

1 Corinthians 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

Analysis

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal (σαρκίνοις, sarkinois, 'fleshly')—Paul diagnoses the Corinthians' stunted spiritual development. The contrast between pneumatikos (πνευματικός, 'spiritual,' Spirit-governed) and sarkinos ('fleshly,' flesh-dominated) reveals believers who remain controlled by natural appetites rather than divine leading. **Even as unto babes in Christ** (νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, nēpiois en Christō)—this describes spiritual infancy, not chronological age.

The Corinthian church was several years old by this point, yet still required elementary teaching. Their factional jealousies over preachers (chapters 1-4) demonstrated carnality, not Spirit-led maturity. Paul's apostolic authority permitted him to address them as adelphoi (brothers), yet their behavior resembled unregenerate humanity. True spiritual growth requires moving beyond milk to solid food (Hebrews 5:12-14), from self-centered disputes to Christ-centered unity.

Historical Context

Written circa AD 55 from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey, 1 Corinthians addresses persistent immaturity in a church founded 3-4 years earlier (Acts 18). Despite residing in a sophisticated Greek city famous for rhetoric and philosophy, the believers exhibited shocking carnality—divisions, lawsuits, sexual immorality, and misuse of spiritual gifts.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What evidence in your life demonstrates spiritual maturity versus spiritual infancy—do you still require 'milk' after years of faith?
2. How does factionalism and loyalty to human leaders reveal carnality rather than Spirit-led wisdom?
3. In what areas might you be 'fleshly' (controlled by natural desires) rather than 'spiritual' (governed by the Spirit)?

Interlinear Text

Καὶ ἐγώ, ἀδελφοί οὐκ ἤδυνήθην λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς
And I brethren not could speak unto you as
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πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκικοῖς ὡς νηπίοις ἐν
unto spiritual but as unto carnal as unto babes in
G4152 G235 G5613 G4559 G5613 G3516 G1722

Χριστῷ

Christ
G5547

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 5:13 (Parallel theme): For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

1 Corinthians 2:6 (Parallel theme): Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

1 Corinthians 14:20 (Parallel theme): Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Romans 7:14 (Spirit): For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

1 John 2:12 (Parallel theme): I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

Galatians 6:1 (Spirit): Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Matthew 16:23 (Parallel theme): But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.