

Get Off That Bottle

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or on our Facebook page, FCC Greensburg.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning with us today in this audio broadcast. And we just pray that God will take his word and use it to mold and shape our hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, if you were with us on Sunday morning in our sanctuary, you would look up on the screen right now and you would see a picture of my three beautiful kids when they were all in that kind of end of the baby stage, start of the toddler stage.

And if you were to see them at that time with a bottle of milk in their mouth, you probably wouldn't think much of it because that's what babies do, right? And yet, if you would see a picture of my kids today, they're 10, 6, and almost 3.

If you would see a picture of them today, especially with the older two, and they had a bottle of milk in their mouths, you'd probably think, well, that's kind of strange. They need to get off the bottle and eat some real food, right?

[1 : 09] They're too old for that. They're typical homeschooled preacher's kids, right? Because it's cute for a baby to walk around in a diaper with a bottle hanging from their mouth. But when a 40-year-old does it, suddenly you're in a People of Walmart video.

But today, as we jump back in to the book of 1 Corinthians, you can go ahead and start to turn there. We're in the third week of our series called The Power of Unity.

And we're talking about a group of people that have been called the Corinthian catastrophe. No question, this culture in Corinth was one of the most morally bankrupt places in the world in the first century.

In fact, they were so known for sexual perversion and drunken debauchery that whenever a play was written in that era, the drunkard with no morals was always a Corinthian. There was even a saying to describe their gross immorality that made unbelievers actually blush where they would say, you're acting like a Corinthian.

And these are the people that Jesus loved just as much as he loves you and he loves me. See, Paul had started this church on his second missionary journey in what we know as present-day Greece.

[2 : 19] Now, five years later, with Apollos leading the church as their pastor, Paul's not real happy about what he's hearing. The church is supposed to shine into the darkness, not look just like it.

And while we can all understand that the people who are lost and don't know Jesus are probably going to act like they're lost and don't know Jesus. And yet that can't be true of those of us who belong to Jesus Christ who've been bought with a price.

Because as we talked about the last couple of weeks, Paul starts off this letter not by challenging their salvation and their faith in the Lord, but he affirms it. And he's basically saying, you are a saint. And that means you're set apart from this world as a child of God who's been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You are called to look different, to walk according to the word, to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, to yield your hearts and everything you are to Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to mature you daily as you seek holiness in Christ.

So hear me. You're not called to perfection, but you are called, just like me, you are called to sincerity and letting the Lord have complete control of your life.

[3 : 37] And to go back to this picture of a baby on a bottle, I remember with each of our kids, you remember, for those of you parents, do you remember when you first started to introduce real food

to your kids?

You'd take vegetables that most of us won't eat, and you'd blend them up and make them really soft and mushy, and you'd stick that spoon in that baby's mouth, and they would look at you with the weirdest look on their face and say, what do I, or they would look like they were thinking, what am I supposed to do with this?

I mean, it was a whole new world. All they'd ever known was milk, and now you're shoving food in their mouth, and it took some persistence. It took finding out what they kind of liked a little better to get them started eating real food.

And then, once you get started, you progress to more and more solids until your kids are eventually stealing your cheddar and sour cream ruffles. And Paul uses this imagery of spiritual milk not to say that you have to start out on steak, because that's impossible.

Obviously, we need to show new Christians grace. We need to realize it's one day at a time as we grow to spiritual maturity. But he's talking to a church planted five years earlier, and unfortunately, they've kind of taken some steps backwards.

[4 : 53] He was with them for the first year and a half. He was seeing them grow as he helped them to seek spiritual maturity. But now he's writing back to them, essentially saying, listen, I expected to hear about growth and continued change, but instead, you guys are still on milk five years later.

And I'm hearing all about this dissension and lack of unity that's happening in this precious bride of Christ. And I don't know if spiritual years are like dog years or not, but the ultimate goal must be to look back at the start of each new year and see how the Lord has grown me in depth and understanding of him and even how I apply that and live that out in my life.

Am I having victory over sin and false ways of thinking? Do I look more like Jesus today than I did a year ago? I actually had a mentor, and I appreciate this.

I had a mentor of mine look at me a while back and say, Ray, you've been dealing with this struggle for many years now. It's time for you to defeat this in the power of Christ. It's time for you to get serious about this.

And you know what? He was right. And here's Paul urging these people he loves to get off the spiritual baby bottle and walk in the Spirit's power, because that's when you're going to live in the fruits of the Spirit.

[6 : 11] Things like peace and joy and hope, that's when we're going to impact our world for Jesus Christ. So if you've not already started to turn to the book of 1 Corinthians, we'll be in chapter 3, by the way, go ahead and do that.

Probably four-fifths, five-sixths the way through your Bible. So let's start here.

Here in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 1. Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ.

I gave you milk, not solid food, for you are not ready for it. Indeed, and this is the most heartbreaking part. Indeed, he says, you are still not ready for it. You are still worldly.

Now, if you're a note taker, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app, go to the menu, click on events, click on our church. You'll get to it, First Christian Church of Greensburg. But let's talk first about the cause of division.

[7 : 34] The cause of division. And that's the flesh. The flesh. At the start of verse 3, Paul boldly says, You are still worldly.

That could also be translated as, You are still living according to the flesh. And while the world and the flesh are two different concepts, in the words of John MacArthur, the flesh and the world are Satan's supreme instruments in tempting believers and keeping them from faithfulness and victory. So, while they are different, they're closely related. The world is external and the flesh is internal. The world is referring to a worldly system around us with its philosophies and false wisdom that rarely match the Word of God, which is our guide.

And when Paul says, You are still worldly, it means we're not walking according to the Word and the Spirit, but instead, we've bought into the world's ways and the world's definitions.

You think about sexuality. You think about gender stuff. The world's measuring sticks for success and happiness. The world's goals that rarely match our Creator's goals for you and me.

[8 : 49] And for the church in Corinth, their world around them was sexual immorality, drunken debauchery, and divisive fighting. Even worse, that system had made its way into the church with

God's people.

Why? Because of the flesh. See, the flesh is the bridge that the world uses to reach us. It's those internal desires that the world appeals to.

Some words that quickly come to mind are pride, selfishness, envy, critical spirit, anger. The list goes on. No one has to teach you these things.

See, as a son or a daughter of Adam, we were born with a sinful nature. And it didn't take long for the flesh to assert itself. And one thing that all of us have probably done to some extent is when we became a follower of Jesus, we expected that maybe life would now be perfect.

And all my struggles, all my addictions, all my battles, all my sin would quickly fade away. Because after all, I'm a child of the King now. And life is now going to be a bowl full of cherries.

[9 : 55] And yet that's wrong. See, this is why during invitation time at church every week after the sermon, I ask that anyone who comes forward sit down with me and count the cost as we study God's word.

Yes, if you repent and are baptized into Christ, you are saved. You are redeemed. The chains of sin have been broken. You now have the Holy Spirit living inside of you. You have hope like you've never known before.

But that doesn't mean that the flesh is gone because it's not. It doesn't mean that life will be easy because it won't. It doesn't mean that struggles and tragedy won't happen because sadly they will. See, heaven is the place where all that ugly stuff will disappear. And yet we're not there yet. We still live in a fallen world where our flesh can buy into the world's ways.

And we find ourselves looking a lot more like a Corinthian than Jesus. And I truly appreciate. See, I don't want to look like a Corinthian. I want to look like Jesus. And I truly appreciate how Paul loves his brothers and his sisters in Christ enough to say you guys are acting like a bunch of babies in your faith when you've been walking with Jesus long enough that there should be some maturity happening.

[11 : 09] And yet there's all this division in your midst because you're not being led by the Holy Spirit living within you that always matches the Word of God. But instead you're chasing after the world walking in the flesh.

So what's the cause of most division in the church? Well, we see it right here. It's the flesh. It's me wanting my way around others who demand their way. And that leads to conflict.

But the bigger question should be, what does the Lord want? What glorifies Him? I got to tell you, I'm so thankful for God's grace on preachers.

Because when I look back at my first at least five to seven years of preaching, I think, oh my, oh my, that was bad. God could really use anyone. And those dear saints were so very patient with me in those messages.

But as my preaching has hopefully, I pray, matured over the years and will continue to do so, I now don't come to the pulpit worried at all about entertaining you. Listen, the Bible's relevant.

[12 : 12] It speaks right into our situation. And we're not as a church going to be a stick in the mud. We're going to have fun. We're going to laugh about things. But my purpose is never to entertain. It's not to have story time with Ray where I find the most powerful story I can.

I'm not here to make you leave on a big fluffy cloud as I just tell you all the positive things. Although the Word can be incredibly encouraging to us. But my heart is to walk through the Word passage by passage, book by book, so that we can go deeper and deal with real life stuff.

To continue to build a culture here where you don't accept watered down preaching. Where you reject false doctrines because you've grown to spiritual maturity. And you know what you believe based on the Bible.

Where although the flesh will continue to be a daily battle, you realize that nothing is impossible in Christ. And you can walk in the Spirit overcoming the flesh. Because what does Philippians 1.6 say?

It says, And I am certain that God who began the good work within you will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

[13 : 22] That's the goal. And the cause of our divisions is when we allow the flesh to take over in our lives instead of the Spirit. Now here's the second thing I want you to see.

So we talked about the cause. Now let's talk about the symptoms of division. And that's jealousy and fighting. Jealousy and quarreling or fighting. It's just like when you go to the doctor and they

listen to all your different symptoms.

And then they make a diagnosis. Paul says that jealousy and fighting are symptoms of the greater issue of division caused by walking in the flesh. So look back here with me at 1 Corinthians 3 still. And let's pick up where we left off in verse 3. He says, You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?

Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says I follow Paul and another says I follow Apollos, are you not mere human beings? Now let me share another quote with you by John MacArthur where he puts it like this.

[14:29] He says, Because self-centeredness is at the heart of fleshly behavior, jealousy and strife are always found in an immature congregation. Think about all the congregations you've seen that fight constantly.

That is a sign of spiritual immaturity. He says jealousy is the attitude and strife is the action that results from it. So if this isn't relevant for today, I don't know what is.

Because you hear about this all the time. People leave a church because their favorite pastor leaves. Or the lead pastor is at odds with the youth pastor. And people choose their side.

A split happens. And the big C church suffers for it. And our witness kind of goes out the window. Because, you know what, because I watch a lot of videos that are church related, my Facebook feed throws up a lot of reels of church stuff.

And the other day it recommended a video where a pastor was being installed into a brand new church. As they were getting ready to pray over this guy on this wonderful day of celebration, at least it should have been, someone speaks up and they yell out, well, he's not my pastor.

[15:37] And apparently they didn't agree with it because they didn't have a say in it or they didn't agree with the process somehow. And all of a sudden, as they yelled out, the church erupts.

And there's people screaming and yelling at each other. And then you see just an all-out fist fight happening in God's precious church. And if I was that guy, that would be my sign right there, okay? I would be like, sorry, changed my mind. I'm out of here. And we wonder why so many want nothing to do with Jesus. Well, they can get a fist fight at the family reunion.

Why get up early on Sunday to do it, right? See, apparently in this Corinthian church, and we see this in chapter 1 and chapter 3, there was division over the leader that they followed.

Some followed the original church plan or the apostle Paul. And maybe they didn't care for the new guy because he didn't have the apostolic authority of Paul. Others followed their current pastor, Apollos, who according to Acts chapter 18, knew the scriptures well.

[16:39] He was a gifted teacher of the word. Maybe they thought he was a better communicator than Paul and they didn't want to follow Paul anymore. They wanted to follow him. Others must have met Cephas, which is just the Greek name for the apostle Peter.

And they swore their allegiance to him. Maybe it was the blue-collar boldness that attracted them to Cephas. I don't know. And yet this is what walking in the flesh looks like.

This is a spiritual baby bottle. When our faith and our devotion to the body of Christ is all about putting a leader on a pedestal, then we've missed the point of what it's all about.

And the symptoms, although this isn't an exhaustive list, the symptoms are an attitude of jealousy, which manifests itself into fighting.

Now, don't misunderstand me. There's a time and a place to take a stand. I believe that with all my heart. When it comes to biblical doctrine, being sound, and when it comes to being a mission-driven church that is all about the mission the word of God gives us, take your stand.

[17:40] But you can take a stand on things and still do it in love. Guys, I've seen with my own two eyes, two different sets of people leave a church for the same reason and do it in completely opposite ways.

Where one does it with all kinds of slander, trying to take others with them, and the other does it with respect and love. Where you may have to agree to disagree, and there are wonderful godly people who see certain issues differently, who both love and follow the word of God, but no bridges had to be burnt, and that Christ-honoring friendship could still remain.

See, the cause of division is the flesh. And when the flesh is in control instead of the spirit, that will come out with an attitude of jealousy, which results in fighting.

And then the last thing I want you to see today, because I know we've been kind of negative so far, and this is kind of the way the passage has set it up, but let's get a little more hopeful here, and let's

talk about the cure for division, and that's glorifying God.

The cure for division is glorifying God. I remember being maybe three to four years into ministry, and there was a certain extended family that had gone through an awful tragedy.

[18 : 57] Your heart just ached for them, and I was there to cry with them and do the funeral, and I'm still amazed at how God used our church family to love and lead them to Christ. And I got the privilege of baptizing probably 12 to 15 of this extended family.

And yet at the same time, their allegiance sometimes seemed more to me than it did to Christ. And I remember telling my mentor at the time how uncomfortable this made me when they heaped all this praise on me.

I mean, they just always were telling me how awesome they thought I was. And listen, that's very uncomfortable for me because I'm not. I am a sinner saved by the grace of God.

And my mentor had some great advice for me, full of wisdom. He agreed that I was just a broken vessel, and it was all Jesus, okay? But he said, you've got to remember, they're babies in Christ, and they should be because they're brand new to their faith.

And it's okay they're on a bottle right now. Now, that's where you have to start. And he just encouraged me to use the influence, the platform I had, to keep taking them to the throne room of God, praying they would move from the bottle to more solid spiritual food as the truth took hold in their lives.

[20 : 11] So look at me here at the last part of our passage today. 1 Corinthians 3 still, and let's pick up where we left off in verse 5. What after all is Apollos?

And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.

For we are co-workers in God's service. You are God's field, God's building. Listen, there's nothing wrong with loving your church staff and being grateful to the team that the Lord has given us here, because trust me, there are people who like to go to the other extreme and who are always attacking and making the pastor's life harder, okay?

And that's a piece of the puzzle, just a piece of why so many leave ministry and why churches are having such a tough time finding pastors. But I'll never forget sitting down at Taco John's in Morristown, Tennessee with a mentor of mine, and I was sharing some struggles that I have.

[21 : 26] And anyone who knows me well knows that I'm a pretty, like, I'm just gonna be real with you here. I'm pretty real about things. I'm an uptight personality. I'm a perfectionist. That's just how I'm wired.

I'm always giving it to God, trying to work on just being exactly who he wants me to be. But I'm someone who kind of works, gets worked up easily. And I bet maybe some of you listening to me are too.

And yet I love the church. I love the church of Jesus Christ so much that my deepest desire is to shepherd God's church with excellence, to draw the world to Christ.

And I remember Randall looking at me saying, you know, there's something, Ray, that you don't realize. He said, Ray, you're just dirt. Dirt. And he said it with his awesome Southern accent.

You're just dirt, you know? And I was like, what are you talking about? See, the Bible says from the dirt you came, the dirt you'll return. And while that sounds a little harsh, it wasn't.

[22 : 24] It was him loving me enough to say, listen, Ray, you're carrying too much. You're trying to play the role of God when that's not who you are. You do everything with excellence.

And that's wonderful. But realize it's God who's in charge of the results. In the words of Keith Green, do your best, pray it's blessed, and let God take care of the rest.

And that was Paul's point. He's saying guys like Peter, guys like Apollos, guys like Paul himself, are just servants of Christ trying to follow his call on their lives, his assignment.

So don't ever make it about us. Don't let us make it about ourselves. We're just farmers. This is the picture he gives us. Farmers planting the seed of God's word, or even watering the seed of God's word.

And that's all of us who belong to Jesus Christ. And I love the name of God for this. El Olam, the everlasting God, who is the beginning and who is the end, the one who works his purposes out

through all generations.

[23 : 31] He is the one in control of the results. So plant the seed if that's what God calls you to do. Water the seed if that's what he calls you to do. But don't forget your dirt.

And that's a good thing. Because he's much more qualified than us to make things grow. Because he is almighty God. And you and I are absolutely not.

Now I have a friend who's a meteorologist at a weather station in Tennessee. And we were in the church together for a few years. And when we did some outdoor services in the past, it was showing a chance of rain.

And I'd always say to him, come on, Lyle, you need to make sure that we have great weather. That's what you do for a living. And he'd laugh and say, nah, that's not my job. I'm not that powerful. I just forecast it. And I don't know about you, but I find comfort as a person who carries way too much pressure. I'm one of those natural worriers. I didn't say warrior, but worriers.

[24 : 31] I'm a natural worrier. And I find it comforting to know that God has it all under control. And my job is simply to glorify him. And that's the cure.

Because I've never seen a confrontation that couldn't be overcome when both parties were 100% committed to glorifying God. Because it's usually pride and selfishness and jealousy that cause division.

But when glorifying God is my goal, you can always walk away with a spirit of love and unity. And so today, Paul's getting to the heart of the problem.

The cause of division is the flesh. The symptoms that come out from the flesh are jealousy and fighting. But the cure to all of it is putting Jesus Christ on his throne and glorifying him in everything. And I hope that can always be the goal. So that Christ's church can always be growing and maturing in our faith. And so that we can be a beacon of hope in a dark world.

[25 : 32] Amen? All right. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, I just give you praise for your word today. And just thank you for speaking your word right into our hearts.

Father, we give you permission to have your way and your will done. And I know it can be uncomfortable because sometimes that can be painful. And that can hurt. And it deals with the flesh.

Our flesh likes to flare up and have its way. And so, Father, right now we give you permission to deal with the flesh. To make us more and more into the image of Christ.

We don't want to be churches that are always in division and dividing and fighting and quarreling with one another. We want to be led by the Spirit. We want to be churches that are so united that the world sees the love of Christ, the fruit of Christ, and they are drawn into the hope that only Jesus Christ can offer.

So, Father, you know that we are imperfect in this. You know that we screw up way too often when it comes to division and how we deal with other people. But we just ask for you.

[26 : 39] We give you permission to come into this and to help us grow in this area so that we will truly honor you. Thank you for your words of life and your words of conviction today.

We pray all of this in the precious name of Jesus Christ. And God's people, right where you are, said amen and amen. Let me give a quick invitation here.

Listen, if you're kind of new to opening up the Bible and God is just using this and speaking into your heart and you're ready to talk about what it looks like to follow Jesus, or maybe you just have some questions about your faith, we would love to come alongside you just like people have done for each of us.

And so, once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here at First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. You can reach out. You can call the church office, area code 812-663-8488. Ask for Ray or Steve or Mitch or Tyler. Any of us would love to help you. Or you can go ahead and email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com.

[27 : 46] And I'd love to just sit down with you and have a chat with you and talk about exactly who Jesus wants to be in your life because he wants to come in, forgive, rip off the chains, and use your life for the rest of your days for his glory and his power.

And so, if you have any questions, please reach out. Hey, we hope you have a wonderful week.

God bless you as you walk intimately with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

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