

Spiritual Infancy

Corinthians Explained

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 3; 1 Corinthians 3:1-4
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Congregation, this morning we wish to ponder to first four verses of 1 Corinthians 3. 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2, 3, 4. Let us read them.

1 And I, brethren, could not speak [could not speak] unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

So far.

The theme for this morning is "Spiritual Infancy." Infancy, I could say it also in a more simple way, spiritual babies. Infancy, spiritual infancy. Three thoughts. Infants in knowledge, let's say babies in knowledge. Secondly, infancy in faith. And in the third place, infants in holiness. Spiritual infancy: infants in knowledge; secondly, infants in faith; and in the third place, infants in holiness.

Congregation, there's nothing wrong with being a baby, right? We love babies. So tender, so small, so vulnerable, a gift from God, all made the Lord a gift, also life when they're born. Precious gifts of God so dependent and so precious, their first smile, and they cannot do much on their own. They cannot remember much and retain much but, oh, how precious those little bundles of love. Promising. And we know they need milk, right? You don't give them steak. You don't give them a hamburger. They need milk and they drink it. And they need it and they grow fast. And they enjoy it. They have no teeth yet. They can't chew things. And we wait and when they're a few months older, we mash the potatoes and we mash the vegetables and we give them a little bit of apple sauce, a little bit of milk, a little bit of meat, and slowly they get used to meat and to bread, and a sandwich and cheese, and you name it.

Now suppose that someone would be 20 years old and still only drink milk. That would be strange, right? And yet we read in the Bible of that possibility, that people after years

are still babies. We still just sense God's children sometimes don't grow up so fast as they should. And I don't want to be too personal but I'm also human, so I think of my father. I think for a long time he was a baby. For a long time. He had so many doubts and questions and he was drinking the milk, and he died with saying a few hours before he died in Psalm 27, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." It was a precious text to him and he yet was able to quote that text. Wait upon the Lord. In a sense, he had not much assurance but he loved the Lord Jesus and he was always busy with those things. So he did not grow up, I have to say, so fast but the most important thing is to be a child, right? To be a child, that's the first thing because people so easily say, "Oh, that's a child. That's a baby in Christ. He's spiritually young. You can't expect so much." Yes, but we need to be born again in the first place. You need that life in the soul.

So God's children are born again and are starting with infancy, spiritual infancy, and yet they should not remain children but grow up and not act as children and think as children and behave as children, but need more. And in between, some people also among us don't grow up right and people have special needs, in a sense, they don't grow up and we empathize with them, we love them. But in a spiritual sense, if people are spiritually retarded and behind, that's not good. That shouldn't be. Although the Lord is free, no, the Lord is free to give one more than the other? That's right. The Lord is also free to give to the one conversion and not the other, but that we still have the responsibility to grow.

So we read in our text, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes," even as unto babes, "in Christ." So he says, "Brethren. And I, brethren." He is talking to God's people, to God's people not growing up, to God's people yet being babes, but at least they are God's people. He says, "Brethren," in the same family. He loved them. He felt connected with the congregation. He did not hate them. He did not rebuke them, in a sense. "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual." They are spiritual and they have life and they are God's people but he could not speak unto them in a spiritual sense because they could not digest it. "But as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ."

We see that example more often in the Bible and it's even possible what's not possible. Well, maybe when people are healthy and sound and grow up, at the end of their life maybe they go downhill and there is dementia added to their lives. It happens, right? Alzheimer's and they don't remember things and they go backwards. Well, that's also possible in a spiritual sense, that people are growing up spiritually and that they have times that they go downhill again, and that they go backwards, and that they become fleshy, and that they become children again. But let me show you a few verses from the Bible.

Already in the Old Testament in Hosea 11 we read about this, that the people of Israel are compared to a child, a child the Lord loves, a child in Egypt. And the Lord took that child and took their hands and said, "I lead you through the desert, and I lead you to the Promised Land." Hosea 11, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew

not that I healed them." So it is possible that people are lead by the Holy Spirit and that they walk in the Lord's ways and that they are little children.

Or think of 1 Corinthians 13, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." So that's normal also in spiritual life, that we at first speak and understand and think and behave as a child but that later on we grow up and we mature.

So the Apostle Paul is talking about milk. "I have fed you with milk and not with meat." You know, the Apostle Paul is saying this, "You as a congregation," he talks about the Corinthians, "you have criticized me, that my sermons were too simple. They were not deep enough. But do you know what? Do you know why I preached in such a simple way? Because you're children. You have not grown up so you could not even understand me if I would go deeper. So that's why, brethren, I could not speak unto you as spiritual because you are not spiritual. You are babes. So that's why, you are babes in Christ and because you are babes in Christ, I have to feed you with milk."

So you may ask: but what is that milk? What is it? Well, it, in the first place, has to do with understanding. Understanding. It is the milk of the word of God. It's the milk the Lord gives and therefore God's children receive spiritual insight and knowledge. It's factual. It's doctrinal. It's a message. Faith is by hearing and that hearing is important. And I know even the most mature children of the Lord are still infants. I know still God's children have been led by fathers who are still little ones compared to what God's children know in heaven. Now it is through a glass darkly, kind of faint, kind of foggy, kind of, "What is it?" We have a little insight into the truth, but what would it be if the veil would be taken off? And God's children will be in heaven and then they will come to full maturity, right, in heaven. There's no glass darkly to look through. Then they will see God. They will be with the Lord Jesus Christ. They will have everything their heart desires. They will be fulfilled and satisfied seeing the image of God. But yet on earth there is a difference as well. Some of God's children have little knowledge and others have more.

"How is it that ye do not understand," the Lord Jesus said, "that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?" The people did not understand the Lord Jesus. He spoke about the leaven of the Pharisees and they didn't get it, even God's people. One of those examples of lack of knowledge is in the life of the Apostle Peter. You know, he had said, "Thou art the Son of the living God," right? "Who do the people say that I am? Well, one says this, and one says that, but who do you say that I am?" And the Apostle Peter worded it so beautifully for all of them, "Thou art the Christ." He knew that. The Messiah. The Son of the living God. And the Lord said, "Flesh and blood have not revealed it unto you but my Father because he reveals it to babes." That Peter.

Listen also to the message of the Lord Jesus that he would die, that he would be delivered into the hands of evil men and be crucified, and the Apostle Peter said, "What? That's not going to happen. I won't let it happen. I'd rather die." Then Peter took him, took the Lord

Jesus and he began to rebuke the Lord Jesus, to rebuke him saying, "Be it far from thee. This shall not be unto thee." So he loved the Lord Jesus, he was the servant of the living God, but he did not have to die. That's ridiculous. There was no place for that. And it's still possible that God's children know something of Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and that they are still babes, still infants in a spiritual sense, and don't grasp the truth, and don't think it necessary that the wrath of God comes down on the Messiah. They just don't see it, don't feel it, there's no room for that.

It's even possible that God's children come to the Lord's Supper table and have something in them of that waiting upon the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, and that they have some insight into the Savior Jesus Christ but yet don't understand much of, "This is my body that's broken for you." That they are as yet, in a spiritual sense, infants and babes and don't go so deep yet.

Or think of those two men traveling to Emmaus and talking to that stranger that came alongside and was asking them, "What happened to you? And why do you look so sad?" And they explained it unto him, "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel and beside all this today is the third day, they said these things are done. We don't understand it and there are still some ladies and they say to us he rose from the dead." And so confused, such babies. They should have known. They were given that meat and they were not able to digest it, and the Lord had to say unto them, "O ye fools and slow of heart to understand." Do you see? Slow to understand.

So it is possible that God's children know something. Well, they do, right, they all know things. They know something about their sins, they know about the fall, they know about the unworthiness of life, they know the Lord could pass them by without pardoning them, that the Lord just freed them, they know that. They don't feel that they deserve grace at all, at all, and yet the Lord surprises them with the gospel and they see something of that possibility outside of self in another, in the Savior. And they see something of, for example, the name Jesus, he would save his people from their sins. But that does not mean that they know much.

They can still be such infants like Mary Magdalene. "Then she runneth and comes to Simon Peter and to the other apostle whom Jesus loved and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre and we know now where they have laid him." So confused, not being able to give it over and to trust. They did not know those things too well.

So there is milk and meat. Now what is milk and what is meat? Do we say that we actually need two types of classes in church? That we have children and adults? And that the spiritual ones receive milk and the advanced ones receive meat? So is there a difference between meat and milk? I wouldn't say so. There are not two different gospels, the meat gospel and the milk gospel, the meat message and the milk message. It's one message. Are there two gospels, milk gospel and meat gospel? There's only one gospel but what's happening is this, a little one may taste something and yet not take all the

nutrition out of it, has a little understanding, a little understanding and not much experience of it.

You know, we see it, for example, how people have experienced the birth of Christ. For some that has been so special, right, for the shepherds and with joy they left and they had seen the Savior born in Bethlehem. So they loved him and for others like for Simeon who a couple weeks later also rejoiced, "Now lettest thou thy servant go in peace because my eyes have seen thy salvation." You know, the one gets more out of it than the other. The same message is milk for the one and meat for the other because there are more details maybe? That's possible. The Apostle Paul writes in Hebrews 5 also about infancy and they are connected to a deeper insight, into more detailed insight. We read there in Hebrews, the letter to the Hebrews, you see all those details about the high priest and the sacrifices and you say, "That goes so deep. That is for mature ones." That's right. It's more detailed and yet that same detailed message can be milk for the one and can be meat for the other.

But it's not only the details, it's also the experience of it. For example, the cross of Christ. For the one the cross can be so special, seeing that someone had died for them, to save them. And it can be a real joy and yet not so deep yet. And for someone else who experienced that he should be cut off from the land of the living and felt the curse on him, the load of sin on his back, have felt, "I have to be crucified and I should be slain and I am unworthy of the least of God's blessings." Well, we all experience that but, you know, there's a deeper understanding of that. That same cross is for the one milk and nourishing milk, and for the other more detailed but also an experience more.

"I have fed you with milk and not with meat." So the Apostle Paul says, "I have brought you the basics of the gospel and what you should understand." I read in Hebrews 5:12-14, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers," again, "For when for the time after so many years of having been taught, for when for the time ye ought to be teachers," you have been exposed to the truth and all the details, you should have been teachers. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again." So the Apostle Paul writes in Hebrews 5 to the people that they by now should have been teachers and they need to be in the class themselves and so he needs to teach them again, "which be the first principles of the oracles of God." So he's saying, "You should have been teachers but now you are students again and I teach you the first principles of the oracles of God. I go back to the course 101. I go back to the beginning." So, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word," he is unskillful in the word, "of righteousness: for he is a babe." Do you see? That's kind of included in our text as well. Being a babe means lack of understanding and falling back into those first principles of the oracles of God. You should have been teachers by now. How old are you? How many years are you on the road? Maybe 20, 40 years. You should have been teachers. You fall back into those old patterns and become as having need of milk again.

So that milk, I said, is especially the word of God. 1 Peter 2, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire," that's a command, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Have they not tasted that the Lord is gracious? They tasted it. Not only believed it and accepted it but they understood it and they tasted experientially of the word of the living God, that sincere, that spiritual milk of the word that you may grow thereby. That's the purpose of reading the word and meditating upon the scriptures and going to church, that God's people would grow thereby and would drink that milk and receive more of that meat and grow in the knowledge and in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you a child? Are you a babe? Are you an infant in grace? Have things changed? You cannot deny that, you cannot deny that you're a slave and hungry and thirsty, you had to drink and you cannot deny that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious? And then he had fallen back again as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word? The gospel of grace.

So in a sense, all God's people, all God's children are children and yet there's a difference. "I write unto you, little children." He is talking to the whole congregation in 1 John. "I write unto little children because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." So is there enough spending with the book of the living God? If God's children don't study the Bible themselves, they will remain babes. And they can still be God's people but they don't grow up and that's not to the glory of God. Infants in knowledge.

Let's go the second thought: infants in faith. You know, I like the last two words of verse 1, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." So they are babes but at least in Christ. They are babes in Christ but at least they are. They understand something of Christ. They are in Christ. Babes in Christ, not adults in Christ but they are at least in Christ. That's all that counts.

Of course, I am thinking of death a lot now over the last couple of days. We saw it coming but it's all that counts, to be in Christ. A babe that should maybe be an adult but at least in Christ, to be for his account, to be chosen in him, to be paid for by him, by his blood, that he is precious to us, the trusting in him, the relying on him, him being revealed unto our understanding. You know, God's children so often fall back into not trusting because it's not only knowledge, it's also trusting, believing, that's connected. You know those examples, don't you, children as well, "Therefore if God so clothed the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

So the Lord is addressing the disciples, his own children with saying, "O ye of little faith." So it happens that God's people, they were in Christ, are babes in Christ and have little of that relying on him. They had it and they in a way have it but it can be so dim and so dark and so little. "O ye of little faith." The little ones have faith. There is still faith but little faith.

And then they have little faith, you sometimes wonder is there grace? Why are they so doubtful and fearful? And I'm not defending that but it happens. "O ye of little faith."

Think of the disciples in the storm on the sea of Galilee. "O we perish!" They cry. "We perish!" And Jesus on board. And he said unto them, "Why are you so fearful, O ye of little faith." Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea and there was a great calm. Do you see? Little faith. "Oh, why, why are ye so fearful? Why are you still babes in believing, in trusting? O ye of little faith, why, why are you so fearful. O ye of little faith," the Lord Jesus rebuked his own disciples and he said, "You are mine. You have faith. I'm your Savior but I'm disappointed. You have such little faith. You're still babes."

And the Apostle Peter was walking on the sea, on the water, and he started sinking when he looked at the waves and the circumstances, and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him and said unto him, "O thou of little faith. Wherefore didst thou doubt? Wherefore didst thou doubt? You don't have to. Why?" And remember the Bible story, children, of the lunatic boy. He was throwing himself in the fire and the water and almost killed himself, and the devil kind of vexed him, occupied him, and his father was so concerned and he brought his son to the disciples because the Lord Jesus was not present at that time, and the disciples could not help him. He was so sad and then the Lord Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and rebuked his disciples. Then Jesus answered and said to the disciples, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring them hither to me." So the Lord Jesus knows how to deal with that unbelief, with those doubts. And think of Thomas, right? "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands and reach hither thy hands and thrust it into my side and be not faithless," not believing. Be not faithless but believing.

So are you a babe and you look at those circumstances and there is no trusting, there is so much fear and anxiety? You know, listen to that and be not faithless but believing. And if you don't know of those things, open that word and understand it, realize it, that we have departed from God and the Lord is preaching a Savior who is able and willing to save. Oh, may your eyes be opened for that, to trust, to repent and to trust in him.

You know, sometimes God's people feel more distant, right, just don't feel so close all the time in order to let his people grow up. So sometimes God's people feel darkness, there's no light, and children are often afraid in the dark, right? "It's too dark. Please, switch on the light. It's so dark, I'm scared!" But now to be an adult and not be so scared in the dark, that's also true in the spiritual sense even if it's dark, not being so afraid. Why not? Because I read in Isaiah 50, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?" And then, "let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God."

So that's also infancy, to not trust for time, eternity, for body and soul, for now and forever in our circumstances. So what is needed for that reason, to not be a babe in Christ but to be mature in Christ, to be rooted in Christ, to be rooted to him, I read in Job 22:21, "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." Acquaint now thyself with him, I studied that a little bit this week. Be friends with him. Be intimate with him. Dwell upon him. Familiarize yourself with him. Meditate on him. You know, if you are close to someone, you're used to someone. You are acquainted with that person. You say, "I know

that person very well. We talk every day." One of my sisters is single and she talks every day to my parents. Every day. Every day at night. She was the closest to my parents, I suppose.

So now to acquaint thyself with him, with Christ, to be at peace. In some doctrines, in some churches maybe, they say when you're justified, when you're forgiven, when you have been a child of God, you don't have to worry about your sins anymore and about forgiveness anymore and you just live a holy life now. You are past the cross. You're past the cross. No. No, acquaint now thyself with that cross more and more and don't pass it and don't say, "I have passed that station and that level, I am now on another course." No, that stage, acquaint now thyself with him, with God, with Christ also in times of darkness.

And yet although the Lord says acquaint now thyself and be not faithless but be not doubting and this responsibility and rebuke, yet the Lord is also free, so when then some of God's people don't grow up, the reason of that is themselves. When God's children may advance a little bit and grow up in that knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, that's God's gift. That's God's gift. Those three disciples that were close to the Lord Jesus and with him in the garden of Gethsemane and closer, and on the Mount of Transfiguration, it was God's choice. And so the Lord has sometimes people he has chosen to be closer to him but that being said, yet it's not right to remain a babe in Christ.

This brings us to the third thought: infants in holiness. First we sing.

Infants in holiness. The Apostle Paul writes in a certain context there are divisions in the church. There is strife. There are hard feelings and there are parties, sections in the church where one says, "I'm for Apollos," and another says, "No, I prefer Paul." And others Cephas. So there was tension and the Apostle Paul was concerned about that. He said something like this, he said, "You know, it's not about us as ministers. The one prefers this minister and another one that minister, it's not about us. Be united. We are not the CEOs of a church. We are servants. We are ministers." Verse 5 was not in our text but let me yet quote it, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed."

So the Apostle Paul is saying, "Your strife and your fights have influence on your spiritual life 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 meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it." Why not? "Not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able to bear it. For," the reason, "For ye are yet carnal." Carnal or fleshy. A carnivore is an animal that eats meat, it's a meat-eater. Carnal is meat, and the word is also used for fleshy, human weakness, sinfulness even. So, "For ye are yet carnal." I thought God's people were not carnal at all anymore? They were delivered from that carnal heart, that heart of flesh? No, the heart of stone and they have a heart of flesh but flesh in the positive sense, impressible, but in this case flesh is negative. Ye are yet fleshy, ye are yet carnal, "for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?"

So let me just make this more practical. I don't think in the church now it might be too bad, that strife and that carnality, but what about your family? What about your marriage? What about other siblings? If there is strife and envying and jealousy and hard feelings and unforgiveness, it stands in the way, then you need milk, then you're not growing up. It will affect your assurance, God's people. It will affect you tremendously. It's not right. It's something you will experience the bitter consequences from.

So let's go back to that 1 Peter 2 about the sincere milk and put it in context. Look at the beginning of 1 Peter 2, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." So he doesn't only say you need to drink milk to grow, but he combines that. He says laying aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk. If you desire sincere milk, if you would like to grow thereby, you have to just also think of holiness and of loving the Lord's ways because it doesn't match otherwise. It's not working.

So some of God's people are still drinking milk, are still carnal, are still babes because there is so much disagreement and fighting going on. It's possible. It goes together. So read it for yourself that combination in 1 Peter 2 and read it here, right? "You're carnal. I have fed you with milk not with meat for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." Not able to bear the meat, to digest the meat, "For ye are carnal and the strife and envying." Or think also of Hebrews 5 in a different context. I've quoted the text before as well but maybe we forget a few words. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." So strong meat for who? For them that have matured, of full age, and tell me more about those people, who by reason of use have their sense exercised. Their sense exercised to discern both good and evil. They are precise. They say, "I don't want to sin." They have crucified more the old nature and therefore they are more able to eat the strong meat.

So if a child of God is not growing up and is not so doubting and they are still God's people, okay. What is often one of the reasons why they don't grow up? Fighting. So when I was a child, I spake as a child, understood as a child, thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things and that's necessary to rid yourself of that.

So assurance is connected to this. In faith itself, in the exercise of faith there is no doubt, right? Because if someone truly believes and if it's alive and exercised, you trust him. You trust him but there is still so much unbelief in the heart of God's people left. So being certain of him but not so certain of myself. There are still doubts.

So if there is something that's holding you up, if there's something standing in the way, if it's another sin, maybe something else than this, and many sins can be in the way, if God's children don't fight unto blood. Now some have said there are two types of Christians, carnal Christians and not carnal Christians. I don't believe that. There are not two classes but some of God's people are more carnal than others are, are less holy than others are.

That's correct. So how do you sit in church under this? "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." Maybe you are not even like that, maybe even not a babe. Maybe you are dead in sins and trespasses, no life whatsoever, so you can't grow either. So open the word of the living God and realize there is milk and realize that there is a God who can save you and can give you that grace and flee unto him with all your sins and seek salvation in no other, and don't try to qualify in any way. Come with your baggage, with your garbage, with your sins unto him. Seek your salvation in Christ to become a babe in Christ. And then to also grow up. Oh, may that be for God's glory and for God's honor.

So the Apostle Paul does not like it that people favor him over others. He said, "No, I don't need that. I want to be a servant. For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" That's carnality. He has no use for that. Oh, may the Lord give that type of unity of humble unity, of being together, to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and that he may dwell in the hearts and the he may grow thereby by that word of the living God because faith is by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Amen.