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For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

Walking as Mere Men

The apostle Paul described the Corinthian believers as those who were “behaving like mere men” (1 Cor 3:3). We have been thinking about the Christian walk and the word “behaving” is the normal word for “walking” (*peripateō* means “to walk around”). How was it that they walked as “mere” men? We are told that they walked carnally. Four times in four verses (3:1-4) Paul described the Corinthian believers with the word “carnal.” It becomes immediately obvious that true believers in Jesus Christ, though being spiritual and having the Holy Spirit, can also behave carnally. Carnal is the English word for “flesh.” That word appears over 150 times in the New Testament referring to the physical body, human works, the old nature, the works of our hands, and things we do when we give in to our old nature. When referring to this last usage, “flesh” is translated fleshly or carnal in five specific passages in five ways.

Sold under sin (Rom 7:14, “I am carnal, sold under sin”). Paul had come to realize the devastating nature of sin that remains in the believer. Though that nature has been rendered powerless by justification (6:6), it still roams the halls of our hearts barking out orders. In order to be successful in the Christian walk the believer must know the difference between the voice of the new nature and that of the old. The remainder of Romans 7 is a unique description of how the new and old natures fight within the believer.

Fed with milk (1 Cor 3:1-4, “I fed you with milk and not with solid food”). Though Paul desired to feed the believers with the meat of the Word, their carnality only allowed them to take milk. Even Bible study is severely limited in its effects when the mind is set on carnality (see Heb 5:12-14). In a carnal condition the believer hears good words, even the meat of

the Word, but makes bad decisions. Peter will say, “add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge” (2 Pet 1:5). Virtue, or spirituality, must always be the priority in a believer’s walk.

Fleshly wisdom (2 Cor 1:12, “not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God”). There is much fleshly wisdom in the world but it is a wisdom that does not know God (1 Cor 1:21). Worldly wisdom may make one famous, or rich, or popular, and even religious. The believer has wisdom available that comes through the grace of God. James says the wisdom from above is pure and peaceable and is sown in peace of them that make peace (Jas 3:17-18).

Fleshly mind (Col 2:18, “vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind”). Similar to fleshly wisdom, a fleshly mind wanders away after false humility, even into a worshiping of angels and other pseudo-religious things and is “vainly” puffed up, that is, empty-headed though it appears to be full. The old nature puffs us up but the new nature builds others up (1 Cor 8:1).

Fleshly lusts (1 Pet 2:11, “fleshly lusts which war against the soul”). Many naïve Christians have thought they could safely play with temptation of the flesh only to find destruction of the flesh. We must see the fleshly temptation of the world as a war waged for our destruction. We have “weapons of warfare” (2 Cor 10:4-6) that can make us victorious in the battle if we will only use them. The “members” of our bodies are either weapons that enslave us or that give us victory (Rom 6:13).

Richard Baxter: “A heart in heaven is the highest excellence of Christian temper. As the noblest of creatures, so the noblest of Christians are they whose faces are set most direct for heaven.”

The Saints’ Everlasting Rest, p. 259.

Further Thoughts on Carnality from 1 Corinthians Chapter 3

Paul continued his discourse on carnality (1 Cor 3:1-4) through the remainder of chapter 3. This chapter is best known for the description of the Bema Seat of Christ, especially verses 12-15. The Bema Seat (“Judgment Seat”) of Christ will take place immediately after the church is raptured, just before the tribulation period begins (see Rev 4:4, 10 for the rewards already given and the casting of the crowns before the throne).

Reference to the Bema Seat is important because our spirituality or carnality *now* will determine our reward or loss of reward *then*. Of interest in chapter 3 is the reference to believers as “every man,” “no man,” and “any man.” These descriptives show how the believer’s walk will affect the rewards which he will receive at the Bema Seat.

Note: I’m using the KJV for English consistency which translates *ekastos* (“each one separately”) as “every man,” *oudeis* & *mēdeis* (“none, no one”) as “no man,” and *ei tis* (“anyone, whoever”) as “any man.”

Every man (i.e., every believer will experience this: 5, 8, 10, 13). God gave the gospel to every believer (5). Every believer will receive the result of his own work and not for anyone else’s work (8). The believer’s work must be based on the foundation of Christ for it to have eternal value (10). Every believer’s work, spiritual or carnal, will be evaluated at the Bema Seat of what sort it is (13).

No man (i.e., no believer should do this: 11, 18, 21). Many have tried to please God by building on a foundation other than Christ but there is no other such foundation (11). We deceive ourselves when we seek to be wise in the worldly sense. It is better to be a fool in the world’s eyes and truly wise in God’s eyes (18). Therefore, Paul says, no man should glory in men because God has given believers everything (21).

Any man (i.e., all believers may do this: 12, 14, 15, 17, 18). The reference to “any man” is a reference to the ability of a believer to choose the good or bad. A believer can chose to build his Christian life with gold, silver, and precious stones, or he can chose wood, hay, and stubble. These represent good works or carnal works (12). The fire of God’s Bema Seat will try our works. If any man’s work abides the fire, he shall receive a reward (14). By the same token, if any man’s work is burned up by the fire, he will suffer a loss of

reward (15). Paul calls our body the temple of the Holy Spirit. Any man who defiles this temple will be destroyed. “Defile” and “destroy” are the same Greek words meaning “to ruin” (17). In light of this, any believer has freedom to choose to be a fool or to be wise. Paul encourages the believer to be a fool in this world that he may be wise before God (18).

The subject of spirituality and carnality, rewards and loss of rewards, must also include a final factor. The subjects in these include all believers. Paul is not talking about lost and saved but about Christians who can choose to be spiritual or carnal. This truth is brought home in four verses.

Saved so as by fire (15). The man who loses reward due to carnality will not lose his salvation. This is similar to the carnal man in chapter 5 whose carnality caused the destruction of his flesh but his spirit was saved (5:5).

The temple of the Holy Spirit (16). The Holy Spirit lives within every believer whether he is living as carnal or spiritual. Sadly, the carnal believer appears to be the same as a lost person though he is not. The Holy Spirit will never leave the believer.

All things are yours (21, 22). All believers will inherit all things in the kingdom of God. Yes, a loss of reward will mean a loss in places of leadership, but not a loss of salvation, eternal life, or presiding as the bride of Christ in His kingdom.

You are Christ’s and Christ is God’s (23). Paul said we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God (Col 3:3). Nothing can be more secure than to have the Holy Spirit in you, while you are in Christ, and while Christ is in God. “No man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:29-30).

Not Now—Momentarily!

There is a contemporary view which says that believers are reigning “already—not yet” in the kingdom of God i.e., the kingdom of God is already here in a spiritual way but it will come in a physical way later. Rather, in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul was scolding the Corinthians when he wrote, “You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!” (1 Cor 4:8). Then we will judge angels (6:3). So, if Christ is “not now” reigning, when will He reign? Paul says, “Momentarily!” “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (15:52).