

Title: Cold-Heat

Text: 1 Corinthians 3.1-4

Theme: What is a “worldly” Christian

Series: 1 Corinthians #11

Prop Stmt. A worldly Christian is an oxymoron

After church was over on Easter Sunday, my family went home, finished loading up the van and headed for Florida. The NCAA tournament was still going, Michigan State was playing Kentucky and we were tooling down I-75. I had relinquished the driver’s seat to my son and was sitting in the back of the van reading a book, and I put it down for a minute and reflected on the moment. This was really nice. My family is together. The van is running nice, the weather is nice, I can read a book, we are going to some warm weather, this is really, really nice. The sense of contentment was very satisfying. I resumed reading my book. About 30 minutes later as we were going through Cincinnati, my son Bobby said, “Hey dad, we just lost the power steering.” My mind starts spinning, was there a leak? Only to hear him say, “Hey dad, the temperature gauge has spiked in the red zone.” Now I am wondering is there something wrong with the radiator? Then he says, “the battery light has just come on.” We are in the far left of 4 lanes going through Cincinnati on Easter Sunday night and the van is having a meltdown. Immediately we put the heat on full blast in order to help reduce the engine temperature, but there is no heat coming out of the vents. The air that is blowing out is the same as the air outside. How could you drive for 300 miles, and have cold-heat? Something was seriously wrong. It was. Much to our dismay we discovered the serpentine belt had come off because the water pump had gone bad.

This text that we have read deals with the issue of cold-heat. In other words, these people in the church at Corinth, we were supposed to be believing in, and living like Christ. By their profession, by their words they claimed to be followers of Christ. If you looked on the dashboard of their lives, the dial was set to heat. But the air of their actions and attitudes was cold. They were talking heat, but were living cold.

Now, when we read this text, there are some words that moms can certainly relate to aren’t there? Notice the word “infants” and the word “milk.” Whenever families get together, the stories come out don’t they? I remember when we tried to get you to eat beans and you threw up all over the kitchen. And for the first 60 years of your life you hear the stories about your early diet. How and what a child eats is very, very important to mom’s. Well, in this text, Paul is the spiritual parent and he is dealing with a room full of spitters. You know what a spitter is don’t you? I am not talking baseball here, I am talking kids. I don’t think you get the parent certificate unless you had a spitter, unless of course one of your kids was colicky. A spitter is a kid who can’t eat more than half an ounce without being burped. But, therein lies the problem, this just isn’t a subwoofin’ burp, this is a kid who believes that burps need to be seen, felt and smelled not just heard. Parents of spitters live for about 12-14 months with permanent stains and not so pleasant odors on their shoulders. What is the problem? The problem is that for whatever reason, the kid’s digestive system is not able to handle more than a little bit of food at a time.

This was church in Corinth. The church was full of spiritual spitters. They were gagging on the truth because... because why? Because they had not bothered to obey it. They couldn't handle any more (the solid food) because they had not digested the easy stuff (milk). They were claiming to be spiritual, (of the Spirit) but were acting as if they had never been born again by the Spirit. Like "Cold-heat" they made no sense.

A little child cannot help his condition when his digestive system is gagging on food. We know that a kid will eventually grow out of it. But, in the church, when a believer is not growing out of it, there is a problem. It is time to grow up. "The church is a school for sinners, not a museum for saints."¹ It is a place for learning and growing and if you are still choking on the Word after you claim to know Christ, you need to hear this today. God wants you to grow so that you can serve and minister. If you don't grow, you will gripe. If you are griping, it is probably because you are not growing. If you are griping you are miserable and miserable, angry believers are a pathetic and distorted reflection of the character and reputation of God. You are a living billboard for the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church. If we put up a billboard on I-94 about the church, complete with a picture and advertised our service times, but over the top had the name of a strip joint that was on 8-mile road, would that be a problem? When the church is full of spiritual spitters, it is an incriminating statement about the integrity and effectiveness of the gospel. From this text there are three questions you need to ask yourself.

1. **Have you learned how much you have to learn?** – v.1

We have just come through a passage where, even though Paul is giving out some good theology on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he is doing it in a way that is setting up his audience. Beginning in chapter 3 and verse 1 there is a not so subtle shift in the grammar that sets this up. From 2.6-16, (notice this now) Paul has been using the plural "we" and he now returns to the singular "I."

He also uses the word adelphoi (translated "brothers"). In this context, everyone knew that Paul meant both brothers and sisters. The word is a family word and Paul often uses it, when he needs to get on them about something, but he wants to do it by reminding them of his love and unity with them. Although in a positional sense, these people had come to faith in Christ and in that sense they were of the Spirit. However, he could not call them spiritual because they had such a long way to go in their own spiritual growth. It is clear that Paul viewed the group as a whole as followers of Christ, even though he also knew that there were probably some individuals who were not genuine.

If this sermon was a chapter in a book, then right about now, I would insert what is called an excursus. An excursus is an intentional break to deal with a specific issue that has become a distraction in order to be able to go back and continue with your main idea.

¹ Thiselton, Anthony. The New International Greek Testament Commentary, the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000 (p. 286) This commentary is in my opinion the finest technical commentary on 1st Corinthians replacing Gordon Fee's work that has in spite of its obvious weaknesses was the standard for many years. This line "The church is a school for sinners, not a museum for saints" was taken from his introduction to 1 Corinthians 3.

This passage has been seriously abused by many sermons through the years. One of the ways it has been distorted is to use this text as the basis for a theology called the carnal Christian. Here is the idea: When you are flying on a plane, you can sit in coach or 1st class. Both coach and 1st class are going to the same place, but some are just enjoying the ride a little more. Therefore, Christianity is like that. Everyone who is a follower of Christ is on the plane. Some are in coach and some are in 1st class. Everyone is still going to the same place, some are just enjoying the ride a little more. A carnal Christian is riding coach. A spiritual Christian is riding 1st class. A carnal Christian made a profession of faith in Christ, followed for a while, but has since gone back to a life that looks just like the world. But since he or she prayed that magic prayer to get saved, even though they live like smell like, look like and believe like the world, they at least are still on the plane whether they like it or not and they will go to heaven. After all, once saved always saved – right? Please listen carefully. What I have just explained to you is a damnable heresy. It is a serious distortion of the gospel. I am not impugning the motives of those who teach it, I am impugning the theology. While the Bible does teach, that a genuine believer is eternally secure in Christ, it also teaches that a genuine believer cannot persevere in sin. The church is a school for sinners, not a long-term daycare for spitters. So, what do we do with this text? Is Paul not saying that these believers are carnal? (KJV) or worldly (NIV)? Yes, he is. But let's look at the complete picture. These are believers who were meeting together regularly for worship. That is clear from chapter 14. They were described as ones who “call on the name of the Lord Jesus” (1.2), who were blessed with tremendous spiritual gifts and were exercising those gifts in the church. They were struggling with theological issues and ethical issues and they were in contact with the people who had brought them to faith in Christ. These “worldly” Christians had not left the faith, quit the church and gone back to the world. They were still pursuing their own spirituality, but they were doing it in a self-centered, humanistic way. They were trying to follow Christ according to their ways. That is radically different than what is usually meant by a carnal Christian. Do not apply this passage to the person who made a profession of faith, but who presumes to sin or to the person who professed faith years ago and lives without any evidence of the Spirit. In those cases we are probably dealing with a phony conversion. Genuine Christianity is serious business. After all, when it comes to His Son being crucified, you really would not expect God to play games with sin and make light of holiness – would you? (end of excursus)

Let's pick back up with the flow of the text. Paul says, “I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly.” Here is the tension that Paul is pointing out. The Corinthian believers were claiming to be spiritual – but they were not! They were people whose lives and affections demonstrated that they were motivated and driven only by the things that motivated and drove people who did not have the Spirit of God. When Paul uses this word, “worldly” or as some translate it, “fleshly” he is referring to people who are driven by human desires instead of being people who are driven by Godly desires. What about you?

What one thing would you change about yourself if you could?

When you dream of your life being better, what is it that makes it better?

How do your thoughts tend to finish this thought... “If only, I...”

When you think about changes that you would like to experience, do you find that you generally think in terms of how you appear, or how much money that you have, how much freedom you would like to have from responsibilities and expectations, how others view you... or when you think about desired changes in your life, do you think in terms of your own spiritual maturity?

What on earth is a worldly Christian? The answer is cold-heat or someone who professes faith in Christ but whose life shows more affections for self than for Christ. Are they really a Christian or not? Time will tell. Life is not static and sin is aggressive. If you are looking for a version of Christianity that will give you relief from your guilt, promises about heaven, but no repentance from sin and no growth in grace, you can find it out there. There are plenty of people preaching that. But that is not the gospel. And that message will not rescue your soul. If you recognize that the affections of your heart are more drawn to the things of this world than the things of Christ and you are alarmed by that – good! You need to learn, that you have a lot to learn. Learn from this text. Learn what the Corinthian believers did not realize. You cannot teach someone who knows it all. The Corinthian believers thought they knew it all. Their immaturity was incredibly evident to everyone but themselves.

2. **Do you understand where you really stand?** (2)

In v.1 he is referring back to the time when he was with them. When was that? It was when the church was established. How deep did Paul get with them? Apparently he did not go too deep because they were not ready for it. I gave you milk. Isn't that interesting? These were the people who were saying that Paul was not very deep. And here he is telling them that there is a reason why they thought it was milk was because they did not really understand it. I do not think that the Corinthians needed a change in diet, as much as they needed a change in perspective. I was listening to a man trying to inflate himself the other day when he said, "All that stuff about Jesus and the cross – I know all that." No he doesn't! In fact, (notice the last phrase of v.2) "you are still not ready."

That is hard medicine to swallow. That is not easy to hear is it? Paul did not want to have to write that. He knew that he risked alienating the very people that he loved. But it was because he loved them that he told them the truth. Have you ever told someone the truth and they returned the favor by taking your head and serving it on a platter? Whoever said, sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me is a liar. Sticks and stones don't break your heart. Paul said, what needed to be said. We need to humble listeners. Do you understand where you really stand?

3. **Do you see what others see?** (3-4)

Paul has identified that the unifying center of their lives was themselves. Do you see that? Life in the church was marked by jealousy and fighting. It sounds like spiritual daycare doesn't it? Instead of "you took my toy" it is, "you're sitting in my seat," or, "you took my solo." In addition to the jealousy and fighting, there was factionalism.

People were lining up behind public leaders in the church and were attempting to pit them against the other.

When I was a kid, I spent my summers (back when kids actually had a summer) playing baseball, army and riding bikes. It was just understood, everyone met at the baseball field. We did not have uniforms, we did not have to sell candy, we did not have to have parent meetings to go over the rules, we did not have to have licensed umpires, we just played baseball. But it was not all perfect. When a kid came who had a new baseball or a bat that we all liked, we were forced to be nice to him, otherwise he would take his bat and ball and ...go home. That was the trump card. If you had the good bat, you got to play wherever you wanted to play, even if you weren't that good.

Do you think that we ought to operate church like that? The person with the talent, intimidation or the influence gets to make all the rules and hold everyone else hostage, even if he or she is not right? When that stuff happens, people observe that and say, "that is church politics." It really is not political, it is spiritual. This happens when some people do not want to grow up, and when the leadership is not willing to address it. Paul had to address it, and there are times when I and others have had to do the same thing. And while there have been some bumps in the road every so often, I am not preaching this text because I see this as a major problem. I don't. If we stop maturing as believers, then it will be, because if we are not growing, then we are griping. And time does not guarantee maturity.

Conclusion:

1. Followers of Christ are not perfect.

There is a church on 13 mile road who's sign says, "The perfect church for those who aren't." I like that. We are not perfect. That should keep us humble, but neither should it be used as an excuse. Because...

2. Followers of Christ are expected to grow
3. Followers of Christ are expected to grow right away.

That is clear from this passage. These people who were still on milk, should have been on meat. What about you? Are you in neutral? How long are you just going to sit there and resist joining, or serving?

4. Followers of Christ who do not grow, need to be challenged.

Why is this text here? It is here to make us aware that spiritual neutrality is not an option. If you appreciate the challenge of this text and it resonates with you, even if you have become spiritually lazy, then that is a good sign. If you resent this, then that may be a major warning because...

5. Followers of Christ who still do not grow, are probably not followers of Christ.