

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 2 (Chapters 3-4)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). Welcome to our study of the Book of 1 Corinthians. Today’s message deals with the heart of the message to the church in Corinth. Paul shows the Christians there that their spiritual immaturity has led to a host of problems. How sad it is that Christians, including even some who have been in the Lord’s body for many years, no longer act like adults but act like spiritual babies. Notice the text of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 where Paul says,

“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? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

Paul says that the main problem in Corinth is that the people were acting like babies, and were focusing on the carnal and worldly instead of the spiritual, which caused them not to grow in Christ as they should have. The writer of Hebrews reminded Christians of how they had strayed from where they should have been by not growing. He wrote:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 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” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Shame on us when we as Christians ought to be mature and know how to deal with problems, yet instead we revert to acting like babies. How do some Christians today act like babies? Here’s how. Some Christians need milk, when they ought to be eating solid food. A baby has to start out on milk. And the Bible says that we, as newborn Christians, must start out on milk. Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Some in the Lord’s body act like babes in Christ because they always stay on milk and never move on solid food. The Hebrews writer said in Hebrews 6:1 that we should “go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” We need to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Mt. 5:6). If we are going to grow up in Christ, we need to study to “show ourselves approved unto God” (2 Tim. 2:15). We must get into the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). We must not study the same old things we’ve always studied, but instead must launch out into the deep (Mt. 4:4) and break up our fallow ground (Hos. 5:12) so that we can reach more people who may not have a good understanding of Christianity beyond merely the fundamentals.

How else are some Christians like babies? Not only do they stay on the bottle, but some Christians whine, complain, and cry when they do not get their way. Paul said in Philipians 2:14 that we are to “do all things without complaining.” The Christian is not to be a crybaby who murmurs, whines, and complains every time something does not go his way. We are to consider other people (Phil. 2:3-4). We are not to put ourselves above everyone else (Rom. 14), but are to look out for those who are weaker. The Israelites learned a lesson the hard way about whining and complaining. Do you remember how God removed them from Egyptian bondage, walked them across the Red Sea on dry ground, delivered them from pharaoh and the Egyptian army, and even defeated their enemies? When the Israelites were walking toward Mt. Sinai in Exodus 15 and 16, were they thankful? No, not at all! As you read Exodus 16, the Israelites in essence said, “What have You done, God? Have You brought us out into this desert to allow us to starve to death? Oh, how we wish we were back near the fleshpots of Egypt where we at least had food to eat! Did you bring us out here to starve us?” Look at their lack of faith, which caused them to have to wander for forty years while the bodies of everyone over twenty years of age died in the wilderness and failed to enter the Promised Land. Are we today any different from those folks when we whine, complain, and act like crybabies when things do not go our way?

How else are Christians sometimes like babies? Sometimes we just cannot be satisfied. When a baby throws a temper tantrum because he doesn't get its way, no matter what you give him, what you say to him, or how you react, the baby simply refuses to be satisfied. Sometime Christians are like that. They cannot be satisfied with God and the pure principles of Christianity. They always look for something new, more entertaining, or more exciting. We need to take comfort in the fact that Christianity is all we need. Christ is our all in all (Col. 1-2).

But Christians also sometimes act like babies in that they are asleep much of the time. You can tell a newborn baby because he spends more time sleeping than he does awake. I wonder if that applies to Christians today. Are we sometimes asleep at the wheel? Are we sometimes asleep and in a daze when we ought to be out working in the kingdom? Sometimes we seem to be aloof to the opportunities that present themselves to us. God may set them in front of us, and if we are asleep at the wheel then we are no different than a baby. We must realize that **now** is the time to work. We must “work the works of Him who sent us while it is day because the night is coming when no one can work” (Jn. 9:4). In 1 Corinthians 15:58 we are told to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Those whose deaths are blessed (Rev. 14:13) are those whose works and labors follow them. Let's not be like babies and be asleep.

And, let's surely not be like babies or children by “playing favorites.” You can tell a child or baby because they play favorites. They like to be around their favorite people. How sad it is when some say, “I'm a Christian, but I'm 'of Paul,'” or “I'm 'of Apollos,'” or “I'm 'of Cephas.’” Christians must not play favorites among men. We are to put Christ on the pre-eminent pedestal (Col. 1:18), and not allow others to receive the glory that only Christ and God deserve. The main problem in Corinth was that they were acting like babies. We today need to look to ourselves and ask, “Are we, too, guilty at times of being spiritual babies?”

One of the problems in Corinth to which I've already alluded is that the Christians there were putting a lot of emphasis on the preachers or workers who stood up and preached the Gospel or who went out and did personal work. In reality, Paul tells them not to put preachers on pedestals because they are simply ministers and servants of the Word. Instead, the emphasis needs to be placed on God because He is the One Who gives the increase. Paul wanted people to know that preachers are merely ministers or servants (1 Cor.

3:5). Gospel preachers are no different than any other Christian. They merely have been given the privilege of speaking the Word. In Mark 10:45, Jesus, the greatest Gospel preacher you could ever imagine, said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In Luke 19:10, the Bible teaches us that Jesus came "to seek and save the lost." Gospel preachers are privileged to speak the Word and spread the message. He is not on a higher level than any other Christian. There is no such thing as a "clergy/laity" system with a type of "Big Me" and "Little You." We all stand on level ground at the foot of the cross.

Where, then, does our emphasis need to be? Look at 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, and you will see that the emphasis needs to be upon God, Who gives the increase. Paul said, "I planted and Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase." Yes, according to Acts 18 Paul went into the region of Corinth to preach the Gospel. He even was instrumental in teaching Apollos some principles that he did not fully understand (Acts 18:24-27). But Paul could not take credit, and Apollos could not take credit. Why not? They preached the Gospel, didn't they? Yes, but they did nothing to bring about the increase. The seed is the Word of God (Lk. 8:11). And it is that seed—set in the hearts and lives of men and women—that grows. God is the source of the increase. Notice Acts 2, which shows us what is distinct about New Testament Christianity. Notice Acts 2 where Peter has just preached the Gospel. He has convicted the people of sin. They are cut to the heart, and cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The answer is, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Those who received Peter's word were baptized (vs. 41). But notice in verse 47 what happened to those same people. They were "praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Paul did not add those people to the church. Apollos did not add them to the church. Nor can men and women today add people to the church—even if they want to. Why? God deserves the glory. He alone is the One Who gives the increase. No matter how great a sermon might be, or how much oratorical skill a person may have, he does not deserve the honor or glory. It is God Who gives the increase. Jesus is the One Who tasted of death for everyone (Heb. 2:9). He is the propitiation for our sins, yet not for ours alone, but for the whole world's. When we preach the Gospel, what have we done? We have simply preached that which has already happened, and which was accomplished in the first century by Jesus, God's Son. Is there power in preaching? Yes—as long as 1 Corinthians 1:21 is applied. We are to preach "the cross of Christ, and Him crucified."

But do you know what is interesting about 1 Corinthians 3? Not only should Gospel preachers not be elevated to a state they do not deserve, but all Christians are considered by God as "fellow workers in the kingdom." Notice the text of 1 Corinthians 3:9. Paul said, "We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." Every Christian has a responsibility. The idea of a Christian "doing nothing" is foreign to the New Testament. In Christianity, when we obey the Gospel we give our bodies to God (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and commit to walk daily after the pattern of the Savior. That being true, all Christians are fellow workers with God and Christ in the kingdom. In John 9:4 Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day for the night is coming when no one can work." That time or day is **now**. How we need to be busy! In Matthew 20 the church is likened to a vineyard. What's interesting about that is that a vineyard is a place of work where fruit is produced. If the church is a vineyard, and the church is composed of the saved, then those saved people need to be out working and producing fruit for God in order to give Him the glory and honor. While Gospel preachers may lay the foundation by preaching the Word, the actual foundation of the church is none other than Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians

3:11 Paul said, “No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Yes, we can preach the Word and lay out the foundation for people to see. But **we** did not build the church. It is not **our** church. The foundation of the church is **Jesus**, Who is the chief cornerstone. In Acts 4 the Jews were questioning John and those who were working with him. They asked Peter and John, “By what power (or authority) have you done these things?” They responded by saying that they had done them in the name of Jesus—the chief cornerstone whom the Jews had omitted from their spiritual super structure. They went on to say, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the foundation, pillar, and chief cornerstone upon which the church is built (Is. 28:16). In John 14:6 Jesus presented the essence of why it is essential that He be at the center of the church. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” In Hebrews 7:25-26 the writer said that Christ is able to “save to the uttermost” those who come to God through Him since He lives to make intercession for them. If we try to lay any other foundation than Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3 and 4 teach us that those who build upon such a foundation will one day be burned up. That foundation will not stand the test of time. But if we lay the foundation of Christ, then the church will stand because it is built upon a foundation of solid rock (Mt. 7:24-27).

There is a very practical application here. If Jesus is the Founder (and foundation) of the church, is it possible for men to come along fifteen hundred or two thousand years later and found another church? The Bible tells us of only **one** church (Eph. 4:4; Mt. 16:18). It is the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). If men come along fifteen hundred or two thousand years after Jesus has already established His church, lay another foundation, claim themselves to be the founders, and then name that church after themselves, is that really the foundation that God intended? Can that be the church of which we read in the New Testament? The answer is, “Absolutely not!” Jesus is the only Founder of the church. Since He is the Founder, notice the role that **we** play. Christians are part of God’s temple today—in that our bodies belong to Him. As individual members, we are part of the temple of God. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:16, where Paul asked, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” In Acts 5:32 we are told that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. In Ephesians 1 the Holy Spirit is identified as the “seal” or “guarantee.” In Colossians 3:16 we are told to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. In Ephesians 5:18-19 we are told that we must be filled with the Spirit, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” What does all of this teach us? If we are the temple of God, and if the Holy Spirit dwells in us, then He must do so by the medium of the Word of God (Jn. 16:13). That is how the Holy Spirit reveals Himself and His will to us—through the Word of God. When we talk about being the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are talking about Christians who have been sanctified, and who have put the Word of God into their lives. By living it out, they become the place where God’s Spirit resides—as long as they have the Word, which is the medium by which the Spirit resides in them. We are not talking about anything miraculous. We are not saying that God is whispering to us or talking to us. We are simply saying that as the Word of God lives in our lives as we apply its teachings and live by its principles, that is how the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians today through the Word.

Is there a practical application here? Sure there is. If we are the temple of God, and if the Holy Spirit dwells in us through the Word, then we must never do anything to defile our bodies. Think how important this is to God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-10 we are told that our bodies belong to God. Let’s make it even more practical than that. You would never want to do anything to your body that would cause it undue harm or disgrace the Lord and the Holy Spirit. For example, you should not “do drugs.” Drugs will harm your body more than you

can ever know. You are bringing things into your body that will poison it. You should not want to take alcohol into your body. It destroys brain cells, and causes you to do things that you may not even know about. You should behave in a pure way since you are the temple of God. That means that all sexual relations outside the marriage bond are sinful. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Do not do anything to make your body sexually impure. This means that things like smoking cigarettes or dipping tobacco are sinful because they will harm your body. They have been proved to cause cancer and lung problems because they are things that are unnatural for you to bring into your body and that are not healthy for your body. I'm not talking about breathing polluted air. You have to breathe, but you do not have to puff on a cigarette and bring that into your lungs. That is a choice you make. And when you make that choice, knowing that it will bring harm to your body, you have done something to the temple of God that you should not have done.

Let's make this even more practical. Gluttony is a sin that is just as wrong as drugs, smoking, or living an impure sexual life. If we bring more food into our bodies than we should (in a gluttonous way), and if we just eat and eat and eat in order to stuff ourselves, then our heart and blood vessels cannot handle this. In doing this, have we really dealt with the temple of God as He wants us to? Laziness also would be a way in which we are not dealing properly with the temple of God. If we allow ourselves to become so lethargic and lazy that we cannot do anything but sit on the couch, have we really dealt with the temple of God in the way He wants us to? Let's think about these things. Let's examine ourselves to see if we can improve our own bodies and their uses in the kingdom of God by not doing some of these things.

Here is another principle from Paul's writings concerning the body of Christ. Christians belong to Christ, and ultimately to God. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:23. Paul has already said that we are the temple of God, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Now he says, "You are Christ's, and Christ is God's." As Christians, we belong to God. Our lives belong to Him, and everything we have belongs to Him—our time, money, energy, etc. Everything we have has been given to us by the Giver of all good gifts (Jas. 1:17). That being the case, we need to spend our lives glorifying God.

In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul teaches us that we must not only be faithful stewards of God, but that we also must be faithful servants of Christ (vs. 1). And, as faithful servants of Christ and stewards of the Gospel, we must **never** go beyond what is written in the Scriptures. As servants of Christ, we must be faithful stewards of the Word. What does that mean? It means that we must "stick with The Book." Notice especially 1 Corinthians 4:6. Do not miss this, because it is a powerful principle for New Testament Christianity. Paul said, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." Paul has used some figurative language so that people could hear the message. His point was that he had done this so that they could learn not to go beyond what is written. What is the principle here for us today? If you want to find New Testament Christianity, and if you want to be a Christian like those people were in the first century, then you must make up your mind not to go beyond what is written. Can you imagine the plethora of problems that would be solved if we said to ourselves, "Here is the boundary; I am not going beyond what is written in The Book. I am going to stick with the Word of God"? For New Testament Christians who live under the New Law, the books of Matthew through Revelation are where we find God's directives for salvation and worship for us today. Proverbs 30:6 says, "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." Paul was amazed at some in the region of Galatia for they were so soon

turned away (from Him Who had called them into the Gospel of Christ) to another Gospel—which, Paul said, “is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). Paul’s encouragement was this: “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (vs. 8). In Revelation 22:18-19 we are told that we cannot add to or take away from the things that are written. In John 12:48 Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” When we stand before God, it will be the words that Christ spoke that will judge us. We are not accountable to the Law of Moses. John 1:17 says, “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The Old Law is a dead law for Christians (Rom. 7:4). That law (Rom. 7:7) contains the Ten Commandment-code. We are not bound by such law, but are bound by the law of Christ.

What questions might be asked regarding 1 Corinthians 4:6 to make sure that we are right with God? If you plan to engage in any practice or take any action regarding religious matters, here is what you ought to ask. First, where are such things found in the Bible? Where can I find support to do this within the Scriptures? Romans 14:23 tells us that if something is not “of faith,” then it is “of sin.” We need to ask, then, where we can find the support for actions, teachings, or doctrines within the Scriptures. Does God approve of such things, or does God condemn them? If God approves of such things, then we must do them. If He condemns them, then we must stay away from them. What is implied by the silence of the Scriptures on a particular subject? When we talk about the silence of the Scriptures, we really are talking about what God **has** said. For example, in Hebrews 7:14 the writer said (in regard to Jesus not being of the Levitical priesthood), “Of the tribe of Judah, God spoke nothing.” This implies that God never said that anyone from Judah could be a priest—which automatically excluded the entire tribe. Why? Because God **did** say that people from the tribe of Levi **could** be priests. When God said what He wanted, that excluded everything else. That applies to the New Testament today in a powerful way. When God tells us **what** He wants, that is **all** He wants! We do not have to wonder. When God tells us to sing, we do not have to wonder if God wanted us to use mechanical instruments of music, too. Does God want us to play a flute or use a guitar? No! When God said, “Sing,” that was **all** He wanted us to do. If we want to please God, then we must never go beyond what is written in the Scriptures. Paul also teaches us in 1 Corinthians 4 that we must be people who are imitators of godly men and women. We are to imitate things that are good.

If we are really going to follow the pattern of Christ and Christianity, we need to be sure that we are following the right faith. The best advice that I could ever give anyone is found in 1 Peter 2:21—“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps.” Our encouragement to you, especially as it relates to the text of 1 Corinthians 3 and 4 (where we see people getting caught up in what men were teaching) would be this: Make sure that your attitude is to follow in the footsteps of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Ask yourself today: “Have I been following in the footsteps of Christ? Am I a faithful child of God? Have I obeyed the Gospel?” Maybe you have done what some man told you to do. But maybe that went beyond the Scriptures and is not found in the Scriptures. If that is the case, I encourage you today to obey the Gospel. To become a New Testament Christian, you must hear God’s Word (Rom. 10:17), believe that Jesus is God’s Son (Jn. 8:24), be willing to repent of sin in your life (Acts 3:19), confess the name of Christ before men (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized for the remission of your sins. In Acts 2:37 we see the Jews crying out, “Men and brethren, what must we do?” Peter told them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus

Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Have you done that? I want to kindly say to you today that if you have **not** obeyed the Gospel, then you are lost and are on the road to Hell. But you can change that by obeying God’s will.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR 1 CORINTHIANS LESSON 2 (CHAPTERS 3-4)

1. Why, according to 1 Corinthians 3:1, did Paul tell the Christians in Corinth that he was unable to speak to them “as spiritual people,” but instead had to speak them as if they were “carnal people”?
2. In 1 Corinthians 3:2 Paul said that he formerly had fed the Christians with “spiritual milk” instead of “solid food,” but at the time of his writing to them they still were unable to eat such solid food. Why was that the case?
3. Explain how Hebrews 5:12-14 agrees with Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.
4. According to Jesus’ comments in the Sermon on the Mount (specifically, Matthew 5:6), what are Christians continually to do?
5. According to what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, what should every Christian be doing?
6. How does Philippians 2:14 teach Christians to live?
7. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, what did Paul admonish all Christians to do?
8. According to Colossians 1:18, what one person deserves the sole preeminence in the church?
9. According to 1 Corinthians 3:7, if we do our part to spread the Gospel, what will God do as His part?
10. According to 1 Corinthians 3:9, what is each Christian’s relationship to every other Christian?
11. In Acts 2:47, what is God depicted as doing?
12. What important message is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 for every Christian?
13. According to Paul’s statements in 1 Corinthians 3:11, who or what is the foundation of the church?
14. What, according to Hebrews 7:25-26, is Christ able to do?
15. What important point is found in 1 Corinthians 3:16?
16. According to 1 Corinthians 3:23, to whom do we as Christians belong?
17. In 1 Corinthians 4:6, what did Paul say that we are **not** to do?
18. According to 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, what are all Christians to strive to be?
19. What does 1 Peter 2:21 admonish Christians to do?