

GOD'S BABIES

1 Corinthians 3:1–4

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1 Corinthians 3:1–4 (NIV)

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”

These four verses connect with what has gone on in the first two chapters of Corinthians, and especially these four verses relate to the kinds of persons that the Apostle speaks of—the natural man, the spiritual man. And in these verses today, the worldly man or carnal man. And that word “man” includes women as well.

The “natural man” is the phrase which is translated often in the Bible as “soul.” The “psyche man,” the “soulish man,” is a human being who has the power of intelligence, he has the power of emotion the power of decision. Man, in terms of his identity, is able to think, is able to feel, and is able to decide. Paul, in looking at this man, says, “This man is the natural man.” There are certain reasons why he is the natural man. He has no sense of ultimate purpose. Paul indicates that the rulers of this age are coming to nothing. That is, man apart from God has no destiny and has no future.

Imagine, for a moment, that you’re in the sands of Egypt. Out there in the middle of the desert, you come across some toppled statue—a thing coming out of the ground which just has two legs, the head is lying off to the side, with the same cold sneer it had on its face when the sculptor

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crafted it. There is an inscription on the pedestal of the legs, which remain standing, “My name is king of kings. Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!” Now all that he amounts to now, is that his statue is littering the desert floor. “Coming to nothing.”

Paul also indicates that the natural man has fatally flawed judgment. The error of all errors. The rulers of this age crucified the Lord of glory.

Also, there’s an indication that the natural man has an inadequate source of knowledge. Human man only has eyes to see and ears to hear and a mind to think. But he has no equipment to deal with what God is saying. His level of knowledge is simply what he can experience and what he can then verify through the senses, through his sight and through his hearing and through his thought processes. This is a fatally inadequate source of knowledge.

In chapter 2, Paul contrasts what we saw last week with the spiritual man, the *pneuma* man. The word for “spirit,” “the man who’s been touched.” And not only touched, but has been controlled by the Spirit of God. This person is destined for glory. Rather than heading for oblivion, he is destined for glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only that, but this person judges all things and he himself is not subject to judgment. This individual has so integrated the person of Jesus Christ into His life through the Spirit, that when that person is presented with moral and ethical choices, hardships, circumstances, that person makes the right decision. Because, on the gut level of life, they know how to respond. For the wisdom of Jesus, the mind of Christ, is dwelling in them and they are in every sense mature, fully developed, grown.

Then this spiritual person, as well, has revelation of knowledge through the Spirit. This comes, of course, through the spiritual person taking the Word of God and letting it be planted and absorbed into their life. This is the way the Spirit speaks, though His Word. Then off of that Word, through our experience in God.

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In these four verses, Paul says to us that there's a third sort of individual, called the "carnal man" or the "fleshly man." Or as the NIV translates it, the "worldly man." The carnal Christian is the flesh-oriented Christian. We'll try to define more specifically, as we go through the message, what is involved in this.

This idea of being carnal or fleshly has several meanings in the New Testament. One, is a positive and a good meaning. It can be used to simply indicate mortal existence. In fact, we're told in Romans 1:3 that Jesus had descended from David, according to the flesh. Jesus was a real life human being. He wasn't some spirit masquerading in a phantom body, but He really came in flesh and blood.

Most often, though, the word "carnal" appears in the context of describing the sinful element that is in our human nature. Galatians 5:19 describes the works of the flesh, which turn out to be our lower nature being in control. That part of us that wants to be argumentative and jealous, that seeks to be sexually immoral, that seeks to be unkind and hurtful in relationships with other people. That describes the fleshly individual. In the Corinthian letter, it is describing believers who are acting like the world.

There are five characteristics in Corinthians of the carnal Christian. Several of these, I'll pick up from the first two chapters. Then we can go back and really begin to get a drift of how Paul has developed a theme.

I. The carnal Christian, in the Corinthian letter, is a saved Christian.

He is a Christian. She is a Christian. In fact, Paul begins chapter 3 by saying, "Brothers," then he proceeds to call them "carnal" and "babies." But the first term is "brothers." Not only are they brothers, but at the end of verse 1, he says to these carnal Christians, "you are in Christ." Here then, is a third group in the world. The polarities are, on the one extreme, the natural person who

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doesn't have the Lord. On the other hand, there is the spiritual person who really has the Lord and the mind of Christ and is mature. Then there is a middle ground, so to speak. There is this word "carnal," describing the one who has come to Christ, who has faith in Christ, who is a part of the church of Jesus Christ, but has, since the day he or she landed in the body, not really grown spiritually. This person remains in a retrograde state, is not developed. They are still largely controlled, not by Christ, who lives in them, but by the world, which still very strongly bids and beckons.

II. Another facet about the carnal Christian is that this person is one who has been dedicated to Christ.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:2 that he's writing to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called holy. Paul knows who's in the Corinthian congregation. Most of it is dominated by carnal Christians. Yet he says, "You have been sanctified and called holy." That seemingly means that there is a recognition of the fact that we all, when we came to Christ, have had a particular purpose assigned to us now. We have been dedicated to God. When something is dedicated for a specific use, it means that if you use it for anything other than that, you're using it inappropriately.

Several weeks ago, I used the illustration of my toothbrush. It has been sanctified unto my teeth. It is not for polishing the shoes. And there is a sense, therefore, that when we were born again and came into the Christian family, God had specific purposes in mind for us. We have been set apart for those purposes. We have been called holy.

In actual fact, we may not realize what God has purposed for us in our stubbornness and rebellion. But the carnal Christian has to reckon with the fact that God has dreams and goals and

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aspirations that have not yet been realized. Part of our finding ourselves in God is going back to what is in the mind of Christ.

Every one of you parents has had the opportunity, at various times when your children were younger, to say, “There are certain attributes, characteristics that I want my children to have.”

You’re thinking thoughts about what you want for them. Now I’m not talking so much about what you want them to do, but what kind of persons you want them to be. Hopefully, when your children grow, they will indeed be what you want.

In the same way, God, our Father, looks at each one of us in His family and He has certain dreams about us. Certain purposes He wants us and us alone to fulfill. No one else but us. We have been sanctified for those purposes. The carnal Christian is the one who has not actualized, not realized, not acted upon God’s purposes for their life. God still has the purposes, though.

That’s a great encouragement.

III. The third thing about the carnal Christian is the fact that the carnal Christian may demonstrate qualities which are commendable.

The Corinthian church, made up of carnal believers, had a rich flow of the gifts of the Spirit. In fact, they had an excess of demonstration in respect to some of the gifts.

Have you ever found, in your experience, that there are some believers that exercise gifts of the Spirit, but who aren’t really all that mature? Even believers who exercise gifts of the Spirit that on occasion show little fruit of the Spirit—maybe not on occasion, but most of the time. Is it possible that a carnal Christian can be gifted of the Spirit, so they can give a prophetic word, so they can give an utterance of tongues and interpretation, so that they can do works of healing? Yes, that has happened in Christ’s body. There have been many, many midget-sized Christians who, in the name of Christ, have done powerful things. This gets confusing at times—doesn’t

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it?—because when you see a person functioning in sort of a gifted role, you expect the maturity that goes with it. But often it is the case that the fruit of the Spirit has not undergirded the gifts of the Spirit in the person's life. Because the fruit is developmental, whereas the gifts are a product of God's grace and are only exercised through faith. No other requirements are needed. Whereas, the exercise of the fruit of the Spirit requires a good deal of discipline and self-examination and integration.

The Corinthian church, as well, had the quality of ones being eagerly and enthusiastically looking forward to the return of the Lord. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 1:7, that they were “eagerly awaiting the return of the Lord.” A Christian is excited about the second coming. While that is a tremendous, commendable quality, this may not, of itself, indicate a mature Christian. Here are carnal believers who demonstrate qualities which are commendable.

IV. A fourth quality of a carnal Christian is the fact that the carnal Christian exhibits traits that are not found in the spiritual Christian.

Here we're going to compare verses, today, with what we looked at last week, in chapter 2. There are especially two traits that are found in the carnal Christian that are not found in the spiritual Christian.

A. One is the trait of partisanship and strife. Paul says, “I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk not solid food for indeed you were not ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready. You are worldly” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

How does Paul know that they are worldly? What's the criteria? How does he arrive at that opinion? He arrives at it in this statement “You are still worldly for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not still worldly?”

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Here are persons who are dividing up in the body of Christ. There's a sense of upmanship, a sense of pride.

B. Not only that, but Paul finds another quality in them that is not found in the spiritual man and that is a dependent and unwholesome attachment to one man or group or doctrine. "One says, 'I follow Paul.' Another says, 'I follow Apollos.' Are you not mere men?" One of the things that's going to be developed (later on, in chapter 3) —Paul's going to say to these believers, "Paul is yours, Apollos is yours—Thank God for all He has given you." What happened is that the carnal Christian, or the underdeveloped Christian, is clinging to one particular human being or one particular doctrine or one particular association and saying that all the truth is there and, "I get all my insights there." "I listen to George Wood's tapes and I don't listen to anyone else!" That's the definition of a carnal Christian.

It is this tendency to say, "I belong to someone," without taking into account all the wealth that is in the body of Christ and drawing upon the riches that God has placed in that body. You'll find that, when a person begins to have a singular attachment to one person, one doctrine or one particular group, by and large, they are not spiritually mature enough to absorb and study the Word on their own. So they have to totally rely on the insight someone else has given to them, and they don't want to be confused. So why be confused in listening to a number of voices when you only have to listen to one? Just block that all out and accept whatever so and so says.

There is always kind of a balancing truth. On the one hand, we ought to seriously listen to spiritual counsel that we respect. But on the other hand, we ought to be aware that there are many riches in the body of Christ today, charismatic and non-charismatic, that can be listened to that will help us live successfully for the Lord. We sort of have a spiritual smorgasbord set before us.

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It is the criteria of deciding, from that spiritual smorgasbord, on what is helpful and what is not. Simply doing what the Bereans did, searching the Word to find out whether or not it's so.

I've had some involvements with those in the discipleship and shepherding movement. There's one real criticism in the Word that I would level at that movement, the precise thing that Paul's describing here in Corinthians, attachment to one man. Saying, "I belong to..." or "so and so is my shepherd. I don't listen to anyone else. I don't read any books without their approval. I don't listen to any tapes without their approval. I don't partake of the wider body of Christ that is out there. I am just geared in to what that one individual says and declares for my life." That, friend, is the classic definition, according to Corinthians, of the baby Christian. The carnal Christian who has not yet grown up and assumed responsibility for the life, spiritually, before God, but is depending on someone else's counsel and insight to sort of set forth the way.

We need counsel and insight from other Christians. But when that counsel becomes a substitute for our own decision-making process, it can become something very evil and sinister.

At Corinth, people had become attached to one individual, and many had become attached to one theme word: wisdom. "We're the part that's in the know. We've got a super-secret spiritual truth that nobody else around has."

James Hammill recently told this story. He said that, when he was a boy, one of his jobs was to feed the pigs. Often, after the ears of corn had been poured in the trough, a little pig would grab one of the nubbin ears of corn and start running around the pen, squealing. Invariably, the other pigs would leave the trough and start chasing that one little pig. His application was that he had seen the same thing among preachers and Christians. One skinny little preacher grabs one nubbin from the trough and starts running around squealing, and immediately other Christians and

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preachers leave the trough and start running after him. The moral of the story is that the real food is in the trough, not in chasing the squealing of someone else.

Another quality of the carnal Christian, as compared to the spiritual Christian, is that the carnal Christian then begins to depart from the central message of Jesus and Him crucified and the focus then begins to be on things other than Jesus.

While Paul notes that the carnal Christian is a person described in terms of his combativeness, jealously and quarreling, it might also be noted that the reverse trait can also mark such a person. That is, one who doesn't care enough to be identified with the body of Christ at all or anything related to that body, but is rather apathetic. The word apathetic, as well as combativeness, can describe the carnal Christian.

V. A fifth quality of a carnal Christian from 1 Corinthian 3:1–4, is that the carnal Christian is seen as a baby.

The word here is translated "infant" but it's the idea of a small child who cannot sustain life on his own. He is a baby, an infant.

I love to watch how Paul brings correction, because he is so very, very delicate in approaching these Corinthians with all their faults. Well might we be careful in how we approach people when we perceive there to be fault or failure in their life. Paul does not call them "babies" in the first verse of the first chapter. He doesn't say, "I am writing to you, Corinthians, babies in Christ. Why don't you grow up?" I can just see all the books closing if he did that. You've been blasted in the first verse. What's the use of continuing? But very delicately, Paul has been building this point, where he can tactfully put before them the fact that the real problem is that there is a total arrested development. They haven't grown since day one, since they came to Christ. Even as Paul was with them, he wanted to give them more mature things, but they hadn't been able to

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take it. Still after all these years, they still haven't grown an inch and he hasn't been able to get past the elemental of what he said previously. He says, "This is babyhood." When you go to correct someone, remember to go tactfully. You can get a lot done. There's no crime in Scripture against being tactful.

There's nothing wrong with being a baby. All of us at one time have been a baby. The word "baby," as it applies to Christians, can also be a very beautiful thing, when a person has come to the Lord. How beautiful, now that life is new in Christ. Fresh. Full of potential. Maybe that individual has not yet learned to walk on their own. They need a lot of support in the early moments of discipleship. Maybe they've not learned to talk. A spiritual baby isn't able to give you the Westminster Confession or any other confession. They're not able to talk. But they're beautiful, joyous, sunlit, discovering life in Christ. There's nothing wrong with being a baby. Thank God for the opportunity we've all had of being spiritual babies.

It's wrong when we've become fixated on being a baby. We've recently added a baby to our family. It is a puppy. We had a dog which died about a year ago, Boomer. He had been with us for twelve years, a very integral part of our family. We waited a year before making another selection. Now to our home has come this bright little toy apricot poodle. He is very much a puppy or baby. And he's cute as a puppy or baby. With all of his cuteness, he jumps in the clumsy little baby way, and barks, but some things have got to change over the next six months. He's going to be doggy trained. He's going to sleep through the whole night. He's going to be calm when he's left alone. And he's going to have respect for property. At the end of six months, if he hasn't begun to master some of these elemental things, he may just be gone. I'd treat him worse than God treats me. God doesn't say, "You'll be gone if you haven't learned the Christian disciplines in six months."

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Paul describes the Christian baby here in terms of two characteristics:

A. An inability to feed himself. That's classic for a baby, isn't it? The baby cannot feed itself.

Therefore, Paul says, "When I came to you, I didn't give you solid food. I gave you milk." Solid food requires you to take a knife and a fork, or however they would have done it in ancient times, cut the meat up, and chew it. You have to get yourself into it. Then it'd be put into your digestive system and produce a good thing. With milk though, you just put the bottle in and often it goes straight on through. Someone has described a baby as a long alimentary canal with a mouth at one end and no responsibility at the other. That is the case. Inability to feed itself. Paul said, "I was only able to give you milk and I'm still only able to give you milk." What, basically, is he talking about here? What basically is the difference between spiritual milk and spiritual food? Some really had wild interpretations of this, saying the milk represents the simple things of the gospel. The food or the solid food, the meat, represent something that's very exotic and only after you've been in the kingdom five or ten years, you discover this mystical doctrine. That's probably not it. We pretty much know the difference between milk and food by reading the first three chapters of Corinthians. Milk represents that Christ died for me. Those are the basics of the gospel. Food would represent how, then, I ought to live. When you begin integrating the fact that Christ died for you, begin chewing on it and pondering it, how then should I live? How should the body of Christ conduct itself? That's what the Corinthians had failed to do. They had failed to eat meat. How, then, ought we to live? How then ought we to conduct the household of God? Milk is, "I want a blessing." Food or meat is, "I'm ready to be a blessing." Milk is, "I want people in the body to care for me." Food is, "I want to care for others." Milk is looking at the facts of the gospel and food is saying, "What do those facts mean as they're translated into my experience and how am I appropriating those facts and how am I

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responding to Jesus Christ?” That’s what Paul basically does in 1 Corinthians 2. He traces the deeper wisdom of the cross, something the starting Christians had never really probed into.

Because babies are not able to feed themselves, they are so easily carried away by every wind of doctrine. Ephesians 4:14 described that the babe has the tendency to be carried away by every wind of doctrine and the cunning and the guile of men. Why is that so? Because there is no attempt, like the Bereans in Acts 17, to search the Word of God for themselves. They simply go to the latest, juiciest kind of teaching or emphasis, and get that particular bottle. There is a lack of solidness that develops when a person is not planted in the Word on their own. Just simply taking whatever’s coming. There are people in the body of Christ today that are out with great guile to prey upon the body of Christ and seek out followers for themselves who will provide a rich funding base or the wild kinds of schemes that develop under the guise of Christianity and do nothing more to advance the gospel than a man on the moon.

One of the important reasons why we must grow up is so that we do not simply become subject to accepting everything that comes down the pipe that bears the Christian name.

B. Another characteristic of a baby is insistence on his own way. If you don’t know that, you’ve never had a baby! Babies are beautiful and wonderful, but they will insist on their own way. You let them go unchanged, you let them go unfed, you let them go without rest, and you will soon find out what is happening in that family. The chief characteristic of the carnal life is the insistence on one’s own way. That’s why Paul here calls them babies. They are occupied with jealousy and quarreling, which is a symptom of “I am number one.” “I want the attention.” “I’ve got to be the best.” “I’ve got to be attached to the best group.” “I’ve got to be in the best denomination.”

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We often think of the carnal person as a person who's all caught up in the sexual sins. It's true that sexual sins are associated with the carnal life. But in the Scripture, the primary characteristic of the carnal Christian is not sexual, it's spiritual. Spiritual sins. Especially in regard to pride, self-sufficiency and egotism. It's this that Paul addresses. The chief characteristic of the carnal Christians at Corinth is this matter of selfishness. Insistence on one's own way.

The Minnesota Crime Commission, several years ago, said that every baby's life starts as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's affection, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny them these wants, and they seethe with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous if they were not so helpless. Can you imagine a grown-up baby? Somebody physically grown and as demanding as a baby—what they would do to you if you didn't give them their bottle? They'd kill you.

Insistence on one's own way.

A little article on spiritual retardation said there's some similarity between mental and spiritual retardation. Like mental retardation, spiritual retardation affects different people differently. Some mentally retarded persons are violent and dangerous. They have the strength of a man and the mind of a baby. The same is true of some spiritually retarded babies. They lash out at others like babies. They try to destroy their leaders or any one else who gets in their way. Other spiritually retarded people are quiet, gentle and even sweet-spirited. Like some mentally retarded persons. They are easy to love and give no trouble. However, they require constant attention, as do babies, and they make no productive contribution. Why? Because they're self-centered. Contrast this, though, with the word "service" in verse 5. Paul identifies himself as a servant. "Even as the Son of Man came to serve." Where the baby is insistent upon his own way, the servant is looking out for the needs of others. There's always been this temptation within the

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body of Christ, which might be called “the cult of self-love.” Everything has to meet my needs. If it doesn’t meet my needs—phooey with it! I’m going to go on and do something else. There’s a certain sense in which, granted, when we’re involved in a church fellowship, we’re looking for needs to be met. But if our primary focus is in any ministry or any relationship in the body of Christ, simply, “What can I get out of this?” We do not yet have the mind of Christ. Because Christ has so clearly portrayed it to us, it is not, “What do I get out of this?” but it is, “How could I serve?” “How could I minister to someone else’s needs?” Perhaps if here’s any cutting line that divides the carnal Christian from the wise Christian, it would be at this very point, as to whether we are in a cult of self-love that says, “What do I get out of it?” Or if we are saying, “What can I give?”

A little poem of a person praying to God puts it this way, “Father, where shall I work today? And my love flowed warm and free. Then He pointed out a tiny spot and said, ‘Tend that for Me.’ I answered quickly, ‘Oh, no. Not that. Why, no one would ever see, no matter how well my work was done. Not that little place for me.’ The word He spoke, it was not stern, He answered me tenderly, ‘Ah, little one, search that heart of thine. Art thou working for them or for Me? Nazareth was a little place. And so was Galilee.’”

Service begins, not with something flamboyant, but something very small.

Let me ask you, in closing today, are you a growing Christian or are you a babe in Christ? How do you know if you are a growing Christian? You look back over this past week and say, “Did I grow these last seven days?” I don’t think you can measure growth in a week. Sometimes, you may have tremendous growth. Just like some nights it seems like my boy goes to bed and the next morning he wakes up and he’s grown 3 inches. He’s going through one of those times kids go through, but most often, growth is not all that observable in a week’s time. How about if

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you've been a Christian five years? Think back on your experience of these five years. You look at your life today as compared to what it was five years ago. Are you at the same spot or have you grown? If you've been a Christian less than five years, how about your development as a Christian between then and now? You say, "I don't know how to measure that. I don't know what handles to get a hold of." Let me just suggest three handles that will help me get a handle on my growing:

1. Reverses? Do I handle reverses more maturely as a child of Christ today than I did five years ago? When some of the goals I've had and some of the expectations I've had of people do not come true, do I act like I did five years ago or do I respond with love and joy and peace and patience and gentleness and kindness? Am I learning better how to handle reverses? I think that's one of the critical factors of the Christian life, dealing with situations that come our way that are not pleasant for us personally to face. One of the real marks of growing up is a maturity in handling the reverses.

2. Resources? As a Christian, I have resources of time and personality and spiritual gifts and finances. Is my handling of these resources, which the Lord has given to me, growing, staying the same, or diminishing? Are more of myself, my time, and my finances, my gifts, involved in the Lord's work now than five years ago? Have I grown in the handling of my resources? Given the fact that all of us will one day appear before the Lord and give an account, one of the ways to get ready for that account is to periodically ask ourselves some questions.

3. Responsibilities? Are my responsibilities as a Christian greater today than they were five years ago? For some, that responsibility may be a matter of having a prayer life. That is what the Lord has called you to and pretty much everything else you're not involved in except to give encouragement and comfort to the body of Christ. For others, responsibility will be a ministry, a

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clear direct ministry to other persons in the body. Certainly responsibility will include greater service to the body of Christ and the work of the Lord than simply coming to church from time to time. If you're only touching base periodically with the Lord through church attendance, I thank the Lord, first of all, for that, because that's better than not touching base. Because that regenerative work that the Lord has done in your life is there, that makes you want to come to worship. But if your sum total of involvement in the body of Christ and in the work of Christ in the world is to periodically occupy a seat, you're going to have to ask yourself some serious questions as to whether or not you're growing. And do you want to grow? And what dreams does God have for you that—through your unwillingness to grow and your finding yourself at a place where you refuse to grow—cannot be fulfilled, because you're not growing. That's a sober message for you this morning. It must have been sobering for the Corinthians. It must have brought a quiet hush over the heart of each one as Paul heads into this third chapter and His letter is being read aloud to the Corinthian Christians, and all of a sudden, it's out on the table. Are you babes in Christ?

We say, "Those questions disturb me. I want to do something about them." That's the first step. Next week, we're going to look at some additional steps for growing. I'll just telegraph that message by saying, "Get planted and get watered. God gives the increase." All the thinking in the world, "I'm going to grow as a Christian," or "I'm going to grow as a human being." I can think "I'm going to grow" till I'm blue in the face, but I'm not going to grow. It is God who gives the increase. My job is to not be like a tumbleweed which blows from place to place, but to get planted in the vineyard of the Lord and to let Him water me and be in a place where I can be watered and can sustain the life that's coming out.

Closing Prayer

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Lord, Jesus, we confess Your name in this moment. We confess Your desire for our lives. Even I, Lord, as a parent remember the times when I have stood over the cribs of my children in their sleep and prayed for them and longed to see the potential of life that You had for them fulfilled in their experience. How much so have You prayed over the cribs of our spiritual experiences. Have You longed for that beautiful newborn babe in Christ, which was us, to grow in faith, to be strong in Spirit. How much so do You wish for it again today, Lord, in the Spirit, to see grown ones among us who yet in Your eyes are babes. Your heart pulls them and wants to draw to a sense of responsibility, a sense of urgency, a sense of leading of the spiritual retardation there has been in the past. So often it is, Lord, that our development as a Christian gets arrested as we have some unfortunate conflict in the body. Because, somewhere in the back of our experience, there is a moment when we have been burned, when we have been taken advantage of by someone in a position that had no business doing that. We have essentially, from that experience, withdrawn. And said, “Lord, I will serve You, but never again in the same way. Never again will I risk that.” And in so doing, we lose so much of what You want. You are calling us, again, in these moments, to renew our faith and our rootage in You. To somehow realize what we have become and what You yet have in mind for us, and that our present arrested spiritual development is curable, but it takes Your hand to touch it and our will to respond to it. And may, Lord, we, like the man with the withered hand in the synagogue—to whom You said, “Stretch forth your hand,” and he stretched it forth and it was healed—so may we stretch forth the withering and the retardation in our spiritual life, stretch out that to You, and have You say, “Be restored!” Lord, we ask that we as individuals and as a church body will have a capacity to give and to minister. Not simply to receive and be ministered to. It is Your Spirit that speaks to us in these moments. That brings us an awareness of who we are and what we need. Thank You for caring enough to

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remind us, through Your Word, of our place in You and how much You love us. Through Christ,
our Lord. Amen.