

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians The Characteristics of Fleshly Brethren

1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4

1. Some Important Terms:

A. Natural - ψυχικός - psuchikos (1 Cor. 2:14)

This word identifies someone as being an unspiritual person, who functions totally in the physical or material realm of life (cf. Jude 19). Spiritually they have an ordinary human soul but have not been brought from spiritual death to life. They are devoid of the Holy Spirit and have no ability to understand the wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18).

B. Spiritual - πνευματικός - pneumatikos (1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1)

This is the category of people who have received the Holy Spirit; these are all Christians. No one who has been born again could properly be described as a natural person. Only those who are spiritual are able to understand the mysteries of God and who see the word of the cross as the wisdom of God.

C. Men of Flesh - σάρκινος - sarkinos (1 Cor. 3:1)

This refers to the relationship of a person to the physical realm, the reality of the physical and fleshly world. It is a statement relating to a sphere of reality. Example: All people are in this world, but not all live as being of this world.

D. Fleshly - σαρκικός - sarkikos (1 Cor. 3:3)

This is similar to the previous word, but emphasizes more of the ethical or behavioral characteristic. Example: All people are in this world, but not all live as being of this world.

2. The Corinthians Referred to as Brethren (v.1)

Paul refers to the Corinthian believers with inclusive language and has called them brethren on several occasions (1 Cor. 1:10; 2:1; 3:1). This is important because not all of those who claim the name of Christ are actually believers, and Paul makes this distinction elsewhere (1 Cor. 5:9ff; 2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:6).

3. The Corinthians Referred to as Men of Flesh (vs.1-2)

Paul describes the Corinthian believers in their newly converted state as being men of flesh. At the time of their conversion and the months following when Paul was instructing them, they were not yet mature in their faith and so were able to receive the proper spiritual nourishment for their situation: milk.

4. The Corinthians Referred to as Fleshly (vs.3-4)

Several years after Paul had planted the church, a significant number of the believers were still behaving as those whose primary identity was of this world. Paul's reason for making this statement was their perpetual immaturity and the abundant presence of jealousy and strife.