

You will remember that last week, Paul had a bit of a rest before returning to the divisions in the church that he addresses in this chapter. In review, in chapter two, Paul explained that he didn't speak to them in highly sophisticated language, and I reminded the congregation that we also don't need to speak in great philosophical terms to share the gospel. The gospel alone has the power to save. Paul then talked about how having the Holy Spirit enables us to understand things we would never be able to understand as natural men (think unsaved people). Why is that? Because the "natural man" doesn't have the Holy Spirit to enlighten and illumine. Lastly, we talked about what it meant to have the "mind of Christ." This is where we are able, in some way, to understand some of God's deep mysteries. In chapter 3, we will see Paul once again addressing the divisions that had arisen in the church. Last week, I should have quoted a verse from 1 Corinthians 6 that says our spirit can be one with the Spirit of God within us. That goes to the heart of how we are enabled to have the "mind of Christ." Paul now turns back to the situation of division and dissension in the church.

***<sup>1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:1-4, NKJV).***

Although indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Christians are still able to revert to their old flesh patterns, and they are able to think, speak, and act in carnal ways. They are sometimes described as "carnal" Christians. They are Christians, but they are not walking in the Spirit. Some have interpreted this to mean that someone can come to Christ and never exhibit any fruit or change in their life. I don't think Paul is giving license to be wholly given over to sin. Paul is certainly not suggesting that the Corinthian believers were totally fleshly. If they were nothing but fleshly, then we must wonder whether or not they are born again. When I grow fruit trees in my orchard, I expect to see fruit on my trees. As believers, we should see some fruit in a person's life. However, sometimes believers will do fleshly things. These people had clumped into groups, living in a fleshly manner. If you have a family member or friend who claims to be a believer but has never shown any evidence, don't stop praying for them. They may, in fact, not really even be a Christian. This is one problem I have with asking someone to pray the so-called "sinner's prayer."

The recitation of the "sinner's prayer" does not get you to heaven. We become believers when we confess that Jesus Christ is our Messiah and Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9-10). That means putting your faith and trust in Him to save you. Paul begins by telling the Corinthians that it is hard for him to speak to them about the higher things of the Spirit because they are carnal. This is a very important statement because some people don't believe this or teach this. Paul clearly tells us that we can be Christians and all the while behave in certain carnal ways. Having said that, when a person comes to Christ, you can't really remain

unchanged. When someone has certain fleshly flare-ups, it shouldn't lead to great doubts about one's own salvation. There is a difference between falling to the flesh on occasion and living in a constant, unbroken fleshly manner. I have heard it said, "Christians are not sinless, but they sin less." Let me give you some examples. I've had people come and ask me, "is it possible that Joe is not really a Christian? He seems to have a severe drinking problem." Another case might be a young person who is a believer who might go through a phase where they're living with a lover outside of marriage, and a parent or a relative might wonder if they were ever saved to begin with. They very well might be saved, yet they're living in a carnal state at present. And yes, it is also possible that they're not redeemed at all. My precious editor explained to me that through a series of bad decisions, she ended up addicted to drugs, even though she is certain that she was a believer when it all happened.

Paul fed the Corinthians the basics of the faith because they had not yet grown spiritually mature enough to handle the deeper truths. He adds that when a person is carnal, they are not able to even receive the things of the Spirit. At that point in their carnality, they are insensitive to receiving any prompting or teaching from the Holy Spirit. I like to think of it as repetitive sin that builds up scar tissue on the soul. The more carnal a believer becomes, the more insensitive they become to the prompting and correcting of the Holy Spirit. In time, if the believer desires, the Holy Spirit cuts away the scar tissue, and the believer's soul once again is sensitive to the conviction, correction, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians were involved in cliques and spiritual one-upmanship, both products of their carnality. The message to us is to run from carnality. When we are carnal, we become insensitive, and we can go into a spiritual downward spiral. If there is no fruit in a person's life and never has been, there is a question as to whether or not they were ever saved to begin with. The Corinthians' mentality was centered on division and dividing into groups based on popularity.

### ***Watering, Working, Warning***

***<sup>5</sup> Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. <sup>7</sup> So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Corinthians 3:5-8, NKJV).***

Paul then talks about how we get into big trouble when we attribute spiritual greatness to one person or another in the church. Pride seeps into a church in so many ways. It is exhibited when someone "doesn't feel recognized or appreciated for ALL they've done for the church." Well, if they've done it for the church, then they've done it for the wrong motive anyway. The church is a family where each person has a role in whatever God wants them to do. We should constantly be on our guard against seeking recognition or approval for what God has led us to do in the group. That is a trap of Satan. The problem is that so many of us don't want to water. We don't want to plant the seed. We don't want to till the soil. We don't want to spread the fertilizer. We don't want to weed the garden. Many want the glory of driving the combine and reaping the entire harvest. Paul is telling the church that they're a team, all in it together. We are to each do our part, but it is God who gives the increase.

***<sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. <sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:9-11, NKJV).***

Paul continues by telling the Corinthians that they are fellow workers. They are in it together. They are like a big garden that God is working in. There is a lot that goes on in a garden. There are many variables and moving parts. Everything needs to be done at the right time and in the right way. The church is also like a big building. If you've ever watched a house being built, you know it's a very big, complicated ordeal. There are measurements, plans, batter boards, concrete, plumbing, electrical, AD, drywall, paint, etc and they are all necessary, or there isn't a house.

Paul reiterates that it is God who builds this building, and that he has been privileged to lay the foundation, which was Jesus. He then sends each of us to do one thing or another in the building that He is constructing. He cautions that we should each be careful, diligent in contributing our part, and that it should never be about ourselves but about the work that God Himself is doing. As I told my kids growing up, "It will be amazing what can be accomplished if we're not worried about who gets the credit."

***<sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15, NKJV).***

Verses 12-15 address the work each of us does. Paul says the motive behind what we do is of utmost importance. It will be revealed and will come to light even if we've hidden it well. You might be engaged in a really important role for the church, but if you do it with the wrong heart attitude, that will be revealed in the end. Paul says that the day will reveal it because it will be revealed by fire (verse 13). This means that God will put that work through a furnace, so to speak, and the part that is genuine will remain. But if something has been done in the flesh, it will burn up in the fire. If it was done with the right motive, it will be gold, silver, and precious stones. If it was done with the wrong motive, it will be wood, hay, and stubble and will burn up in the fire! I think it's important to understand that motive is everything. If you are doing something for the church for the cause of Christ but you're doing it to receive "attaboys" and "kudos," it's all for naught. Even if it seems valuable on the outside, it has no eternal value at all. And there will be no award attached to that work.

Paul goes on to say that some people's life work will all be burned up because, in the end, it was really all about them. He says, "they're still going to find themselves in heaven, but they'll have the smell of smoke on them."

***16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, NKJV).***

Paul turns his attention toward the body. Many of the Corinthians were no doubt still engaged in the deeds of the flesh. What am I talking about? I'm talking about fornication, adultery, drunkenness, and any misuse of their bodies. Paul tells us that our bodies are the very Temple of the Holy Spirit. They are the vessels in which God lives. We are not to misuse our bodies in a sordid way because God's Holy Spirit lives within us. I learned this verse as a young boy, and I was always conscious that my body was not my own. This is a great truth to understand, as it helps us to guard our bodies from drunkenness and sexual license. God gave me this old body, but He made it His temple when He sent His Spirit to live within me.

### ***Avoid Worldly Wisdom***

***18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (1 Corinthians 3:18-23, NKJV).***



Paul tells us to keep a check on ourselves. We should each be very careful not to think more of ourselves than we should. I have often said here at the Grove, "we'll be fine as long as none of us takes ourselves too seriously." What I'm trying to say is that we need to walk in humility, never thinking of ourselves as more important than we are. Paul says that the more we really realize how little we know, the closer we get to being wise. This reminds me so much of what Cowboy Bill used to tell us. He'd say, "it's what you learn after you know it all that really counts." The wisdom of God is so much farther, higher, deeper, and wider than anything that a human being might think is wise. I'd like to offer practical steps to keep ourselves in check

and avoid thinking too highly of ourselves. The main Scriptures that lead us in this are Philippians 2:3-8, which instructs us to count others more significant than ourselves. This is how we, in part, have "the mind of Christ." Also, James 4:6-10 urges us to humble ourselves before God, and Peter reminds us repeatedly to clothe ourselves with all humility (1 Peter 5:5-6). These verses can be lived out by the following:

- **Confess your tendency** to think too highly of yourself (1 John 1:9). Recognize that pride is evidenced when we have an inclination to boast, be defensive, and be self-focused. These are evidence of a pride problem. Don't beat up on yourself. Just get over yourself!

- Start your day **declaring** your total and complete dependence on God. You can pray something like, “Lord, I cannot do this on my own. Help me to walk humbly as Jesus walked. Oh, precious Lord, guard me from myself.” In essence, this is claiming and living out Proverbs 3:5-6.
- Make a practice of **thanking** God frequently. Start with the first breath you breathe in when you find yourself alive once again in the morning (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18). Being grateful to God will displace the unholy pride you harbor.
- Be **intentional** about thanking others for anything and everything they do for the church, for others, and for you. Consciously think about how you can look out for their interests instead of primarily your own (Philippians 2:3-4).
- Be very careful **not to crave** or seek recognition for what you do for others (especially the church). If you are doing what you’re doing to please men (i.e., to have folks in the church thank you), then it is nothing but wood, hay, and stubble. Jesus washed His disciples' feet. Go and do likewise. Try washing dishes, helping someone you might normally avoid, or giving up your preference for how things should be done. (Galatians 5:13).
- **Accept** correction, criticism, and humility with great patience. Don’t be quick to jump to your own defense. This is true even if you’ve been unfairly accused of things. Resist the temptation to defend yourself at all costs (1 Peter 3:8-9; 2:18-23).
- **Submit** yourself to those whom God has put in authority over you. Submission trains your heart to be less interested in self-exaltation.
- **Compare yourself only to Jesus** and not to other people. Stop worrying about what others get or have. That is envy. Envy is pride in full bloom. Fix your eyes on Jesus and His standard for holiness, and you’ll stop being so impressed with yourself.
- **Serve** in ways that cost you in time, talent, and treasure... and even in status. Volunteer for unglamorous roles. Give without recognition. Prioritize others’ needs.

Be on guard. Self is sneaky. None of us can really be humble without a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. It is He who empowers us to get ourselves out of the way. In time, your habits of humility will become dominant, and self will fade away. Pride will always tear a church family apart. Humility and love for Jesus above all else will keep a church unified and effective.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.