

## **I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **II. Handling Divisions Among Believers, 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21**

#### **D. Avoiding Carnality's Spiritual Rut**

##### **(1 Corinthians 3:1-4)**

### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, Ibid.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 where Paul clarified the spiritual rut of his carnal readers, a revelation that leads believers to want avoid it as follows:

### **II. Avoiding Carnality's Spiritual Rut, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.**

- A. As Paul applied his teaching that contrasted spiritual maturity with the state of "carnality" where a believer functions by means of his sinful nature, he described seven characteristics of the "carnal" Christian that can actually produce a spiritual rut in a believer he can live indefinitely.
- B. We view those characteristics as motivation to confess our sins and rely on the Holy Spirit to begin to grow into maturity which is far better than staying indefinitely in carnality's spiritual rut (as follows):
  - 1. Paul's carnal readers were unable to appreciate, absorb, or understand deep spiritual truths, 1 Corinthians 3:1a. Thus, Paul could not speak to them as to spiritually mature Christians, for deep spiritual content would have seemed foolish to them, nor would they be able to understand it, 1 Corinthians 3:2 with 2:14.
  - 2. Paul's readers were thus unable to grow spiritually, and remained spiritually immature babes, 1 Cor. 3:1b:
    - a. We know from 1 John 2:12 that spiritually immature "little children" know that their sins are forgiven by God when they believed in Christ, but after salvation, Paul's carnal readers had returned to live by their sinful natures, living in a state of sin, cf. 1 John 1:8, 10 with 1:5-6.
    - b. We also know from 1 John 2:13c that spiritually immature "little children" have come to know God the Father at salvation, but Paul's readers were obviously out of fellowship with the Lord, cf. 1 John 1:3-6.
  - 3. Paul's readers were actually stuck in a rut of ongoing carnality and immaturity, 1 Corinthians 3:3a:
    - a. The Greek term *eti* that means "yet, still" begins 1 Corinthians 3:3a and indicates that Paul was critiquing the fact that his readers were inexcusably immature given the time that they should have grown into maturity. (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 583; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 315-316; Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to 1 Corinthians 3:3)
    - b. Thus, Paul's readers were in a carnal rut, not growing in their relationship with God due to their carnality!
  - 4. Paul's readers were committing the sins of "jealousy and strife" (1 Corinthians 3:3b ESV) or "quarreling" (NIV), characteristics typical of the sin nature, cf. Galatians 5:19-21 ESV. Since they were remaining in a spiritual rut of carnality, this jealousy and strife or quarrelling was a continual problem.
  - 5. Paul's readers were living like unbelievers lived their lives, 1 Corinthians 3:3c:
    - a. When Paul rhetorically asked his readers if they were not carnal and walked as "men," expecting a positive answer, he used the Greek term *anthropos* for "men," Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T., p. 584.
    - b. This word is the generic term for "human being" (Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 67-68), and in this context, Paul meant that his readers were being "merely human," acting like unbelievers!
  - 6. Paul's readers were exalting men and not God, 1 Corinthians 3:4: They were claiming to be followers of Paul or followers of Apollos in a competitive mindset, wrongly exalting the ministers of God when they should have been praising God for the gifts He had given these men of God, 1 Corinthians 3:5.
  - 7. Paul's readers were also proud and self-centered, claiming, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos," boasting of their identity with one of God's servants in competitive carnality! (1 Corinthians 3:5)

**Lesson:** *In their carnal state, Paul's readers were unable to grasp spiritual truth, unable to grow spiritually, stuck in the rut of carnality, exhibiting the vices of jealousy and strife, living like unbelievers, exalting men and not God and being sinfully proud and self-centered.*

**Application:** *If we note that we are in a rut of carnality, may we repent that we might grow into maturity in Christ!*