

1 Corinthians 3:1

by Robert F. Adcock

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and maturity, recognizing the body of Christ as one, and focusing on the person of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 39:53

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Topics: "Gospel Centrality", "Unity In Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of continually immersing oneself in the gospel and the word of God. He uses the analogy of a sieve, stating that by repeatedly putting things into our minds, we can retain and plug up the holes in our understanding. The speaker also discusses the concept of living our lives for the glory of God and presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice. He warns against envy and division within the body of Christ, urging believers to examine their behavior and strive for unity.

Transcript

A reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 from verse 1. I'd like for you to think in terms of the Apostle Paul as perhaps a soul doctor. He certainly knew, because I believe he was a man that was filled with the Spirit of God, a spiritual man, deep spiritual discernment. And in his observations concerning those that were a part of this fellowship at Corinth, he had his finger on their problem.

And not only did he diagnose the problem, but he gave the remedy for it, and any good doctor does that, any good medical doctor. He not only diagnoses your problem, but he gives you the medicine you need to correct that problem. Paul had already put his finger upon a number of things that marked these Christians at Corinth out as being in trouble spiritually.

They had been responsible for causing divisions in the body of Christ. Their reasons for this is spelled out in this chapter, the first few verses of chapter 3. There are many other problems that arise as he looks at this church, as this letter discloses, but each one of them are pointed out, and the remedy is given. And as we read these verses, and as we consider these thoughts this morning, I trust that you'll not only relate to a time long ago, a church in Corinth, but you'll think upon your situation today.

Think about your own experience as a Christian, and be aware that, you know, we're not immune to the same problems that face these people, because I'm reminded that we're made out of the same stuff they were made out of. The same weaknesses they had, we have those same weaknesses. Those same

tendencies that they had, they're with us.

So we couldn't claim that, oh, we've advanced beyond this. Oh, we would never let this happen in our fellowship today. We would never be guilty of those things that these carnal Christians at Corinth were guilty of.

Well, if we feel that way, we're headed for a fall. So let us read these verses and take a look at what Paul had to say to the saints at Corinth. 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 solid food. For to this time ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos? But ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.

I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. Now, he that planteth and he that watereth are one, and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.

For we are laborers together with God. Your God's cultivated field, your God's building, according to the grace of God which is given unto me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth on it. But let every man take heed how he buildeth upon it.

The Apostle Paul had to be a courageous man. You think when you write to someone a letter or you address someone that you're always honest in dealing with that individual. If you do anything less than that, you could be guilty of hypocrisy and pretense.

In other words, our conversation with our believers in Jesus Christ as members of the body, we should always be right out front in talking to our fellow believer. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of those that would be pretentious and not tell someone what they know in their hearts to be the truth. You know, in sometimes seeking to be kind and tactful, you can be guilty of not telling the truth.

There are some people that boast about, of course, their openness and their brashness. That's the way I am, and they just speak their mind. Too often that sort of reasoning is just silliness.

But we are accountable to God to let our yes be yes and our no be no. The Apostle Paul was a brave and courageous man. When you write a letter to a church that you were responsible for planting, a church that you were responsible for laying the foundation, and you write to them and you tell them, you are not spiritual, it takes some courage to do that.

I wouldn't dare stand up here this morning and say, you're just a bunch of carnal people, that's all you are. You're fleshless. You're motivated by the flesh.

There's no evidence of the Spirit of God that lives within you. There's no evidence of the Spirit of God working in your midst, in your individual lives and in your corporate gatherings. I don't have the courage to say that.

Of course, I'm so thankful that's not true. But the Apostle Paul had to be a bold, courageous man when he tells them that you are not spiritual. You Christians at Corinth, you are controlled by your baser nature, that old part of you that belongs to Adam, that old part of you that belongs to the world.

Now, this is significant because it didn't mean that they did not have spiritual gifts. In the first chapter, the seventh verse, he says this, you do not come behind in any spiritual gift. So we're not talking about people that were not able, by the control of the Spirit of God, to evidence spiritual gifts in their midst.

There were those that had the gift of preaching, teaching. There were those, no doubt, that had all of the spiritual gifts that are mentioned in the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 12. So there was no lack of spiritual enablement provided.

The Spirit of God was in control of their lives, and when the Spirit of God is in control of your life, you are controlled by the Spirit of God, you are filled with the Spirit of God. So they weren't filled with the Spirit of God. What they were doing with the spiritual gifts and enablements that they had were not for the glory of God.

Why? The source of all that they were doing was of the flesh. It was carnal. The same thing applies today, and God has already warned us through this same letter that no flesh can find glory in the presence of God.

If men will glory in the flesh, it's limited to the flesh, and God gets no glory when we as Christians seek to serve Him in the flesh. He goes one step further, and he says something that has a little touch of irony in it. He says, You are babes in Christ.

True, you are members of the body of Christ, you are a Christian, you have received Christ, and when you were born again into the family of God through faith in Christ, you were a babe in Christ, and you are still there. That's where you are, right there. You're still a little baby.

You have to be rocked. You have to be cared for just like a baby. You're so helpless, but you have to carry that one step further.

Although they were spiritually babies, this exercise in the flesh became a real threat and danger to that church, resulting in divisions within the body. The same thing is true today. When you have Christians in a church fellowship and they're babies spiritually, they never grow up.

There's no evidence of progress being made in their Christian experience. They become a threat, a danger to the whole body. They require very special care.

It's wonderful to have a little baby. We have one in our family. Indeed, it brings real joy to our souls to have this little baby.

But I don't want him to stay a baby. I want to see him grow up, mature, develop. And the same applies to the family of God.

God wants to see His children develop and grow strong spiritually. All of the problems at Corinth stem from that very fact that they were not growing spiritually. The Apostle Peter says, We are to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I think it does a lot of good for us to examine ourselves. Take a little spiritual inventory. Introspection is good to a point, but don't be guilty of that kind of introspection that causes you to be so depressed when you see what's in here that you say, What's the use of going on? Because, as someone as well said, look in here and you can get sick.

You can get sick, but when you look at Him and you keep your eyes upon Him and occupy yourself with Him, indeed the soul is so satisfied and there's peace, even in great difficulty. We are to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is very explicit.

He says, I fed you with milk. And he's talking about spiritual things, the very basic, elementary things concerning our Christian faith, the things of Christ. He no doubt had taken the gospel, and he had very carefully gone over the death, the burial, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing to them the value of the atoning work that Christ did upon the cross.

And, indeed, that's great. That's wonderful. I always just cringe and draw up when I hear someone say, I would go to the service tonight, but they're only going to preach the gospel, or any service for that matter.

And someone says, Well, they're only going to preach the gospel. Listen, but for the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, we would not be saved today. We would never look in a demeaning way upon the gospel and think that it's something that is so elementary that we can depart from it, and we go on and we have no thought of the glorious gospel of Christ.

But the Apostle Paul, in seeking to minister to the needs of these Christians, he ran into just a roadblock, and that was this fleshiness that was so harmful to them. Remember the problem? It was one of deifying and exalting the wisdom of men above the wisdom of God. They were surrounded by great philosophers, men that spoke deep things, men that spoke things that were so deep it would give you a headache to think about it.

And they were sitting around all the time meditating and thinking upon great things that they could share with others, things that would cause the mind to just go racing in all directions. And they put such a value upon human wisdom that the Apostle Paul said that is a product of the flesh. That's carnality.

You are believers in Jesus Christ. I have fed you with some milk, the milk of the Word, and you were growing, but you stopped in your spiritual growth. And now I can't feed you with anything stronger than milk.

Solid food, something that you really need to acquaint you with your responsibilities as believers in Jesus Christ, that you have to grow up and quit acting like babies, and feed upon something that is good, solid food that will result in spiritual growth. You're not able to bear it. You can't take it.

I've said this before. It's worth repeating. We learn from repeating things.

So many people today, when they hear something from the Scriptures, and it's a little beyond them, there's an expression that's used, it's over my head. That's over my head. Well, you know a dear brother that's going to be with the Lord now, Brother August Van Ryn, he responded to such a comment one time at a Bible conference, and he said this, No, brother, it's under your feet.

It's not over your head, it's under your feet. You are trampling underfoot the things of God that you should be fully acquainted with, yet you plead ignorance, and it's over my head. God forbid that that would be true

of any one of us.

We have the Spirit of God as our teacher. He can teach us. He can make the things of Christ very real and precious to our souls.

We can limit him because we can grieve the Spirit of God. We can quench the Spirit of God in that wonderful divine activity of enlightening us to the wonderful things of God. Paul, you indeed have a difficult assignment.

You're dealing with those that are spiritual dwarfs. They're not growing, therefore your hands are tied. But he goes on and he says this, You are yet carnal, you're still fleshly, and this is something that is evidence of that, whereas there's among you envy.

This is one of the things that began to come to the surface. No doubt in the exercise of those spiritual gifts, these spiritual dwarfs with their spiritual gifts, they were envying each other because one looked at the exercise of one's gift and said, huh, and began to envy that person, began to look at them, well, he thinks he's something because he has that spiritual gift. Envying among believers in Jesus Christ, not knowing that every spiritual gift that's given to the body is to edify and build up the body, make the body strong, make the body a viable witness for Jesus Christ in the world.

Shame on us if we are guilty of envying any brother or sister in Christ in the exercise of their spiritual gift. It is God-given. It is given for the purpose of bringing glory to the name of God.

But there was envying among these Christians. It marked them out as being carnal, fleshly. There was strife where you have envying, pretty soon there's going to be a war.

The envying leads to warfare, warfare within the body of Jesus Christ. They were battling each other. Doesn't sound real, does it? Members of the body of Jesus Christ, those that have been recipients of divine grace and love in their souls, and they're fighting with each other.

How tragic. The Apostle Paul had to use strong language, and he says there are divisions. After you've envied, after you've had your warfare, then you divide up.

Well, I'll no longer fellowship with him or her. I remember what they said, the differences, divisions within the body of Christ. Oh, how it grieves the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

How it grieves the Spirit of God to see divisions among God's people here upon the face of the earth. Our oneness is something that is precious and dear to the heart of God. We are one body.

I care not what kind of name somebody tacks on himself and says, I am whatever. If he's a believer in Jesus Christ, he's in the one body. There's not but one church.

It's the body of Jesus Christ. We are one in Him. It must grieve the Lord to look down from heaven above in His throne and see God's people all divided up into these various little groups.

It's evidence of carnality among the people of God. How much of a sectarian spirit do you have in your mind, in your heart this morning? Oh, we may boast about on our sign out front, we say non-denominational. Well, that's because we refuse to take a non-denominational name.

I'm not going to call myself some of those names that people call themselves. I don't have to. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ.

I'm a Christian. Isn't that enough? Ask someone, are you a Christian? I didn't ask you that. I'm a member of a certain church.

Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Have you trusted Him as your Savior? Then you are a Christian. Does being a Christian come before anything else, all of these other names that sometimes people take? I make no apologies for being non-denominational. I make no apologies for not taking some other name.

I don't have to. I like just being a believer in Jesus Christ, being a Christian. But I tell you, just because I say that, I don't make any barriers between me and those that do take these names.

Any man or woman that has faith in Jesus Christ becomes a member of the one body. We are one. He may not recognize that.

He may feel just a little strained sometimes, a little awkward because he's talking with one of those people that call themselves independents or non-denominational, and he doesn't know exactly how to handle that thing. He's still one with me in the body of Christ. And I don't do anything, God is my witness, I don't do anything to make any brother or sister in Christ that's a member of any church that honors the person of Christ feel uncomfortable in my presence.

We fellowship around the person of Jesus Christ. He is the center of all that we do. I don't want a division in the body.

Don't have any sectarian spirit. Don't let anything or anybody cause you to erect barriers between you and other believers that may be in one of those groups with a name. Maybe you don't like the name.

He or she is still a member of the body of Jesus Christ. But Paul says this, where there is evidence of this, the ending, the strife, the divisions, it's a mark of carnality. And your manner of life is such that you are no different from any of the other people that are a part of the world.

Those people that are in the world today, those that surround the Persian Gulf, and they have a name, and they have a religion, and they're very devout in their practice of that religion. Those people, they are striving. Warfare, all that's a part of that.

You know, if you as a believer, if you're envious, and if you are warring with others in the body of Christ, and you're causing division, the Apostle Paul says something very strong. You're no different from all those other men, all those that are in the world, that have never had the enlightenment that you've had. The grace of God has never touched your soul.

You're acting just like all other natural men, if that's the way you're acting. That's a rebuke. How are we behaving as Christians, members of the body of Christ? Are you envious? Do you like warfare? Let's have a fight.

I'll fight you over. Are you causing divisions? It doesn't take much sense to destroy, to mar, and to hurt. It takes someone that has real discernment, and skill, and understanding to build something up.

But someone so foolish as to think that they can glorify God in the flesh has made a serious mistake. And here is the thing that has been uncovered as being one of the things that just grieved Paul so much. One

of you says, I am a Paul.

I don't know, I feel like Paul could have, if any fellow had come up to him and said, now, Paul, I want you to remember, I'm very loyal to you. You are the one I'm following. Paul, I'm a Paulite.

Paul, you are my man. I really like it that when you opened the Scriptures and when you taught us, I just fell in love with you, Paul. And while Apollos was around, one would come up, Brother Apollos, Apollos, I want you to know I'm loyal to you, Apollos.

Well, the apostle Paul says, you can say that if you want to, and God have mercy upon you. But that's evidence that you're a carner. Have you got a favorite preacher? Have you got someone that you have exalted to a place, a pedestal, and you just, oh, that brother when he preaches.

Maybe he's on the television. You just can't wait to turn the set on to see Brother so-and-so. Be very careful.

If you exalt one person above another that's a member of the body of Jesus Christ and the spiritual gifts that God has given to minister to your spiritual needs, you could be guilty of carnality. Can't we accept all of the gifts that God gives to the body? Aren't they all intended to be exercised? I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos.

I am of Peter. The apostle Paul says, that's evidence of fleshliness. That's evidence of carnality.

It results in divisions in the body. Isn't it tragic that you could announce at a certain time, pick out the biggest place you can think for the assembling of people, and you could say, our brother Billy Graham will be present there. And Billy Graham is a great servant of God.

And you can fill the place up. By the same token, you could say, our brother John Matson will be speaking in that same place. John, I trust that you understand.

And just a little handful of people, loyal people to John, show up. You see, there's something wrong in our thinking. I'm saying this to shock us into the realization that this is serious business.

Would we dare say, in the case of one brother, that that spiritual gift that he has, though it may not be of the same magnitude as Billy Graham, yet he had something to present from God for the needs of God's people? A little group showed up. Whereas this other person, this great personage with this name and notoriety, thousands came together. Can it not be the evidence of carnality among the people of God? And the next section is one that I think the Apostle Paul took the boxing gloves off.

He really gets rough when it comes to this business of spiritual gifts. He says, who is Paul? You don't know who I am. You're talking about following me.

You don't know me. What you have just proposed to me, I find it as to be something that I just resist with all my might. The very thought of you saying, I am of Paul.

You don't know Paul. Who is Apollos? And he knew something about Apollos. Apollos doesn't want you to follow him.

We're bond slaves of Jesus Christ, ministers, bond slaves of Jesus Christ. Harry Ironside said one time, it is indeed tragic, and something that just causes you to wonder that God's people would be divided over servants. Those that minister the Word of God, those that exercise their spiritual gifts, if you're not careful,

carnal people will exalt them to a place they don't look like servants anymore.

They don't dress like servants. They don't live like servants. It seems like someone's lost their way.

They're not understanding anymore. The one that ministers the Word of God, the spiritual gifts that are given to the body, we are servants. We are bond slaves of Jesus Christ.

And Paul says, don't rally around the slaves, the servants of Jesus Christ. We're just what God has used to bring the glorious message of the gospel to you. We brought light to you.

That's all we are. I planted. I'm just a seed boy.

I'm out sowing the seed. And another comes along and he waters. That's all we are.

But God gives the increase. Do you believe in the sovereignty of God? Do you believe that with all of our human effort, we can never do anything without His help? Do you know unless the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and speaks to a soul, that soul will never be spoken to? Do you believe that? The sovereignty of God. Without me, you can't do anything.

But men are sure trying to do something without Him and without the Spirit of God and the ending and the strife and the divisions. And we press on. We've got a program.

We've got all of these things that we've got to achieve. Where is God in all of this? The seed boys, the water boys. It is God who gives the increase.

Nothing will ever happen when you open and read and preach the Word of God unless the Spirit of God seals it home to the hearts of those that are listening to it. Paul says, Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth. But it is God.

It is God. Jesus Christ, let Him have the preeminent place. Let us acknowledge.

Let us acknowledge this. Let us be quick to say, if God wills, He will honor this His Word. He will be sure that it will not come back unto Him in a vain sort of way.

He that planteth and he that watereth, they are one. Again, the one body. The one body of Jesus Christ.

The gifts that are in the body being exercised in a way that glorifies God. And people are listening. People are taking heed.

When they see this unity, this oneness, the Lord Jesus said this, A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another the same way I love you. Other men will know you are My disciples because you love one another. The oneness that love can produce in the body of Jesus Christ.

Love the greatest of all gifts, the greatest of all spiritual gifts, to be able to love the way Jesus Christ loved us as poor sinners and the sacrifice that He made for us. The oneness that we can express by loving one another, exercising our spiritual gift. And Paul closes with this.

You can be sure of this. God will give you the reward you deserve for exercising your spiritual gift, for being faithful in carrying out His will for your life and for all the contribution that you made in the body of Christ. God will reward you.

We can be sure of this. Why? He said so. Well, there's a further development of these thoughts in this same chapter.

Perhaps next week we'll take a look at this and what will happen one day when every believer stands in the presence of God. Every believer stands at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. Not to be judged for our sins.

That was taken care of at the cross. But to find out how we made out in living our lives down here. Did we live our lives for the Lord? Did we present our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God? Did we save our lives for ourselves, or did we let this life of mine be offered up as a living sacrifice for Him? Let us pray.

Our Father in Heaven, we give thanks now for the time together. Bless thy word, we pray thee. Use it for the glory and honor of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For this we ask in His most holy name. Amen. John will come and close with just a verse of a hymn.

Turn to number 500, please. It's a very familiar hymn. As Bob was speaking about the gospel and how often we say, well, all I ever get to hear is gospel, I was reminded of an illustration that my Greek teacher once said that your mind is a sieve, and so you've got to repeatedly put things into it, and sooner or later you'll start plugging up the holes and you'll retain things.

And another student of his says, yeah, but if we keep on putting things in, and especially as we immerse ourselves in the water of the word, at least we'll be a clean sieve. And so if you look at the gospel as the water of the word, the more you hear it, the more you study, the cleaner your life will be as a result. Let's just sing verse number three, number 500, Trust and Obey.

Let's stand.

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