

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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1 CORINTHIANS 1-2

Often churches flatter themselves with the title, “[New Testament church.](#)” Their members are proud of the fact they go to a *NT church*. Pastors make it their goal to grow *NT believers*, and build a *NT church*. *I use to think I wanted to be a part of a New Testament church...* until I read Paul’s New Testament letter to the Church at Corinth. The Corinthian Christians were a NT church, but they were a church fraught with problems.

This was a church divided.

So much so, members were suing each other in the pagan courts.

Blatant immorality was tolerated.

The God-given roles of male and female were being ignored.

Communion had become an excuse for gluttony.

Spiritual gifts were abused.

Foundational truths, like the resurrection, were being questioned.

And perhaps worst of all... *love had taken a backseat...* I want our church to embrace NT doctrine – experience NT expansion – display NT power... but if being a NT church means being like Corinth... **forget it!**

The city of Corinth was a wicked place. It was home for the kind of folks who appear on the Jerry Springer Show... *the wackos and the sickos*. Among the Greeks the phrase, “[playing the Corinthian](#)” became synonymous for drunkenness. Prostitutes were called “[Corinthian girls.](#)” The city of Corinth had a sordid reputation. Every night in Corinth 10,000 so-called “*priestesses*” left the temple of Aphrodite, and hit the streets to play the prostitute. The tricks they turned raised funds for the Temple. Sexual immorality wasn’t just tolerated in Corinth, it had been institutionalized as part of Corinthian religion.

On his Second Missionary Journey Paul spent 18 months in the seaport of Corinth. Immigration had swelled the population to half a million. And with the influx of people came every lewd and wicked practice known to man. In this *den of sin* the Holy Spirit had used Paul to build a vibrant and Spirit-filled church. It was after he left that problems developed. Rather than *the Church influencing Corinth* – *Corinth had influenced the church*. Paul was in Ephesus when he heard of problems. He pens a letter of correction. I’ve heard it said, “[Boats are made to be in the water, but you don’t want water in the boat.](#)” This is true of churches. The church is made to in the world as a witness - but in Corinth the world had gotten into the church.

Paul begins in verse 1, “[Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother...](#)”

Acts 18 speaks of Paul's time in Corinth. When he first arrived he held meetings in the Jewish synagogue. The leader of the Jews, a man named Crispus was converted. He was replaced by Sosthenes who was determined to stir up trouble for Paul and the church. Sosthenes brought Paul before the city counsel on grounds of sedition, *but his plot backfired*. The proconsul realized this was a religious matter and outside his jurisdiction so he dismissed the charges. The civil leaders were so upset with Sosthenes for wasting their time and using them to vent his hatred, they had Sosthenes beaten instead of Paul. Now look at how Paul addresses the Corinthian church. He writes with *"Sosthenes our brother."* Apparently Sosthenes concluded, *"if you can't beat them, join them."* The Jews in Corinth were having a hard time keeping a rabbi in charge of the synagogue. They were all converting to Christ.

Paul and Sosthenes write *"to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:"* Over the centuries, the church applied the term *"saint"* to special believers who demonstrated extraordinary acts of faith. But originally all believers were called saints. The word means *"set apart"* or *"dedicated."*

Once, two brothers stole a neighbor's sheep. They were caught and punished. They were branded on the forehead with *"ST"* for *"sheep thief."* One brother was so ashamed he fled from town to town hiding his mark. The other brother was repentant. He took responsibility for his crimes, and despite the stigma, stayed in the community to build a good reputation. Years later a newcomer noticed *"ST"* on the man's forehead. He asked a townsman what it meant. The man replied, *"I'm not sure, but I think it means 'saint'."* Let's all live in a such way that we're known as a saint.

Paul writes to the saints in Corinth – but also to those who are *"in every place."* That even includes Lilburn and Stone Mountain – *"in every place."*

Verse 3, *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* Grace and peace are called the Siamese twins of the NT. They go together. Which reminds me of the Twins Restaurant in NYC... The eatery is owned by twins, Debbie and Lisa Ganz. They employ 37 sets of twins. Each set of twins works the same shift, in the same outfit. If one gets sick, both people stay home. If one gets fired, they both get fired. Every night 10-20 sets of twins eat at their restaurant. There's even twin chandeliers in the dining room, and Double Mint gum on every table. Their motto reads, *"You can only make a first impression once, we make it twice."* *"Grace and Peace"* would fit in nicely at Twins Restaurant. They too work together. Grace gains a right standing with God. Peace is the result. *Grace cooks it up - then peace serves it up.* You can't have one without the other. You can't know God's *peace* until you receive God's *grace!*

Paul continues his greeting, verse 4, *"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you..."* I love Paul's phrase, they were *"enriched in everything..."* This is what Jesus does – He enriches and enhances. He not only takes away, but adds. He fills us up with good stuff.

"So that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ..." God blessed this church with a wide array of spiritual gifts... *healings, words of wisdom, discernment, unknown tongues.* Paul says it was through the gifts that *"the testimony of Christ was confirmed..."* Think of it this way, the atmosphere always contains a degree of moisture, but we realize most when it rains. Likewise, Jesus

is always among us, but His presence gets *“confirmed”* through these spiritual gifts. Later in the book we’ll learn that the Corinthians were *misusing and abusing* these spiritual gifts, but never does Paul suggest they stop *using* them. The presence of these gifts are always viewed by Paul as a positive.

Verse 8 speaks of Jesus second coming... *“who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Notice we’re cleansed and made blameless, so we can have fellowship with Jesus. This is why we’re saved – to know Christ! As a Christian we do good works - we serve – we grow... but that’s not why we were saved. Our calling is to fellowship and hang out with Jesus.

Verse 10, *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”* Here Paul tackles their first problem... The church had become fragmented. They lacked unity and harmony. *“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.”* This sister in Christ, *Chloe*, had written to Paul. She was upset that cliques had formed.

Understand up front, it’s okay to have a circle of friends at church, as long as that circle isn’t closed. Our emphasis should always be to bring people in, not keep people out. Problems occur when members polarize. One group thinks they’re better than the others – or more spiritual. Suddenly, the family of God becomes a family feud - a war zone of friction. Certainly, there are issues worth fighting for - and on those issues I’ll lead the charge. But all too often churches end up *majoring on the minors and minoring on the majors*. We divide and fight over petty, picky stuff... Christians divide over baptism - do you dunk or sprinkle... communion every week or once a quarter... King James or a newer translation... hymns or praise songs... piano or guitar... robes or blue jeans... a fiberglass pulpit or one made out of wood... pews or medal chairs... *so much trivial stuff*. I read the story of Paul Loetz. Paul took a terrible fall – punctured a lung, broke a few ribs, was bleeding internally. He was rushed to the hospital. While lying in the emergency room, he heard two doctors arguing over who would put the tube into his crushed chest. The argument became a shoving match. One doctor threatened to have the other doctor removed by the security guards. Loetz cried out, *“Please, somebody, save me!”* Two other doctors had to step in and settle the dispute. All too often this happens in the church. God brings hurting people through our doors, but we’re too busy trying to out-do or upstage each other to provide the help they need. That’s what occurred in the church at Corinth.

Verse 12, *“Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.”* The church had divided around personalities. They had gravitated toward their favorite teacher. One group shouted, *“Paul is cool - we’re into Paul, he preaches liberty. You guys are all legalists.”* The second splinter disagreed, *“We like Apollos, he gets into the Greek, and unlocks deep truths. We’re more intelligent than the rest of you.”* A third segment countered, *“We follow Pentecost Pete, ole Cephas. You can study the Bible, we’ll just flow in the power of the Spirit.”* The final schism thumbed their nose at all the rest, *“We’re too proud to learn from any human teacher. We take our orders from Jesus alone.”* But Paul writes... *“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* The answer to all the above is *“no.”* The church is *the body of Christ*. He died for us. We’re baptized into Him. The main thing is Jesus, and we should keep *the main thing the main thing*.

Paul is accusing the Corinthians of ripping apart the body of Christ. Once I read the story of a man who killed his wife and ran her body

through a wood chipper to destroy evidence. As repulsive as it might sound, this is what the Corinthians had done to the body of Christ... chopped it up. Here's the lesson for us... Don't be attracted to personalities! Teachers point us to Christ, but He is the rallying point. Jesus is the commonality greater than all our differences. Focus on Jesus and we'll stay united. I love this quote by Edwin Markham, "He drew a circle that shut me out. Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout... But Love and I had the will to win. We drew a circle that took him in." Let's seek harmony in the Body of Christ.

Verse 14, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other." Here's a verse that gives me much hope! Paul confesses he couldn't remember who he'd baptized. He'd lost track. It's so embarrassing when I ask a person if they've been baptized, and they reply, "Of course Pastor Sandy, you're the one who baptized me." While in Corinth, Paul baptized only a couple of folks. Apparently, he suspected what might happen. He'd tried to prohibit divisions over baptism.

He writes in verse 17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." Notice the distinction made between baptism and the Gospel. Certainly, in Paul's mind they were in two separate issues. There are Christian denominations, like the Church of Christ, that teach the necessity of water baptism for salvation. But if this were true, it's hard to imagine Paul being so cavalier and nonchalant about the subject. He says, "I didn't baptize any of you..." "I came to preach the Gospel, not baptize..." John 4:1-2 tells us not even Jesus baptized. His disciples handled the duties. Baptism is a person's response to the Gospel – but it's not included in the Gospel. The rite of baptism is important, but not essential.

Paul came to preach the Gospel, and "not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." Paul's teaching wasn't high philosophy, or technical theories of personality and behavior modification. He heralded the cross of Christ. He declared a harsh, brutal reality. When the Corinthians heard Paul mention "the cross" there would've been an initial resistance - a repulsion. Roman crosses were bloody and brutal. Crucifixion was rated "R" for violence. The cross is a harsh message. Paul says he didn't try to flower it up or soften the blow. Rather He proclaimed the cross of Christ – *this is what our sin deserved*. Paul allowed the message of the cross to punch us in the nose of our refined sensibilities.

Verse 18, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The Jews were impressed with power - the Greeks with philosophy. The cross was an affront to both. That an Almighty God would subject Himself to death appears foolish - even wimpy in the eyes of man. God has gone out of His way to save us in a way that insults the sources of our pride.

For it is written (and here Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14): "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." God deliberately packaged salvation in a brown paper sack. He wrapped up the expensive, sparkling diamond of salvation in newspaper. We look at the cross, and it seems foolish and weak that God would die. That's not the way we would've done it. We value strength and wisdom. But the cross pries the attributes we value out of our hands. Apparently, God could care less about human strength and wisdom. The cross forces us to humble ourselves - to come to God on His terms, and not our own.

Verse 22, “For Jews request a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Jews were attracted to power. Greeks were impressed by wisdom. “*Christ crucified*” appealed to neither! To the Jews a *martyred Messiah* was a “**stumbling block.**” The Greek word was “*scandalon*” or “*scandal.*” It was sheer scandalous to the Jews - almost blasphemous - to think that our sin would nail God to the cross. If salvation had come through an act of valor the Jews would’ve been saved. If salvation had come as an academic achievement you could’ve counted in the Greeks. But the cross was and is all about sacrifice, and love, and faith. It’s about God doing for man what man could never do for himself. Salvation comes to humble hearts that simply trust in God.

“**Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.**” The cross is God’s secret weapon. Our minds and our muscles bow before God at the cross. Only He can save us. Once, a seminary, founded by godly men, had a stone arch over its entrance. It was engraved with the words, “**We Preach Christ Crucified.**” In time ivy grew up over the arch, until the greenery covered the word “**Crucified...**” The arch read, “**We preach Christ.**” Over the years the ivy kept growing, until it covered, “**Christ**” – and today it simply reads, “**We preach.**” And this is what’s happened to the modern church. We’ve gone from preaching *Christ crucified* to just talking – that’s why we’ve lost our power.

Somewhere along the way the church decided to sanitize the cross. Clean up the blood and gore. Make Christianity more palatable to human tastes. We steered clear of the cross and emphasized Jesus’ good works. It didn’t take long though for Jesus’ teachings and miracles to become controversial, so now the church just preaches. They tell cute stories and anecdotes. Since they’ve abandoned the cross there’s no more power. We’ve forgotten the foolishness of God is wiser than men.

The cross mocks our values, and attacks our pride - *and so does the church*. The church consists of folks whom God has called out of this world, but rather than choose the rich and the famous... God has filled his church with relative nobodies. As proof, Paul points to the Corinthian believers... Verse 26, “**For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.**” The Queen of England was once asked how she was converted to Christ. She responded, “**by an 'm'.**” When asked what she meant, she explained, “**I'm thankful God said 'Not MANY noble,' rather than 'not any noble'.**”

Verse 27, “**But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are...**” God chooses the simple not the smart – the weak not the strong – the humble not the noble – *and why?* The answer is in verse 29, “**that no flesh should glory in His presence.**” God wants all the glory to go to Him. His salvation is of mercy, not merit.

People today admire *wisdom*, and *power*, and *privilege*. That’s why God chooses the cross – it’s an affront to all three. And this why He’s chosen the church! The type of people God picks out baffles our reasons - undermines our notions of power - and turns upside down our concepts of rank. For God chooses, not the smart, but the simple - not the mighty, but the frail – not the upper-crust, but the down-and-out. He wants to make sure that every knee bows before Him... “**no flesh should glory in His presence.**” Never can we say, “**God uses only the slick, or smooth, or strong, or spotless.**” He uses *the bottom of the barrel* to show He’s *on top of the world!*

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, *“He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”* He quotes Jeremiah 9. Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption! All we are, do, and hope to be is because of Jesus. *To Christ be the glory!*

Chapter 2, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” Here’s Paul’s theme... God makes choices and works in ways that deliberately insult our pride and force us to humble ourselves before Him.

He’s talked about the **cross... church...** and now he turns to the **courier** himself. God works in ways contrary to the **smarts, strength, and status** that’s so vital to man. In chapter 2 Paul describes the methods of his own ministry... He relied on *simplicity of speech* and the *power of the Holy Spirit*. Once there was a church with a painting of the crucifixion right behind the pulpit. The pastor was a big man and blocked the view. One Sunday, in his absence, a child asked his mother, “Where’s the guy who stands where we can’t see Jesus?” Paul always tried to avoid that being said of him. Rather than impress folks with his oratory skill or keen insights he just pointed to Jesus. The worse mistake a pastor can make is to use the pulpit to show-off and promote himself. Don’t ever block anyone’s view of Jesus.

Verse 2, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” There’s an ole quip, “Timing is everything.” Here, the timing of Paul’s writing may help us with our interpretation... Paul came to Corinth immediately after his experience on Mars Hill in Athens. There he tried to reason with the philosophers of Greece, but with little success. He could’ve come to Corinth with a different strategy. Rather than argue philosophy he decided to proclaim the power of *Christ crucified*.

He writes on, “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power...” Paul’s ministry did not depend on eloquence or intelligence. In fact, he made a point of being plain! He preached *Christ crucified* not *himself amplified*. Yet miracles flowed from this trembling little specimen of a man. It was obvious to everyone that Paul’s power came from the Spirit.

Helena Modjeska was a famous actress at the turn of the last century. Once at a party she was asked to perform. She presented an amazing oratory in her native tongue of Polish. The crowd was riveted to each word. Her presentation was powerful, emotion-packed, soul-stirring. It was later, that Modjeska revealed all she had done was recite the Polish alphabet. There are preachers who impress with their polish, but don’t really say anything! They can say “*nothing*” better than you’ve ever heard it before! Once, the chaplain for the insane asylum was leaving the auditorium after a particularly convoluted and confusing sermon. A mental patient pointed to him and said to his friend, “*There, but for the grace of God, go I.*”

Paul had waxed eloquent among the Athenians - and it had gotten him nowhere. I’m not saying he made a mistake in Athens. There is a time and a place for philosophical argument, but Athens had taught Paul a lesson. At the crux of person’s salvation is the cross! A person can have all his intellectual questions answered, but without facing the cross he remains unmoved. On the other hand, a doubter can come full of skepticism and be shaken to his or her core by the power of the cross. The crux is the cross! That’s what we need to share with others! Paul came to Corinth *weak physically* and *drained emotionally*. Constant opposition had rattled him. *Fear* was threatening his *faith*. But in Acts

18:9-10, while in Corinth, God came to his rescue. God spoke directly to Paul in a night vision to encourage him, and assured him of His protection. In Corinth, Paul couldn't be powerful and persuasive - he just preached the simple Gospel - and the Spirit continued to demonstrate His power. Paul reminded the Corinthians of his style - and its purpose in verse 5...

“That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.” Paul had grown weary of the world's pundits and talking heads. He put his faith in the power of God, not the human wisdom of this world. Man's wisdom will eventually come to nothing. It will fail and fade.

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” God's wisdom has never been conventional thought. Man doesn't think God's thoughts. The wisdom of God is a mystery to the mind of man. *Strength through weakness, wisdom through foolishness, life through death, victory through defeat* had never been promoted by man's wisdom. The paradox of the cross was a mystery hidden from the human mind. That mankind knew nothing of God's wisdom became apparent the day Jewish scholars called out for Jesus' blood, and ordered His execution. You can't miss it any further - the experts of religious order God dead!

Verse 9 quotes from Isaiah 64. “But as it is written: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*” Usually you hear this verse at funerals where its applied to the wonders of heaven... “*eye has not seen...*” And heaven will be wonderful. But this verse also speaks of life right now! God loves to surprise us! He has glorious blessings prepared for us! What you've experienced to this point in your life pales in comparison to the things God has for you just around the corner... if remain in the Spirit.

For it is through His Spirit that God conveys His blessings, verse 10, “But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” God is broadcasting amazing things for your spiritual eyes to see, but you've got to be tuned to the right channel. If your thinking revolves around material concerns - if you're thinking merely on a physical level you won't be open to the Holy Spirit. *God's stuff* is communicated through *God's Spirit!* We need to be spiritually minded.

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” Paul says that *life is lived* and *God is known* on the spiritual level. I can see facial expressions and watch body language, but I can't tell whether you're mind is tracking with me or not. Some of you may already be thinking about Survivor. Only the *spirit of man* knows the *mind of a man*. And only *the Spirit of God* knows *the mind of God*. This is why if I want to get to know God I need to cultivate a friendship with the Holy Spirit. The mysteries of God that were hidden from *the mighty* are now available to *a minion like me*, through the ministry of the Spirit.

Verse 12, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.” This past Monday I sensed the urge to pray for my pregnant, daughter-in-law, Dana. I texted and assured her of my prayers. Later that day her blood pressure spiked and she was sent to the hospital. I don't think the earlier urge was a coincidence. I believe the Spirit prompted me to pray. The Holy Spirit's job is to communicate with us. One of the tremendous thrills of the Christian life is to be on the receiving end of a divine communiqué... At first you're scared. You feel a little foolish. You're not completely sure it's from the Lord - but

when you step out in faith, and really see God's hand at work, life becomes an adventure!

Verse 13, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Now here's how you learn to recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit - by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." Compare the prompting you sense with spiritual priorities - does it fit? Compare what you hear with the nature of Jesus – is it like the Lord? Compare the still small voice with the Scriptures - are they compatible? The Holy Spirit authored God's Word, and He will never contradict Himself. Compare what you're sensing spiritually with your spiritual gift or specific calling - does this harmonize with the direction God has already provided? We learn to identify *spiritual subjectives* by scrutinizing them up against *spiritual objectives*! God never contradicts Himself. If the inner prompting isn't like Jesus, or if it contradicts His Word – then it's not really from God.

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Paul's been talking about the **spiritual man**. He's in tune with the Holy Spirit. But the **natural man** is limited. He lacks the Spirit. The *mind of man* cannot explore the *things of God* unaided. He's deaf to spiritual communiqués. He's earthbound in his deliberations - limited to his five senses. There's a whole spiritual dimension of life closed off to him.

"But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly judged by no one*." Since the spiritual person navigates to resources unavailable to the natural person - inevitably he or she will be doubted and misunderstood. This is why its frustrating to share what God is doing in your heart with a lost friend or spouse. It doesn't compute. They're not privy to all the info...

Verse 16 "For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ." The Phillips translation puts it, "we who are spiritual have the very thoughts of Christ." *What a concept!* Don't think you have to turn off your mind and enter a trance to talk to the Holy Spirit. God gives us a mind. His Spirit enlightens our intellect. Through the Holy Spirit we become exposed to God's thoughts - we can look at life from heaven's perspective – we tackle problems with God's wisdom. Can you dream of a bigger blessing, "we have the mind of Christ." The unbeliever has lost his mind. *The Christian has the mind of Christ.*

Paul is discussing three types of people – there's the **natural man** – who doesn't know God. There's the **spiritual man** – who's in contact with the Spirit. Chapter 3 brings up the **carnal man** – we'll get to him next week...