



CHARIS-MATTERS

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Text

First Corinthians 2:13 - 3:4

Topic

The apostle Paul rebukes the Christians at Corinth by telling them they are in the flesh and therefore acting like babies when they ought to be maturing

Title

"Don't Get Flesh With Me"

Introduction

I was always told that watching too much television would rot my brain. Turns out something far more sinister is going on.

Hulu is a free online service that lets you watch some of your favorite TV shows on your computer.

Their TV commercials feature celebrities who tell you that TV won't rot your brain, only soften it into mush so it can be scooped out. Why are they doing it? *"Because we're aliens and that's how we roll."*

Watching TV may, in fact, stunt a child's brain growth and development. A 2005 report by Dr. Aric Sigman of the British Psychological Association found that even moderate television viewing could adversely affect children.

The report, creatively titled *Remotely Controlled*, suggests,

First Corinthians 2:13 - 3:4

"Don't Get Flesh With Me"

... children under three should see no screen entertainment, those over three should be limited to watching one hour a day of "good quality" programs, teenagers should be limited to one and a half hours a day and adults should watch two hours a day.¹

It's obviously too late for most of us. *Our brains are jelly!* The sheer volume of gray matter dedicated to remembering and recalling theme songs and jingles leaves most of us mentally challenged. We've permanently stunted our growth.

What we are going to learn in our text from the Bible today is that you can stunt your spiritual growth in the Lord. It occurs when you apply man's wisdom rather than relying upon God's wisdom.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Rely On God's Wisdom And You Will See Spiritual Growth, and #2 Apply Man's Wisdom And You Will Stunt Your Growth.

#1 Rely On God's Wisdom And You Will See Spiritual Growth (2:13-16)

We said last time that the difference between God's wisdom and man's wisdom isn't the difference between faith and facts. It's not that we as believers discount the facts of history or science or psychology or philosophy or sociology or political science or any other science in favor of mindless faith in God and the Bible. It's that we, because we have been born-again and have God's Spirit indwelling us, look at the same facts the nonbeliever does but we interpret them and we apply them based on the authoritative, inspired Word of God.

We are able to do what you read in verse thirteen:

1 Corinthians 2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

¹ http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/health/s/176/176353_tv_stunts_kids_brain_growth.html

The “we” is probably a reference to the apostles, like Paul, who were revealing God’s Word. The Holy Spirit enabled them to proclaim the message of the Cross and the mysteries of Christ.

Now that we have the Bible, we have the things “the Holy Spirit teaches.” It is our measure to compare “spiritual things with spiritual.” In other words, whatever we hear we can take back to God’s Word for evaluation. It is “spiritual” and can be received and acted upon if it is in keeping with what the Holy Spirit has revealed in God’s Word as “spiritual.”

This is why, for example, we hold to the traditional view of marriage as being between one man and one woman for life. Who would know best about marriage? The God of the Bible created man and woman. He instituted marriage and gave it its boundaries. Within those boundaries individuals and whole societies will experience the greatest satisfaction and success. God’s wisdom on the matter is spiritual and we receive it as spiritual. Man’s wisdom on the matter is more sensual and has degenerated into something that has proven historically to undermine and weaken the family and entire societies.

Man’s wisdom is a product of what the apostle Paul calls “the natural man.”

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The “natural man” is the unsaved, nonbelieving man. It is every man and woman born into the world with a sin nature and a dead spirit.

- In that natural condition a person cannot “receive the things of the Spirit of God.” If you have an AM radio you’re not going to pick-up an FM signal. God is broadcasting truth on a spiritual frequency but the nonbeliever is not able to “receive” it. Thus the natural man thinks of the things of the Spirit of God as “foolishness.” And they seem foolish without the message of the Cross. I mean, really, how does losing your life save it?
- In that natural condition a person cannot “know” the things of the Spirit of God because they have no capacity to discern them. “Discern” is a legal term used of a pre-trial examination of the facts. The natural man cannot

First Corinthians 2:13 - 3:4

“Don’t Get Flesh With Me”

even really examine the facts properly because he does not have a framework within which to understand them.

How is it men and women are born into this world with a sin nature and a dead spirit? It's an Adam and Eve thing! God did something about it. He came as a man and as the God-man died on the Cross and rose from the dead to offer whosoever would believe eternal life. Those who trust the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior are born-again. Their dead spirit is quickened and God the Holy Spirit indwells them. They are no longer natural men but are referred to as "spiritual."

1 Corinthians 2:15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

In this new "spiritual" condition you can "judge all things." You can examine and measure the facts within the spiritual framework of God's wisdom.

What does it mean, "he himself is rightly judged by no one?" It means that no natural man, no matter how intelligent he may seem, can give you better counsel or advice than you can get from God in His Word and by His Spirit. This is explained in verse sixteen.

1 Corinthians 2:16 For "WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD THAT HE MAY INSTRUCT HIM?" But we have the mind of Christ.

It's a loose quote of Isaiah 40:13. No one in their right mind would presume to be able to "instruct" God about anything. If God is indwelling us, we can look to Him for our instruction. It makes no sense to look to men, especially natural unsaved men, for counsel and advice.

Instead of looking back to the world "we have the mind of Christ." We sometimes ask of a person, "What is your mind on this,?" meaning, "What are you thinking?" That's the idea here. We can know the 'thinking' of Jesus Christ on every matter pertaining to our walk with Him.

Why get a second opinion from the natural man when you've got truth from God? *You shouldn't!*

We'll learn in a moment that man's wisdom was stunting the spiritual growth of the Corinthians. **That means following God's wisdom promotes spiritual growth.**

And that is a key. The growth is spiritual. It is a growing in the grace and the knowledge of God. It often leaves us looking like fools by the world's evaluation. But who cares about the evaluation of a natural man when you will one day hear the evaluation of Jesus Christ?

#2 Apply Man's Wisdom And You Will Stunt Your Growth

(3:1-4)

Everything the apostle Paul has said has been building up to his stunning assessment of the Corinthians in verses one through four of chapter three. Imagine hearing this on a Sunday morning, addressed to you personally from the founder of your fellowship and an apostle of your Savior.

1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

It's important to establish that they were most definitely saved. There are two proofs of it in this verse:

1. Paul called them "brethren." They were his brothers (and sisters) in Jesus Christ, members of the same spiritual family.
2. He called them "**babes in Christ.**"

They were Christians but they were "carnal." The word itself refers to the flesh. Not just the outward, physical flesh of your body. "Flesh" refers to the fact that though you are saved your human body retains a propensity to fulfill its lusts. You still struggle against attitudes and habits. In fact there is a war within you between the flesh and the Spirit.

The analogy Paul used is instructive. He said they were "carnal" then illustrated it by calling them "babes in Christ." They weren't what we sometimes call 'baby Christians.' They had been saved quite some time. They thought of themselves as incredibly mature.

But in reality they were like adults who still acted like babies. A baby is great fun. But if you are ten years old or twenty years old and still crawl and drool and wear a diaper... ***There's something very wrong with you!***

1 Corinthians 3:2 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;

There's a scholarly debate over the exact meaning of "milk" and "solid food." We commonly refer to a teaching that lacks depth in a derogatory manner as 'the milk of the Word.'

There's nothing wrong with milk! Milk a description of the Word of God that is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe things that are part of an adult diet.

I think verse two should be understood in the context of Paul's illustration. We need to distinguish between baby Christians and Christians who act like babies. They were acting like little babies. No matter how hard Paul tried, they would not mature. Not when he was among them for eighteen months; not now.

This kind of rebuke would have hit them hard. Paul substantiated it in the next two verses.

1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

They were "still carnal" means that although they were Christians they acted just like natural men and women act. They acted like "mere men," men who lacked the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Do you think they thought of their behavior as "envy, strife, and divisions?" I say probably not. At some level, of course, a Christian knows that his or her behavior is carnal, is fleshly. The Holy Spirit is in them telling them they are carnal. But since His voice is often still and small it is easy to drown it out by thinking more highly of ourselves than we should and by talking with others who agree with us.

In the church at Corinth their carnality was obvious. Look at verse four:

1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

They most definitely **were** saying this. They were splitting into camps and cliques based loosely upon their loyalties to either "Paul" or "Apollos." No amount of 'spiritual' mumbo-jumbo could disguise or excuse the fact that doing what they were doing was inherently fleshly and was producing works of the flesh like "envy, strife, and divisions."

There really are only two kinds of people in the world: the natural man and the spiritual man. The unsaved nonbeliever and the saved believer.

Among those who are saved there are two ways to think and behave: As maturing and as babies. You know whether or not you are growing and maturing based on your thinking and on your behaving.

A baby only thinks about its own needs. It demands that those needs be met. It doesn't care how disruptive it gets. It makes messes!

We've all thought and behaved that way. We all will again. It's to be expected since we all still struggle against the flesh.

It is to be expected but it is not to be excused! If you allow yourself to go on thinking and behaving like a baby you start to accept it as normal. If you could see yourself spiritually you'd be an adult whining and soiling yourself.

Whining and complaining and gossiping are the behaviors of a Christian baby. Going away thinking that your needs were not met is the thinking of a Christian baby. Remember when you'd take your ball and leave? Christians do that sometimes, too.

Praying for one another and seasoning all your words with grace are marks of maturity. Seeing the needs of others and then meeting those needs shows you are growing. Commitment and faithfulness are grown-up behaviors.

Some years back churches began to adopt what is called a “seeker-sensitive” or “seeker-friendly” model of ministry. On the surface it seems to make sense. Get people into church so that you can reach them for Christ and make disciples of them.

Trouble is, in order to be truly “seeker-friendly” you have to design your services and even your building for the natural man or for the carnal Christian. Otherwise their needs will not be met and they will not return.

A tragic by-product of focusing so much on the seeker is that those who are spiritual aren’t really being built-up in their faith. They, too, start to focus on felt needs rather than on sacrifice and service. You thus risk not reaching the natural man or the carnal Christian and you give those who are spiritual incentive to become carnal.

It has produced a generation of Christian babies!

The better, biblical model is to speak to the spiritual and make disciples of them. Those who are spiritual will go out from the church and reach the natural man and the carnal Christian on their mission field. They then come in to the church ready to be saved or disciplined.

Are you growing? Are you more mature than you were a year ago? If not, *quit being such a baby!*

The Lord is at hand. You don’t want to be stunting your growth. Service and sacrifice are preferable to selfishness.