack the proper biblical nutrients.*

This is how a lot of Christian like to explain their juvenile faith. Rather than take responsibility for themselves and their family, it's easier for them to blame their immaturity on the church... *the pastor is boring - the youth are half-hearted - the kids get neglected...* And the answer is a change of scenery.

But Paul says the problem in Corinth was just the opposite. It wasn't the lack of solid food that caused their carnality. It was their carnality that impaired their ability to digest the food Paul wanted to feed them.

He tells them in verse 2, **"I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal."** The problem with the Corinthians wasn't the food in the cupboard,

it was their inability to chew and swallow. This limited them to sipping milk.

Their own carnality created their dietary deficiency.

You'll find some Bible passages require the reader to have teeth. You have to chew on it, and mull it over, and break it down... before you can digest its truth.

Hebrews 5:13 tells us, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The spiritual meat-eaters have grown some teeth.

"By reason of use" they've sharpened their senses.

Spiritual maturity takes more than just adding spiritual calories - packing on more knowledge - it involves applying what you know. You take the biblical truth you've learned and exercise it in real-life - you put it into practice - this is what adds muscle to your faith!

If God is teaching you to trust Him, start with your money and give Him an offering... If He's dealing with your fears, identify one and face it head on... If He's teaching you patience, get involved with a teenager...

Hey, to grow spiritually start applying what you know.

The carnal Christianity looks around and thinks the grass is greener, but he's not watering his own lawn!

It's cute to watch a newborn nurse, or suck a bottle.

But if it's an 18 year-old still chugging Similac, we'd consider it despicable. And this was the problem in Corinth. Their carnality had kept them from growing.

Actually, one way to tell if you're a babe or if you're a maturing Christian is to ask, *what's my spiritual diet?*

The carnal Christian *sips skim milk*. It's all his digestive track can handle. Whereas, a mature believer orders filet mignon. He enjoys *a meaty Bible study...*

A carnal Christian enjoys *Bible stories*, but lacks a taste for *Bible doctrine...* A babe in Christ *knows about God*, but a spiritual man aspires to *know God Himself..*

The carnal Christian marvels at *what God does*, but the spiritual person wants to worship *who God is...*

A spiritual babe likes *learning biblical principles* that served his interests, but he falls short of *adopting a biblical perspective* that changes his own outlook...

The carnal Christian can have *a mind full of Bible facts*, but a spiritual person has *a heart full of love...*

Again, it's okay to be a spiritual babe for a season. But too many believers stay put. They never graduate kindergarten, and grow on to be a mature Christian.

In verse 3 Paul goes on to list another defining characteristic of a carnal Christian, **“For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”** Envy, and strife, and division... *you could sum it up, the inability to get along with others* - is proof of a Christian's immaturity.

And this is what was happening in the Church at Corinth. It was the equivalent of a spiritual nursery.

The believers were acting like babies. They were demanding their own way. Refusing to cooperate.

In the Corinthian Church, when it came to attitude, there wasn't much difference between what went on in the sanctuary and what occurred in the toddler's room.

Carnal believers and babies have lots of similarities..

For one, **they whine when they don't get their way.** How quickly a toddler will stick out his bottom lip and pout. I've seen it in babies *and in carnal Christians.*

In fact, this is the #1 enemy of today's Church!

We live in a culture that wants to ban prayer and the Bible from the public square... A culture that condones abortion - mocks Christian morality - is redefining gender and marriage - embraces false religions - may soon brand the Bible's teaching on homosexuality as hate speech... These are huge battles, yet churches today quibble and squabble over the pettiest of stuff...

Carnal Christians don't like the style of music, or the sanctuary colors, or the order of service, or the length of the sermon. We're at war. The church needs a wartime mentality, instead *we act like spoiled brats.*

Hey, changes will occur when our Christianity costs us. When being a Christian starts to hurt, we'll set aside our pettiness and love one another. *But if we did it now,* perhaps God would send the revival we need.

Yet Carnal Christians and newborns have other similarities... **They can't stand on their own, and thus, have to be held.** It's true of a child and a new believer.

When I dedicate a baby, often I have to hold it's head. The neck muscles aren't developed enough to brace the weight of its head. It has to be supported.

And the same is true of the faith of a new Christian.

As long as a carnal Christian is in the right company and exposed to the right environment he or she will grow - they'll feed off the faith of other believers - but remove the external *props* and their faith begins to *flop*.

Another problem with babies and carnal Christians is **their lack of discernment. They're easily deceived.**

This week I spent some time with my two year old grandkids, and I did the gag where I pinched their nose, pulled it off, showed it, then put it back on.

They giggled and squealed - and as soon as I pulled it off, they wanted it reattached. I'm not sure whether they were just enjoying the attention, or if they really believed I was yanking their nose off their face.

But they seemed genuinely gullible. Little kids and Carnal Christians are prone to be extremely naive.

This is why the cultist preys on believers who don't know basic Bible truths - who've yet to learn the Scriptures. New Christians lack spiritual discernment.

It takes a while for the Holy Spirit to tutor them and get them up to speed. In the meantime they need help.

Those of us who've been around the block a time or two need to take a younger Christian under our wing.

Here's another trait shared by both babes in Christ and babies. [They haven't learned to feed themselves.](#)

First they need the reflexes - then learn the direction to their mouth - and then how to control the spoon.

And it's the same for a New Christian. At first, he or she has to be spoon-fed by pastors and mentors.

It takes time to develop the coordination and skill to read the Bible and draw out its truths. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes a while for a newbie to get acclimated to a book they may've never seriously read.

This past week I read about Arlo. On his wedding day his grandpa gave him and his new wife a leather Bible. Their names were embossed on the front cover.

Arlo and his wife sent a thank-you note to grandpa, and acknowledged the gift, but they never opened the Bible. Arlo left it in the box and put it in the closet.

But over the next several years, every time Arlo spoke to his grandpa, gramps would ask how he was enjoying the Bible. Finally, out of curiosity, Arlo got the Bible out of the closet, and opened it up. At the front page of Genesis there was a crisp new 20 dollar bill.

Actually, at the beginning of every new book there was a 20 dollar bill. There ended up being over \$1300 in that Bible. And Arlo would've never found it had he not opened his Bible. There are spiritual treasures you'll forfeit if you don't open and

study your Bible! The mature Christian learns to feed himself of God's Word.

Also both babies and Carnal Christians **have short attention spans. They get easily distracted.** A baby sees *something that glitters or hears a distinctive rattle*, and it pulls their interest away from what really matters.

The same happens to Christians. We get distracted.

We know that life is following Jesus, but we see a thing that glitters, or hear a tempting rattle, and it pulls at us. We're drawn away by a foolish curiosity.

It's like a fish. It sees the lure in the water. Probably even sees the hook. But it shimmers and glimmers, and it just can't help itself. It takes the bait and it's life is over. We need to sedate our hyper-active curiosity.

Speaking of fish... recently, Microsoft surveyed 2000 customers and discovered the average attention span has shrunk. At the turn of the century it was 12 seconds. Today, we lose concentration in 8 seconds.

Microsoft concludes it's the effect smart phones, and internet surfing, and multi-screens has on the brain.

But what's funny is that other scientists have determined a goldfish's attention span to be 9 seconds.

This means a goldfish has a longer attention span than an average human. Sounds fishy, but it's true.

And just as **babies end up the center of attention, a carnal Christian demands the same.** It was humorously said of

Teddy Roosevelt, “He wanted to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral.”

Apparently, ole Teddy had a love for the limelight.

He wasn't shy about taking the center stage. And this is the case with both babies and carnal Christians.

They both live a self-centered life.

Just this past week I noticed again our selfie culture.

Everywhere you turn today folks are taking and posting their selfies. People focus the lens of their camera not on the beautiful vistas in front of them, or the intriguing portraits around them, but on themselves.

Surprise, surprise, we're preoccupied with ourselves.

It's interesting, that of all the photos taken today by adults ages 18 to 24, 30% are selfies.

Some social observers worry that the family photo album - the book so treasured by past generations - a catalogue of memories that include our relatives and friends - will be replaced by pages of self snapshots.

Welcome to the selfie generation! It's another example of our childishness and self-centeredness. To understand the **Carnal** Christian check out the nursery.

It's interesting to me how Paul phrases the ending of verse 3. It's a question, “**are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**” He infers that Christians are not suppose to be just “**mere men**” or “**mere women.**”

We learned last time we have *supra-natural powers.*

We have the Holy Spirit living inside us. We're supernaturally enabled. Remember, the astonishing words at the end of Chapter 2, "**We have the mind of Christ.**" We're now privy to Christ's wisdom and power.

What the human eye does not see, and the ear does not hear, and the mind of man cannot grasp - *the riches of Christ...* is conveyed to us by God's Spirit.

And this means God expects more from us.

Rather than act **carnal**, or be **natural**, we're called to be **spiritual** people - folks influenced by the Holy Spirit.

God holds us to a higher standard than "**mere men.**"

And this is how I think of being a father.

Neither is a dad a "**mere man.**" A father is something special in the mind and plan of God. As a dad, I'm God's representative to my children. God even gives me His name. Just as God reveals Himself to us as "**Father,**" He calls on me to be *a father* to my kids.

And there is nothing selfish, or self-centered, or self-absorbed about being a dad. It's just the opposite...

The first requirement of a good dad is to **grow up!**

Being a child's father is the most sacrificial task most of the men in this room will ever be called on to do.

A father's job is to lead and influence his family. And how can he, *in a godly way*, unless he's first under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit? It seems apparent from our text, that Carnal Christians make for lousy dads. How can you

be a *“babe in Christ”* and also be a *father*? A dad is more than a *“mere man.”*

In a CNN article by Bill Bennett, entitled, *“Why Men Are In Trouble,”* he explains how men in America have lost their way. Bennett says in 1960 men earned 60% of college degrees. In 2006 it was down to 43%. Today, women earn more degrees than men by three to two.

In 1950, 5% of working age men were unemployed. In 2010 the percentage was at an all-time high of 20%.

Today, the out-of-marriage birthrate in America is 40%... 27% of all kids now live in a home without their dad... today, 18-30 year old men spend more time daily playing video games than 12-17 year old boys...

Bennet draws this conclusion, *“If you don't believe the numbers, just ask young women about men today. You will find them talking about prolonged adolescence and men who refuse to grow up. I've heard too many young women asking, “Where are the decent single men?” There is a maturity deficit among men...”*

Apparently, this is not only a problem today, it was the situation in Paul's day among the Corinthians.

There were men in the church acting like boys!

Realize the difference between a man and a boy - **a man takes responsibility.** He answers to a higher authority. He realizes He's accountable to do things a certain way - the right way - hopefully God's way.

He understands, life is not a piece of cake. He's not expecting a handout. He *trusts God and works hard.*

Boys opt for short-cuts. They want a wife, and a job, and a house, and kids *that aren't a lot of work*. They might as well believe in Santa - he doesn't exist either.

Here's what a boy thinks... *I want money, just not a regular job... I want to own a business, but without the long hours it requires... I want sex, but not the commitment of a marriage and a family... I want a cool church, I just don't want to give anything or serve in any way...* And when a boy becomes a dad it's trouble.

Boys love their toys more than their families. *They deny it but they do*. A boy drives the nice car, while his wife drives the beater... A boy purchases a big screen, while his kid lack money to sign-up for baseball... A boy buys a guitar, while his wife struggles to make do without a washer and dryer...

Don't be a boy!

Or as Paul would put it, *"a mere man..."* The last thing your family needs is **a carnal dad**. Man up and live your life under the influence of the Holy Spirit!

Dad, here's how to be **a spiritual man** for your God and for your family... Remember the similarities we discussed between babes and carnal Christians - well, live a different kind of life. Be more than a *mere man...*

First, **stop whining** when your don't get your way. Hey, work to change the situation. Pray for God to change your situation. Trust God to work all things for *your good and His glory*. But don't whine and complain.

Second, learn to **stand on your own**. Grow a backbone. Have some convictions, dad. Take a stand.

Third, **develop discernment**. Cut your spiritual teeth. Chew on the Scripture and settle your beliefs.

Fourth, **learn to feed yourself**. Guys, don't depend on your wife to do the heavy spiritual lifting in the family. *It's not her job!* It's the man's duty to lead his family spiritually, and if he's going to be successful he has to know his Bible and has to hear from his God.

Fellows, if you don't have a devotional life where you open your Bible and listen for God every day it's time to get busy. Why would your wife and kids want to follow you, if they can't see you following Jesus?

Fifth, **develop an attention span** longer than a goldfish. A big part of being a man is the ability to overcome distractions, and focus on a goal for longer than 8 seconds. Concentrate on what really matters.

Then sixth, **stop thinking it's all about you**. It's not! When you sign up to be a dad everything changes! It's now all about mom and the kids - giving them a better life. Don't be a "selfie dad" - that's an oxymoron.

Before I got married I didn't realize how selfish I was. In retrospect, my world literally revolved around me.

But then I got married. And I found I couldn't come home after work, and just veg out - do what I wanted. My wife needed me... I had to be a little less selfish.

But then I had kids - four of them. Oh my! *Unselfish* was now the operative word. The moment I walked in the house I

had responsibilities. And it didn't stop on the weekends. Those kids needed their daddy, 24/7.

One day it dawned on me. God didn't want me to be selfish! He wanted me to be like Jesus, so He gave me a Kathy, and a Zach, and a Nat, and a Nick, and a Mack. God and life have been *weaning me* off of me.

This is what being a dad is all about. It's about growing up. It's about being **spiritual** and not **carnal**.

My question to us today would be this... "*are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*" If so, stop it.

Don't be a *mere man*. God has called you to so much more. Don't be a baby - a boy - be a real man.

In fact, be a **spiritual man...** *in Jesus name!*