

People of the Flesh and Spiritual People, I Corinthians 3: 1-9

In an ideal world, faith or religion would play important roles in bringing peace, harmony and reconciliation. But in reality not every person or community of faith is able to exercise peace and harmony. Why ?

In 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul says "I could not address you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh" - continue in verse 3 "for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy or envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?"

In this first verse there are two kinds of people under consideration: People of the Flesh (other translation: carnal) and Spiritual People.

The word "of the flesh" (Greek: sarkinois (v.1) and sarkikois (v.3)) is applied here to Christians who have much of the remains of corruption. You are carnal; you are dominated by the flesh; your thinking is fleshly. They are still governed by the thinking of the flesh. They are babies / infants in Christ.

Notice that three times Paul uses the phrase "of the flesh." That phrase represents the problem here at Corinth.

The works of the flesh are jealousy, strife and divisions (see also Galatians 5:20-21). Paul knows that their danger lay in this direction, and he therefore addresses them according to their character.

Jealousy – we use the word “jealous,” in a sense of being envious of someone who has something we do not have. This kind of jealousy is a sin and is not characteristic of a Christian; rather, it shows that we are still being controlled by our own desires or worldly attitude.

James 3: 14-16 ‘But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice’.

Childish human competition tore the church apart (in the past and still happening). Some claimed loyalty to one leader, while others argued in favor of their leader and against the other groups. "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not being worldly people?"

There are many congregations or churches in this category.... divided by political lines (Liberal, Labor or Green), divided by ethnicity or languages and so on...

In an effort to put this childish behavior to rest, Paul puts matters in perspective. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

That's what we call 'a spiritual person'... a person who is mature in Christ, characterize by the wisdom from above. James 3: 17-18 ‘The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace’.

What is it that makes a person spiritual?

Spiritual person is simply to behave good ... godly. Spirituality is simply being godly, or possessing godliness. A fine working definition of spirituality is knowing God so I can please God. That is what godliness (spirituality) is all about. Paul makes this clear: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). Spirituality is forever tied to knowing God and doing God's will.

The New Testament is very clear that spiritual maturity is a process and that, though we will all reach a point of maturity, we should never stop growing as long we are on this earth. Paul's point when he says, "I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven" (Philippians 3:12-14).

1 Timothy 4:7 - Exercise yourself toward godliness.

The Bible tells us there are several things we need in order to grow toward spiritual maturity, things such as fellowship with other Christians, prayer, and, of course, Bible reading and study. That was partly Paul's point when he told Timothy, "[Scripture] is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do" (2 Timothy 3:17).

Meet together with other believers regularly. The reason we attend church or gather with other believers regularly (Hebrews 10:25) is for teaching, fellowship, worship, communion, prayer and to build one another up in the faith (Acts 2:42-47). Participating in the body of Christ is fundamental to spiritual growth.

Get involved in a ministry group. There are many ministry opportunities here in Dandenong... Pray and ask God where you should put your talents, gifts, expertise and experiences. I believe that it's the people who really "get involved in" that find their purpose and nourish in their walk with God.

Pray daily. Prayer is simply talking to God. You don't have to use big fancy words. There are no right and wrong words. Just be yourself. Give thanks to the Lord daily for your salvation. Pray for others in need. Pray for direction. Pray for the Lord to fill you daily with His Holy Spirit. There is no limit to prayer. You can pray with your eyes closed or open, while sitting or standing, kneeling or lying on your bed, anywhere, anytime. So begin to make prayer a part of your daily routine.

Christian maturity requires a radical reordering of one's priorities, changing over from pleasing self to pleasing God and learning to obey God. The key to maturity is consistency, perseverance in doing those things. We know these practices will bring us closer to God.