

The Carnal Christian Reconsidered

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Lord, You know how weak I feel. And Lord, even beyond that, You know how weak I am. And Lord, You know how much Your people here tonight need Your Word. Lord, it just overwhelms me - the needs of Your people. Every one of them. So would You please help me to help my brothers and sisters? Help me to love my brothers and sisters. Help me to limit myself to the things that Your Word says, and that Your Word would be the help. Father, we're just taking You at Your word. Those who grow weary shall be lifted up, they shall be strengthened. Lord, that's a promise that if You did not answer, You would be unfaithful to Your Word. And so, reverently Lord, we ask You to keep Your word. Father, we're asking for more help, more clarity, more power. Lord, I'm asking for something I've never even experienced before; I've just read about. Lord, we're asking You to revive Your people. We're asking You to meet us with Your presence and then to abide with us in a deeper way. And Lord, we're expecting You can do that through our very, very desperate weakness. So we ask You.

And now, Lord, as we finish praying, we don't want to just forget that we've prayed. We want to now move into waiting on You. And to actively and expectantly looking to You like a watchman looks for the morning light. Lord, would You come and speak, not the words of men, but the voice of God through Your Word? Thank You that You can do this. Thank You that You've promised to do this. And thank You that You're my Father and our Father, and we ask You to move in Jesus' name - the name above all names. Amen.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 is going to be my text. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 It's my hope to love you. And so many of you have been so loving to me in expressing your prayers for me tonight and I do appreciate that. And I just pray that we would be able to reap the answers to those prayers, and that God would pour His love out towards us through His Word. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 The Apostle Paul writing to the grace-filled, but troubled church of Corinth, writes, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food. For you were not ready for it. And even now, (4-6 years later) you are not yet ready. For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy, (that means you want what other people have) and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not being merely human?" Lord, keep us from being merely human. One of the most glorious experiences in the Christian life is sitting under the preaching of God's Word. Like a baby delights to hear the voice of his mother, the Christian delights to hear the voice of his heavenly Father in the Word.

Yesterday, about 6:30, I called my kids and my wife put the phone on speaker phone and she said, "it's daddy." And shouts of glee from at least three children on the planet. I have four, but there was only three in the room. Dad's on the phone! We're going to hear from dad! That is what's happening when a Christian sits under the Word of God proclaimed in the power of the Spirit resonating with their own spirit is "Dad is on the phone!" Our Father comes to speak to us by the Word. Here at this conference, we have been hearing great preaching. Through Mack Tomlinson we heard consoling. God knows your trials and your tears. Preaching that leads you to the empowering presence of God for weak people preaching. And I was just eating

it up. Because I am weak and weary. That's the chorus of my life. And then, Kevin Williams we heard. Balanced, evangelistic, doctrinal preaching that answers all the objections you ever thought of having and never had thought of having. Until by the end of the message, I'm like "I can come to Christ!" No, I mean that. I decided I'm going to sit on this message. I'm going to think what's keeping me dry? What's keeping me from full faith in Christ? So I was letting myself ask questions like the skeptic.

But, Lord, when I come to You, what happens? Nothing generally happens when I come to You. And then Kevin started dealing with feelings, and I was done. It's just glorious! It is a marvelous thing to hear good preaching. To hear good preaching is to hear how much God knows our souls and how much God cares for our souls.

I will say this, for me, the call to preach came largely from hearing good preaching. I just heard good preaching, and I thought whatever it takes to be able to do that, whatever amount of study or diligence or devotion it takes to be able to thunder truth like John MacArthur or to wed textuality with passion and applicability like John Piper; or to be logic on fire like Martyn Lloyd-Jones; or to have winsome love like Charles Leiter in the pulpit, I want to do it. And I still feel the same way. When I hear good preaching, I just want to preach. There's two ways to make a God-called preacher want to preach, you know. One is to make him sit under very bad preaching. The other is to make him sit under very good preaching. Both have a similar effect. And yet sadly, to hear good preaching does not automatically make for good living, does it? To hear the best preaching does not automatically make the best Christians.

In fact, we must lay down this spiritual principle at the start of tonight's message: Many people who like the best preachers are prone to the most divisive sins. Let me say that another way. Many who love spiritual preaching are quite carnal followers of Christ. Of course, we know that those who love bad preaching, compromised preaching, ear-tickling preaching, are often compromised lovers of self. What we often forget is that those who love good preaching and good preachers are exactly the same in the quality of their lives. Not all. But enough that some spiritual introspection is called for.

This is certainly the case with these Corinthians. Many of the Corinthians, despite all their faults, loved good preaching. They loved preaching that's better than any preaching you've ever heard. Notice in v. 4 what they said. "I follow Paul." Give me Romans! "I follow Apollos." That humble-hearted apologetics-driven preaching. Love it! And then, of course, in 1 Corinthians 1, "I follow Cephas," or as we often call him "Peter." That bold Peter who's been broken by his falls, but he's so honest and transparent and helps you out in your suffering preaching - Peter. Just loved it. Loved it. They loved the best preachers. And yet, though they loved the best preachers, these Corinthians were babies - total spiritual babies. Not because they had heard bad preaching. Not because they had unfaithful pastors. But in spite of the fact that they'd heard good preaching and had exceptionally faithful leaders. Notice the text. 1 Corinthians 3 Paul couldn't talk to them like spiritual people, but as people of the flesh. Infants in Christ. They hadn't even heard the best things Paul had ever preached. He gave them milk and not solid food. They weren't even ready for it. They heard Christ. They weren't content in Christ. They were envious of others. They heard Christ, and they weren't much for peace-making, they were full of strife. They were of the flesh. They were behaving in a human way. And all the while, these were not the people who didn't show up to hear the preaching. These were the

people who always showed up to hear the preaching. I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. And yet, Paul says despite the supernatural anointing that God had clearly placed on Paul, on Apollos, on Cephas, that supernatural anointing was not transferring into spiritual love in the Corinthians.

And I'll just say this, I don't want to be that guy. And I've been that guy. Hear a great sermon, cut to the heart, get in the car, irritable with my wife. Maybe you can relate. You read a Christian biography and it doesn't make you humble and sweet, it makes you jealous and grumpy. Spurgeon got to live a movie. I'm living a novel nobody's ever going to read and I can't even see the plot. A lot of carnality in the church can hide in the shadow of great preachers. And brothers and sisters, I want something different for me. I want something different for you than immaturity, carnality, and fleshly living. I want for myself and for each one here - and maybe you could just be praying to God for these things as we go through this message - I want for you and me maturity, biblical spirituality, heavenly love, heavenly living.

The goal of this sermon is to help each of us think about the carnality in our lives and to walk away from it into biblical spirituality and a biblical following of Christ. Here in 1 Corinthians, these Corinthian Christians are not even living like Christians. They are living below what Christ has called them to, and below what Christ has made possible for them. They have sometimes been called carnal Christians, but there's so much controversy about that term and controversy about what they are and who they are and what that means, that I just want to walk through the text verse by verse and then we'll handle the bigger issues. So let's go.

First of all, the Apostle Paul calls them brothers. "But I, brothers..." He calls them family. He identifies with them. It wasn't that Paul had family off in Corinth. It was that they had experienced the new birth along with him and now were children of God. They now had the Spirit in them that cried "Abba, Father." They were going to share a common inheritance. Though they may never have met or some of them may never have met Paul, they were one family because they were one in Christ. They were part of God's family where God is the Father, Christ is the elder brother, and the church is the company of God's redeemed. His family. And so Paul does not disdain their carnality as the problem of some other church. He views their carnality as a family problem. Where he, a father in the faith, is going to move towards them in their sin and not away from them in their sin. "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people."

Now here's where the text gets strange because why can't Paul talk to them as spiritual people? Because the very definition of being a brother in Christ is that you are spiritual. The Apostle Paul has actually just finished talking about the two divisions that everyone in the human race falls into in the two or three verses just prior to the ones we're reading. Every single human being is either spiritual because they receive the truth of the Gospel, or they are natural because they reject the truth of the Gospel. Look at 2:14, "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him and he is not able to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." So, the natural person - could be a religious Muslim; could be a secular American; it doesn't matter. The natural person does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. That is, the truths of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He lived and died and rose again for wicked sinners to be completely reconciled to God. The natural man doesn't have any time for that. It doesn't make sense to him. He's a good guy. He doesn't need that. There's no God. He doesn't need that. The natural man does not receive these truths. The spiritual person

judges all things. Now what that means is the spiritual person has received that and now they look at the whole world in light of that. They're able to make sense of the world and judge the world in light of what they've come to understand about the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, all I'm trying to say here is there's two kinds of people in the world: the natural who reject the cross and the spiritual who receive the cross. And Paul says that some brothers can't be talked to spiritually. What's happened is they can no longer grip - they are no longer gripping the truths that God has given them. They've let them slide off.

A few years ago, we got a great gift - a lovely gift, stainless steel cookware. Very nice, unless you want to cook. And the problem with stainless steel in my opinion, is that when you put an egg onto stainless steel cookware, the steel says, "mine!" "Forever!" I didn't know there was space in that steel for egg, but there is. You pour the egg on there. It heats up. And the steel grabs it. And we bought all kinds of new products we didn't even know existed to scrub egg out of steel. I've got strategies I use now. That's what Christians are supposed to be like. They're supposed to be like stainless steel cookware that goes "mine!" They get spiritual truth and they just grab hold of it and they hold on to the things they have heard, lest they drift away. They hold on tight. But the Christian soul can become like Teflon. And in this illustration, Teflon is a bad thing. In real life, quite enjoyable. Here our souls can be like Teflon. Where you hear great preaching that sizzles on your soul when you hear it. It's gone. And usually when it's gone is in the moment when it matters. When the family needs to be loved; when the boss needs to be honored; when the kids need to be cared for. I get very nervous when Christians don't talk about practical details in their lives when they're fellowshiping. I get very nervous when I feel like I'm getting a theological windbag effect: "You're so awesome!" "It must be awesome to be you!" I get nervous about that. I want to hear about the wife and the kids and the work and the church and the details, because that's where the Spirit of God actually works. The devil's in the details and so is God. And you need to cling to the truth in the moments when it matters. Not just in the moments when you're fellowshiping. If fellowship means you talk about things that you don't experience in real life and they talk about things that they don't experience in real life, that's not fellowship. That's called play acting. Fellowship is when I was going to scream and choke them to death. And then the Spirit of God came upon me and I gave them a big kiss. And I loved them.

"...I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people." You were just letting spiritual things slip off your souls, "but as people of the flesh." Again, we have to be careful. This may sound too particular. I think it's a necessary distinction. Paul is not calling the Corinthians people who are in the flesh. All people live in one of two realms. Romans 8. In the Spirit or in the flesh. As a Christian, you do not wake up and try to get spiritual. If you're a Christian, you just are spiritual. All the time. You might be Teflon spiritual - we've got to work on something. But you're always spiritual. Because the Spirit of God resides in you. You are His temple. But having said that the Christian is always in the Spirit and never under the dominion and the reign and the rule of the flesh, doesn't mean that the Christian cannot be influenced by the flesh and in fact influenced extremely by the flesh. The Apostle Paul acknowledges that in Galatians 5 when he tells us that we should walk by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh. So here you are. You are in the Spirit. You are not in the flesh. And yet, even now, under the rule and reign of the Spirit with the Spirit of God dwelling in you, the flesh is constantly tugging on your soul at

all times, pulling backwards from the forward motion of the Spirit of God. And while the Christian can never go back to being in the flesh, they can so consistently cave to the desires of the flesh, that they can be called unspiritual. They can be called "of the flesh." And when that happens, the Apostle Paul says they are infants. Big babies. Always making a mess. Always throwing a temper tantrum. No stamina. No resolve. No maturity. No backbone. Cute for a minute, and then, you need to mature. The Apostle Paul says these people were infants. And so, he fed them with milk and not solid food. This is a tragedy. I don't watch any of these cooking shows, but you've got Julia Child and Emeril and Wolfgang Puck - these guys can make anything - garlic, sage, oregano steak - boom! It's amazing. Whatever they do with it. They probably use a steel pan. They probably know what they're doing. Can you imagine one of these fancy cooks - one of these TV chefs going, "I need two scoops of the formula, six ounces of water, shake it in a bottle, stick it in your mouth." Do you not have a steak available? Yeah, I do. You couldn't digest it. It wouldn't do you any good. You actually cannot at this point profit from the best things I have to offer. I could cook you a Roman's banquet. It wouldn't help you. I could cook you an Ephesians appetizer. It wouldn't help you. Because you're not receiving spiritual truth.

"And even now, you're not ready, for you're still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh?" How does Paul know that these Corinthians are immature babies? How does he know that? It wasn't because they had a lack of doctrine. There were doctrinal issues in the Corinthian church, but it's not primarily the test Paul uses to discern whether he can feed them the fullness that he has or whether he has to limit what he feeds them to just milk. He says the reason he knew he couldn't feed them the best food is because they were jealous. I want what that guy has. He speaks in tongues and I don't. That was happening in the Corinthian church. That guy's got a gift of knowledge; I've got the gift of being dumb and serving, and I hate it. And my hatred is a fleshly rebellion against God. So Paul saw that jealousy, and he saw strife. Oh, they didn't just like preachers. They liked their preacher better than your preacher. Oh, that's bad. I really like Paul Washer and I guess you're in if you like John MacArthur. He's got a few problems. I'm really not a one guy - I'm sort of a zeal of a John Piper with sort of the family of Voddie Baucham splash going on. You're branding yourself with preachers. They're your foot-washing servants, not the logos on your t-shirt. They're just servants. You actually own them. They're just for you. They're not for you to get an identity from. Their zeal is not your zeal. Their awesome experience overseas is not your awesome experience overseas. Their life is not making up for the deficiencies in your life so that you can feel like a well-rounded person. That's the wrong way to approach a preacher. And when you do it, you will always have to look down on someone else. You have to. And you can't profit from the wealth of teaching that's out there because you've got to have a favorite. And if you have a favorite, you've got to despise someone else's favorite. And so often, the men teaching the cross of Christ meant to humble you, become vehicles for the exaltation of our pride and division in the church. And it's carnality. It's not maturity. And it's hard to spot, because the people who are into it, they can quote doctrinal confessions and verses and they've got YouTube glaring awesome preachers at them all the time, and how could they be in rank sin because what's on their iPod is just radical, good theology? Paul says, those people need a bottle of milk. These people are not mature.

Notice this, beloved. He is not saying that the Christians going to prostitutes are immature. That's true. They are immature. That's not what he's talking about here. He's not talking about the Christians who are going to sue each other being immature. He's talking about the sold out, on fire for the big preacher, I love good doctrine, I'm so into that guy, he's getting it mostly right - I'd tweak him a little bit - but mostly right. He's saying that person's a baby. That person's carnal. That person is behaving in merely a human way. The Corinthians loved fancy speakers. They love to identify with the big fancy speaker. It's like Americans love to identify with a pop star or a sports star and we bring that over into the church and identify with a preaching star. And we think that we've gone from being natural to spiritual because instead of liking sports stars we like preaching stars, but actually Paul doesn't think we've made the transfer. He thinks we've actually brought the world into the church.

Just in case I don't say it later, I am not demeaning any great preacher. I want to be like every preacher I just mentioned. I am not demeaning loving and wanting to follow the example of those who have gone before us in leadership. No way. I'm demeaning finding an identity in them that excuses your immorality. So that's the text.

Now, let's work out some implications. Is there such a thing as a carnal Christian? It depends what you mean. I'm using the word carnal Christian because that's the term we often use. We haven't seen that word in our text. We've seen "of the flesh." But the King James Version translates this word that we translate "flesh," carnal. You know carnal - chile con carne. Chili with meat. Dinosaurs were carnivores. They eat meat. It just means flesh. Is there such a thing as a fleshly, carnal Christian? Depends what you mean. Do you mean a "Christian" whose life is habitually, continually, and in a patterned way, dominated by sin? Absolutely not. In fact, we have to be careful not to be deceived on this point. Three times the New Testament tells us: Do not be deceived. The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. And I'll tell you, as a pastor, when an ungodly person is weeping over their sin, more than you've wept over your sin, but they won't quit sinning, I can see how you'd get deceived. It's hard not to get deceived. But you must know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were (past tense) some of you. Every Christian has experienced a change from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have all been born again. They all walk in newness of life. They all have one way. There is a holiness without which no one will see the Lord. And every Christian pursues walking in that holiness. And if you believe you are a Christian and you are not pursuing holiness, you are deceived and I love you and I want you to know there's something better than what you think is the Gospel. And that is that Jesus Christ died to save sinners and if you believe in Him, He will give you new life and transform your lifestyle. That's the Gospel.

Is there such a thing as a carnal Christian? If we mean a Christian's life is dominated by habitual sin, the answer is clearly no. But Paul uses the word here. Hey, if your theology gets rid of a verse, get rid of your theology. Every single verse is inspired by God. So, what does Paul mean when he says that there are infants; there are people of the flesh; there are people who are walking in carnality? I believe he means people with real marks of grace who go on living for years below what God has made possible for them. Paul led the Corinthians to the Lord in 51

A.D. The letter of 1 Corinthians was probably written around 55 A.D. We see in the text that he did not feed them with solid food because they were not ready and even now - at the time of the writing, depending on what time of year they got saved; what time of year this was written, four to six years later, even now you are not ready. These people had been jealous and full of strife for an embarrassingly long time. This was not a bad week. This was not a bad month. This was a bad pattern in the life of Christians who had great marks of grace in their life. Look at 1 Corinthians 1. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:4, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in Him." These were people enriched by Jesus. And they were enriched in all speech and all knowledge. So these people had speech gifts and knowledge gifts. They loved to study the Bible and teach it. They loved Paul and Apollos. And they learned a lot from them. These were real deal Christians with real marks of grace in their life. "Even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gifts as you are waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, one of our things we do is when we see a church with some corruption in it, and then they also have the spiritual gifts active, we say it's all false. Paul didn't say that. There's nowhere in the Corinthian letters where Paul calls into question the tongues, the prophecies, the miracles of healing, or the discernment of spirits, or the exorcisms that may have been happening through the Corinthian church. They were real acts of power from the Holy Spirit being done by babies. The presence of God's supernatural power in your life is not a sign of your maturity. Let me say that again. The presence of God's supernatural power in your life is not a sign of your maturity. So these Christians had real marks of grace. They had speech gifts. They had spiritual gifts. They loved good preaching. They asked all kinds of questions. These were interested Christians. If you know the book of Corinthians, you know that much of it is centered around questions that the Corinthians had written to Paul that he was answering. Should a man ever touch a woman? What about the Lord's Supper? Hey, some guys are suing each other. These were Christians hungry to grow. These were the real deal. And yet they were jealous and fighting. And in that way, we can rightly call them fleshly or carnal.

Let me make a little aside before I go on. Many of you, because God has done a marvelous, transforming and saving work in your life, are now too quick to call other people non-Christians. And the reason it's important for me to tell you, it's not so that I can be the big rebuking preacher; it's because the Lord Jesus does not break a bruised reed. And He does not quench a smoldering flax. And you can really hurt people. You can really hurt people. You can cause your brother to despair. If you're too quick - Not saved! Saved! You see that? Not saved! No Christian would do that! Not saved! Saved! I'm not saying there's not a time for that. There is. Any pastor who's executed church discipline thoughtfully and wisely knows there's a time to say that person is an evil man. That person is a Gentile and tax collector. But don't be faster than the Apostle Paul. Someone's going to prostitutes? You know what the first thing out of Paul's mouth when a Christian's going to a prostitute? You're the temple of the Holy Spirit! Affirmation and assurance. Oh, man it's so encouraging. Come on, you've been that guy! Maybe not a prostitute, but you've fallen flat on your face somewhere, right? As a Christian? And Jesus comes along and says, "Mine!" "I love you!" "Come back!" "Feed My sheep!" Jonah falls flat on his face. God puts him in a whale and then it says, "And the Word of God came to Jonah a

second time." I love that. Be slow to declare churches not churches. There's a place for it. Absolutely. Be slow to declare immature Christians non-Christians. There's a place for it. Be slow.

Second implication. Second, I don't know. I never know what my points are called. So this is what this is. All my sermons used to say three things, four things; I had an elder who was like maybe you should try something other than things. Is a carnal state a state we should leave people in? Or be content in ourselves? Absolutely not. Some would tell us that there are Christians who have Jesus as their Savior and not as Lord. And the implication of that could be that it's fine if they have Him as Savior and never make Him Lord. But the Bible never talks like that. There are not two Christ's. Christ the Savior and Christ the Lord. There's one Christ: Christ. Our Savior and our Lord. What Paul here is doing is not telling them hey, some of you are spiritual, some of you are natural, get used to it, the Second Coming will come and end all that. No, he is working with the immature to bring them to maturity. That's the Great Commission. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded, even till the end of the age. To get those who are still struggling with disobedience, even after four, and five and six years, to get them more mature. That's our job, not just as preachers, but as Christians. We all have a ministry of equipping one another, of speaking the truth in love to one another, so that we help people go from immaturity to maturity. We do not pull back from the immature in the name of keeping ourselves holy. We move towards the immature keeping ourselves holy to help them. That's the impulse of the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. That impulse is why anyone here is saved.

So we should not leave people in a carnal state. To leave people in a carnal state will lead to more and more people experiencing a false assurance. They are treated like brothers here, but brothers, if they never get any victory, then there comes a time late in the letter to the 2 Corinthians where you say test yourselves. See if you're even in the faith. There's a time to say, you fell? You're a temple! You're God's! There's a time to say, maybe we need to look at this again. We don't want to encourage false assurance.

How do we help such people? How do we help such people? Four observations and three questions.

First observation. We need to have the humility to know we could be the people in need of help. What a nightmare! The Fellowship Conference dismissed and they're coming to save America from her carnality. I think there's something in the Bible about getting a log out of your own eye, before you take a speck out of a brother's eye. Christians going to prostitutes are carnal. Christians suing one another are being carnal. But Christians who love preaching and spiritual gifts and have tons of spiritual questions, but don't know how to get along with other people because they're envious fighters are also equally carnal. I'm telling you this because as a pastor I regularly encounter guys who know the Word, know theology, and they're not nice. They don't know how to be normal or nice. Where's nice in the Bible? The fruit of the Spirit is - I think kindness is in there somewhere, right? Love is kind? How are you doing? How's your day? Those are ok questions. And the nightmare is the guy who thinks everyone else is carnal and thinks there's no such thing as a carnal Christian. So he's walking around going "not a Christian, not a Christian, not a Christian, not a Christian..." Meanwhile there's a Holy Spirit neon light over him going, "this is the carnal Christian right here." That guy's a nightmare. And he can't be convinced he's a nightmare. Because if you try to convince him he's a nightmare, you're

compromising. Because you won't lay every believer flat like he would. He is the Christian who's acting carnally. And some of us probably just need to meditate on our interactions with our parents; brothers and sisters; other pastors; church leaders. You know, some of you, the standards you come to other churches with? There would be seasons in the preachers at this conference lives', you wouldn't have gone to their church. Because maybe they hadn't learned something yet that you're discerning is the absolute right way. So this is for me. This is for us. Don't you want us to grow? I want to grow. I can't remember if it was Mack who said yesterday, you can change. So wonderful.

Second observation. We need to help people see that maturity is not about doctrine, but about walking in love. Now doctrine matters. Not denying that for a minute. It really matters. But the way you discern this kind of carnal person is envy and strife. You can't discern them by doctrine alone. They, in fact, generally have Paul's doctrine. I love Paul. I love chapter 1 on Romans and 2 and 3 and 4, 5, and 6, and 7, and 8, and 9! I love 9! And then they fight. I think. I think that the elder's not supposed to be pugnacious. Not supposed to be quarrelsome. Which means that's supposed to transfer into the whole body. A meekness. A tenderness. A patience. Even when people don't agree with you. And one of the most important things you can do is when you assess your maturity you shouldn't say, you know, I've really grown a lot in doctrine so therefore I must be mature now. But rather, has that doctrine led me to be patient? Isn't that amazing? The first thing: love is... patient. Love is patient means that love is expecting people not to get there very fast. And then when they're not getting there very fast, love is kind. That's just what love is. It's shaped by doctrine. But if the doctrine doesn't create this kind of love, it's not maturity, beloved. It's not maturity when you can hash out the fine points of theology and not learn how to form a loving community. Loving community is a big biblical value.

Third observation. We need to feed and receive milk and not solid food. What is milk vs. solid food? What is that anyway? That's a hard one. Is milk the introductory level teachings and then once pastor gives you the secret handshake, you get the solid food? Solid food is not secret doctrines. Solid food is the fullness of doctrines. Every doctrine can be presented in simplicity. You can be forgiven by Christ. Every doctrine can be presented in complexity. By the justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, His propitiatory death on the cross, you can feel the free and full forgiveness of your sins by His atoning sacrifice which fulfills all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Simple. Full. What I've found in counseling situations: Immature people get irritated by milk Hey, you're the temple of the Holy Spirit. You need to quit looking at pornography. Can you give me a little more? I think the Bible says, "flee." But that's not helping me. You're not ready for what you think would help you. In fact, what you think would help you would be the most delusional experience you could ever receive. You need it basic and quick. You're going to prostitutes. You're the temple of the Holy Spirit. Cut it out. You're suing each other. Don't you know you're going to judge angels? Quit it! You make some baby steps in that and then you can start exploring the relationship between Noah's ark and baptism. But you don't need to know every single typological construct and every single point of doctrine before you can make the right moves towards the Lord Jesus Christ. And if some pastor is giving you real simple stuff or some discipler is giving real simple stuff, maybe it's not because they're shallow. Maybe they're sitting there going, no, I'm not giving them that.

So humility requires that we put ourselves in a place that says whatever simple truth I'm given, I'm going to receive that in humility and make the right move in response for it. That's humility. And you find that in new Christians. You find it in new Christians. Like, what have you got for me? I don't know anything, so just tell me what you got. And then after a while, we don't like being humble for the long term. That was good for the beginning. You just want me to stay there? Broken, weak, not knowing very much? Beloved, that is how I feel before every single time I preach. My wife and I were driving in the car the other day. She says to me, "Maybe God just made us so weak and so low capacity so other people in the body would have all kinds of opportunities to serve." I love my wife. We're just not much. Any of us. Not much for brains. Not much for zeal. And it's just ok. Because we've got the wisdom of God. We have the power of God. And so if someone starts giving you milk, don't be insulted. Say, ok, that's where we're at. I'm going to drink some milk. But I want to go serve the nations! Drink some milk and you'll get strong enough to serve the nations. Try to serve the nations without getting any milk, you'll be a disaster overseas. But do drink milk and get strong, beloved. Do.

Fourth observation, then three quick questions. We were meant for something more. What a uniquely Christian insult. You're so human. Isn't that interesting? Last I checked, all Christians were human. Any non-humans present this evening? But what Paul means when he says, "you're just being human," is he means you're just living by your five senses. You're just living without the enlightenment of the third Person of the Trinity; without the shaping moral influence of the second Person of the Trinity. Without the empowering, encouraging presence of the Fatherhood of God. You're just living like normal people. You're not living like people who are seated at the right hand of God. You're not living like people who have the life of God in the soul of man. You're not living like that. And the best thing is, you should. You can! God has made that possible for you. Jesus Christ died on the cross so that you were not just going to be tossed to and fro by circumstances, but you could learn to abound in the worst circumstances and in the best. You can thrive when you're poor and when you're rich. You can thrive when your brain works and when it doesn't. You can thrive when you're healthy and when you're sick. You can walk like Jesus on this planet today because of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit of God. That's you if you're a Christian. That's you. And so the reason you should quit fighting and the reason you should quit being jealous of other people is nobody could have it better than you ever!

But I've got these trials! They are just the trials to make you like Jesus. But I've got these weak gifts! They are just the gifts to make you depend on God. You didn't get anything that wasn't meant to draw you near to Jesus. That's you! That's me! That's amazing! We were meant for something more. And so the way you enter into the life of a carnal person is not immediately condemnation. I don't even think you're a believer. But I see grace in your life. Here's some milk. Some quick truth that implies obedience. And then with a celebration of what they could be - do you see what you could be? You weren't meant to worship Paul and Apollos. Paul and Apollos are your servants to get you to worship Jesus!

Three questions. Then I'm done. Three questions. I heard these in a sermon. Like them a lot. Three questions to help you move on; help me move on. What victories have you won? Let's start there. You want to move? You want to make progress? Out of carnality into greater spirituality? What victories have you won? Start by encouraging yourself. Start by encouraging

other people. One of the greatest things you can do in the body is just walk around telling people how you see Jesus in their life. It's wonderful to do. Make it a full time hobby. What victories have you won? What fruit has there been? Do not fall into the trap that says because there's a sin, everything else is trash. Don't do that. One Puritan said when you do that you're slandering the grace of God. So what's there been? Did you used to not think the Bible was the Word of God and now you do? That's a big step. Did you used to scream at your parents and how you just sort of hold yourself down and pray for mercy? That's a big step. That's a big step. It's not all the way, but it's a big step. What's there been? If you're dealing with somebody (unintelligible) Tell them what there's been. Draw it out. Encourage them. Tell them where there's been victory.

Second, where do you need to grow? Where do you need to grow? And it's probably not that you need to be able to refute every argument against some obscure heresy. It's probably like, I need to take a meal to the shut-in in my church regularly. I need to be nice when I talk about Romans 9. It's that I need to not lift my hands up in worship, and then run home to look at pornography. Where do you need to grow? Put your finger on it. There's too many. Just start with the biggest one. I'm not saying you tolerate sin, but start somewhere. Where do you need to grow?

Last question: what's the game plan? What's the game plan? What are you going to do? What are you going to do about it? The Bible calls us to action. What a wonderful word we heard from Brother Kevin today, God's sovereignty; human responsibility. You know what that sermon did in my soul regarding this sermon was I thought to myself, I can't just sit around thinking God's going to give me a sermon. I've got to go back to my hotel room and work. It just takes work. If a preacher thinks that sermons just drop in their head... I've been preaching like 15 years. I think that's happened like 5 times. The rest of the time it's work. What's the game plan? Who do you need to tell? Confession is good for the soul. Confession gives accountability. Who do you need to tell? You don't need to tell her you've been lusting after her. You need to tell him you've been lusting after her. Be wise in your confession. Who do you need to tell? Where do you need to get away and pray? Is there a book that particularly deals with this? Maybe it's not a massive envious looking at the book stall. I haven't read it all, therefore I suck. But it's a humble: which one would help me right now? What would help me now? Maybe you could ask. What do you need to get rid of? Make no provision for the flesh. What do you need to cut off? What do you need to gouge out? You'll be ok without it. Really, you will.

Right now, in my house, there's a really big TV. It actually hangs on the wall. If you want to come over, you can see it. You can judge me. But for years after I got saved, I never had a television. I couldn't handle it. I'd just turn it on and just zone out. I'd watch things that wouldn't be helpful. I just had to get rid of it for years. And now there's one right there on my wall and as far as I know, I'm not sinning with it. But there might be something you need to get rid of. Maybe there's a place you can't go. A thing you can't do. It's not that it's wrong for everyone. You don't need to preach a sermon on no one can do this. We're talking about you. Tell people your plan. Pursue it. Run after it. Get some people in your life who when you fall flat on your face, they'll say, yeah, but there's still marks of grace. Get back up! You're meant to be more than human. Jesus saved you! And then keep pursuing it. Don't pursue it as a legalistic plan to get right with God. Jesus already got you right with God. Pursue it as a wonderful opportunity to grow, to be

the spiritual, mature man or woman that you were meant to be - you were meant and you are destined to be. Listen to this, beloved. You're going to be exactly like Jesus someday. Isn't that amazing? So flee carnality. Walk by the Spirit. You will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Instead, you will grow into the very likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we praise You and glorify You and magnify Your name. You're so patient, so loving, so kind. Lord, You have such high hopes for us. Not just hopes. You've done such a mighty work for us. Would You just help us to walk in what You are already doing in us? Would You help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in us to will and to do? Would You help us to walk away from carnality? And to walk towards the fullness of the Spirit? To the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the praise of God the Father. Amen.