

ANSWER FIVE: UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL STAGES OF MAN

1 CORINTHIANS 02:14–03:04

Introduction

Divisiveness is a terrible problem, one of the most damaging and devastating problems existing in the world. Divisiveness leads to anger, fights, divorce, murder and war. One of the answers to solving divisiveness is to see ourselves as God sees us. When God looks at a person, He sees that person in one of three classifications.

- I. The natural man (v. 14).
- II. The spiritual man (v. 15-16).
- III. The carnal, worldly man (Ch.3, v. 1-4).

I. 1 Corinthians 02:14 The Natural Man

There is the natural man or what the Greek calls the *psuchikos* man. The words “the man without the Spirit or the natural man” (*psuchikos*) means a man who has physical life or who is living. The root word is *soul* (*psyche*), which simply means the life of a man, the consciousness, the breath, the energy, the being of a man. The *soul* is the animal life of a man. Men and animals are *breathing* and *conscious* beings. They are living souls. This is clearly pointed out in the creation of animal life. When God was creating the world and He had finished the creation of vegetation. He said:

Gen 1:20 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures [*hephesh*, Hebrew], and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.”

What God was saying is that the life He was then creating was different from the vegetation He had just created. The things that were now being created were “*living souls*,” things that breathe and possess consciousness — things that have “souls,” life and consciousness within their bodies.

The point is this: the natural man is a *living soul*, an animal soul; he is a man who is living on this earth, just as an animal. However, *that is all he is doing*. He is living *in the flesh* only. He has gotten no further than the flesh, no further than his animal life. He has never progressed to the level of the spiritual. His mind and life, energy and effort are all focused upon...

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|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| • the physical | • what can be seen | • the material |
| • what can be touched | • the world | • what can be heard |
| • the flesh | • what can be tasted | • the natural |
| • what can be felt | • the human | • what can be possessed |
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There is another way to say the same thing which is extremely helpful. The natural man is the *Adamic man*, the man who has fallen from the perfection of his creation. The natural man is...

- the fallen and depraved man
- the sinful and corrupt man
- the aging and deteriorating man
- the dying and doomed man

The natural man is the morally corrupt man, the man whose spirit is dead to God. He is a man with a human nature, and the human nature is all he has. His nature is human nature *apart* from God. It is a Christless human nature, a nature that will not believe and obey and live for Christ. It is life lived without the presence and influence of Jesus Christ.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

James 3:15 *Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

Jude 1:19 *These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

Three things are said about the natural man.

1. The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. The phrase “does not accept” (*dechetai*) means that spiritual things are not welcomed as a guest, are not received. It means to refuse and reject. Spiritual things are of little if any concern to the natural man, for his mind is primarily upon this world and upon...

- bigger and better things
- acquiring more and more
- desire and feelings
- wants and cravings
- position and wealth
- attention and recognition
- ambition and promotion
- socials and parties
- play and recreation
- comfort and ease
- drinking and eating
- dress and appearance

The natural man’s life and mind are spent focusing upon the natural, upon this world and not upon the spiritual; therefore, in God’s eyes he is classified as *the natural man*. His heart welcomes only the world; it is closed to God. God is not welcomed into his life. Therefore, he does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.

Rom 8:7 *The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.*

Eph 4:17 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.*

Col 1:21 *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.*

Titus 1:15 *To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.*

2. The natural man considers the things of God foolishness. The word “foolishness” (moria) means dull, absurd, distasteful. Remember the natural man lives primarily for the animal part of his nature: he lives primarily for what...

- looks good • feels good • tastes good • sounds good

He lives primarily for his animal senses, primarily for what turns him on. It may be position, money, wealth, possessions, recognition, fame, influence, power, family, house, cars, sex, food, dress, popularity — an endless number of worldly and material things could be listed — anything that attracts and appeals to the animal nature within us as human beings. The man who gives in to these instincts and urges is the person who lives as the natural man. To him the things of God are secondary, of less importance. Why? Because he cannot see, feel, taste, hear or prove spiritual things — not with his physical senses. Therefore, to his mind, it is utterly foolish to put spiritual things first.

1 Cor 1:23-24 *But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

1 Cor 1:27 *But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.*

3. The natural man cannot know spiritual things. Note the word *cannot*. It is not only that the natural man will not and does not know spiritual things, but he *cannot* know them. He is incapable, unable, helpless to know them. He cannot discern spiritual things...

- their truth • their worth • their goodness • their excellence
- their reality • their wealth • their virtue • their majesty
- their hope • their glory

Why can the natural man not know spiritual things? Very simply, because they are spiritually discerned. The word “discerned” (anakrinetai) means investigated, judged, scrutinized, examined, estimated. Spiritual things have to be discerned by *a living spirit*, not by a natural man, not by a man who is primarily living by his animal nature. Spiritual things can be discerned only by a spirit that is living. Spiritual things can be...

- investigated only by a living spirit
- judged only by a living spirit
- examined only by a living spirit
- estimated and valued only by a living spirit

Mat 6:23 *“But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”*

Rom 10:3 *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.*

2 Cor 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Eph 4:18 *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.*

Jer 5:4 *I thought, “These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God.”*

Micah 4:2 *Many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

II. 1 Corinthians 02:15–16 The Spiritual Man

There is the spiritual man or what the Greek calls the *pneumatikos* man. The word “spirit” (*pneuma*) is the word used for the Holy Spirit which means that the spiritual man is a person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. A man is spiritual because the Holy Spirit dwells *in* him. He is not spiritual because he...

- has received some superior, human gift.
- has received some unusual ability.
- has become more intelligent than before.
- has become greater than he was before.
- has become better than he was before.

A man becomes spiritual because he has received the Spirit of God and is living under the influence of the Spirit of God. When man receives Christ Jesus as his Saviour, Scripture says...

- that he is born again by the Spirit of God.

John 3:5-6 *Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”* (cp. 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19)

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

- that he sets his mind on the things of God, not the things of the flesh (sinful nature).

Rom 8:5-6 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds*

set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

- that he is in the Spirit and that the Spirit lives in him.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

John 14:16-17 *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

- that the Spirit imparts life to him.

Rom 8:10 *But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

- that the Spirit quickens, gives life to, his mortal body.

Rom 8:11 *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (cp. 1 Pet 3:18)*

John 6:63 *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”*

- that he can kill the sinful deeds of his body only by the Spirit.

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Gal 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

- that the presence of the Spirit’s leadership in the man’s life proves that he is a child of God.

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Gal 4:6 *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

1 John 4:13 *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

1 John 5:6 *This is the one who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.*

Three things are said about the spiritual man.

1. The spiritual man judges or discerns all things. The word judges means the very same thing as discern in the former verse. The man who believes in Jesus Christ experiences a most wonderful thing:

=> The Spirit of God enters and dwells within his body converting his body into a holy temple for God's presence.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

1 Cor 3:16 *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

1 Cor 6:19 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.*

=> The man actually partakes of the divine nature of God and becomes a new creature, a new man.

2 Pet 1:4 *Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:10 *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

The point is this: the man who is truly spiritual lives under the control of God's Spirit. God's Spirit lives within his body. Therefore, it is the *Holy Spirit of God who reveals the truth of spiritual things to the man*. This is critical to note: the ability to discern is not the man's; it is the Holy Spirit within the man.

Thought 1. There is no room for super-spirituality in God's church, for all that we have is of God; it is not of us.

2. The spiritual man is not understood by the natural man. Note how Scripture words this point: the spiritual man is "not subject to any man's judgment" (v. 15). This statement has been abused and misused to such a degree that some men have become not only laughingstocks, but stumbling blocks to the innocent. This is tragic, for the meaning is perfectly clear when *kept in the context* of this passage.

“Any man” means the natural man, the man just talked about. The natural man has little concern and little knowledge of Christ and God; therefore, there is no human way he can understand the spiritual man. A man knows only that which he *experiences and studies*: common sense and honesty tell us this. There is no way a man can judge spiritual things unless he experiences and studies spiritual things. Therefore, the natural man cannot understand why any person would want to put his efforts into and waste his time upon matters that are “other-worldly.” After all, we live in this world, not the other world, not yet. Hence, the natural man feels that our primary concern should be upon this world (this is true even with religionists). The natural man might argue that a little thought about spiritual things is acceptable, but not the focusing of a person’s whole life. The point is that the natural man just does not understand the spiritual man. To him the spiritual man is a fool for passing up this world and all the *good things* this world has to offer.

3. The spiritual man has the “*mind of the Lord*.” This is the reason the believer can discern spiritual things: he has the “*mind of the Lord*.” This does not mean that the spiritual man knows all there is to know about Christ, but it means that his mind is focused upon God and the things of God just as the mind of Christ was. The Spirit of God pulls, draws and stirs the mind of the genuine believer to spiritual things.

Phil 2:5-8 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!*

Luke 9:23-24 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”*

Rom 8:5-6 *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

III. 1 Corinthians 03:01–04 The Carnal, Worldly Man

There is the carnal, worldly man (see *Carnal, Worldly*, 1 Cor. 3:1-4 for the meaning of the word carnal). Three things are said about a carnal, worldly man.

1. The carnal, worldly man is not spiritually mature; he is as a babe in Christ. Note that the carnal, worldly man is a true believer. He is a babe in Christ, but he is deformed just like a deformed baby. He should be more mature, more developed spiritually, but he has not grown in Christ. The carnal, worldly man does not know Christ and the things of God like he should. His mind and behaviour are not focused upon Christ

like they should be. He has been a believer for years, but he knows little about Christ and God.

2. The carnal, worldly man has to be fed with milk and not the meat of the Word. This does not mean there are two sets of teachings, nor that there are two sets of beliefs, one for the learned believer and another for the unlearned. The same gospel is preached to all, and the same Word is studied by all; but some have paid attention, studied, prayed and served Christ more than others. Therefore, they naturally know more about God's Word, and know more about what it means to pray and walk in Christ. The spiritual believer knows and experiences more of the depth of spiritual things than the carnal believer, much more. Therefore, the carnal, worldly believer has to be fed the very basics and not the depths of God's Word.

Thought 1. The same is true with any endeavour of man. The more a person experiences and studies a field, the more he knows his field. Everyone either feeds on the "milk" or the "solid food" of his field or endeavour.

Mark 4:33 *With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.*

John 16:12 *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."*

1 Cor 3:2 *I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.*

1 Cor 9:22 *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

1 Cor 14:20 *Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.*

Eph 4:14 *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

Heb 5:12 *In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!*

1 Pet 2:2 *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

3. The carnal, worldly man is characterized by division. Division is striking proof that a man or a people are carnal or worldly, whether the division be in a church or in a family.
 - a. Carnality or worldliness is clearly seen in envying and strife. Envy leads to jealousy, and jealousy leads to division. When people become jealous of one another, they become divided and begin to strive or argue and wrangle with one another. The envy may be caused by...

- some position
- some gift
- some recognition
- some wealth
- some promotion
- some attention
- some possession
- some person

The list could go on and on, but the point is well understood. Envy leads to differences and strife, and strife leads to division. Such behaviour is carnal, worldly, of the flesh, of the sinful nature, and it does not belong in the church.

- b. Carnality or worldliness is seen when believers begin to walk and act like men of the world. Men in the world live for the world, so they want and struggle for all they can get for the least amount of effort...
- the best position
 - the most money
 - the coveted possession
 - the highest honour
 - the equal recognition
- c. Carnality or worldliness is seen when believers begin to follow men and form cliques (see outline and notes, 1 Cor. 1:10-16).

Rom 6:6 *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*

Rom 8:7 *The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

Eph 4:17 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.*

Eph 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 2:18 *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.*

Col 3:9-10 *Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Titus 1:15 *To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.*

1 Pet 4:1-4 *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. ■*

1 CORINTHIANS 03:01–04 CARNAL, WORLDLY, NATURAL MAN.

William Barclay points out that there are two different words used in this passage to describe the carnal, worldly man (v. 1, 3. *The Letters to the Corinthians*. “The Daily Study Bible.” Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1954, p. 33). The Corinthians are called “carnal, worldly” (*sarkinoi*, v. 1), which means flesh. The ending “*inos*” means “to be made of.” Paul is saying that the Corinthians were human beings, made of flesh. Their problem was that they were living as though they were nothing but flesh. They were still living at the human level of life. They had never gotten beyond the affairs and material things of this life. They acted as though this world were all there was.

The word *sarkikoi* (v. 3) is also used for “carnal, worldly.” The ending “*ikos*” means to be “characterized by.” Paul is saying that the Corinthians were not only “made of flesh” but characterized and “dominated by the flesh, [i.e. sinful nature].” They were allowing the flesh and its passions to captivate and control their behaviour. They were living on the level of the flesh, dominated by it.

The term “sinful nature or flesh” is used to describe two different men.

- 1 There is the natural or Adamic man. (See note, 1 Cor. 2:14.)
2. There is the carnal, worldly, or fleshly man. The carnal man follows the lower part of his nature. He follows the unregulated urges that are prone to sin and to centre attention upon oneself. He lives a life that is opposed to God (Rom. 4:14, 18). A carnal life refers to far more than just bodily or sexual sins. Gal. 5:19-21 shows this. Bodily and sexual sins are included, but so are sins of the spirit such as greed, selfishness, hatred, pride and idolatry. It also includes that part of man that subjects a person to a legal and enslaving spirit, a spirit that subjects him to rituals and ceremonies and to rules and regulations (Gal. 3:3; 4:9). Simply stated, the man who is carnal is a man who lives after the sinful nature or flesh. He is a man who allows his lower nature, the worst part of his being, to influence and dominate his life.

The Bible says several things about the flesh or sinful nature.

1. The flesh has no good thing about it; it is opposed to doing good.
Rom 7:18 *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*
2. The man who is in the flesh is controlled by the sinful nature, and by the influence of the flesh and cannot please God.
Rom 8:8 *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

3. The man who has the spirit of Christ is removed from being *in and under* the influence of the sinful nature or flesh. Such a man is said to be a transformed man, a new man — even a new creation.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Eph 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

4. The transformed man, however, can walk after the flesh, can live according to the sinful nature — at least for a season. Such a man is said to be a worldly, carnal believer.

Rom 8:2, 4-7 *Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death... in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

1 Cor 3:3-4 *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?*

1 Cor 11:30-32 *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*

5. The regenerate man is strongly urged to walk "in the spirit." Such a man is said to be a spiritual believer (see note, *Spiritual Man*, 1 Cor. 2:15-16).

Gal 5:16-26 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. □

ANSWER SIX: SEEING WHO MINISTERS REALLY ARE

1 CORINTHIANS 03:05–09

Introduction

The Corinthian church was severely divided. The division focused primarily upon the former preachers of the church: Peter, Paul, and Apollos. The ministers themselves were not involved; it was the carnal believers in the church causing the problem. Some liked Peter and his preaching better and felt he was doing more for the Lord; others felt the same about Paul and Apollos.

The issue of which preacher was best and is best for a church is always a critical issue. The reason is simply understood: every believer has his *favourite minister*, the minister who led him to the Lord or to a deeper commitment, or ministered to him and his family, or who really spoke to his heart when he preached. A minister who becomes deeply involved in a person's life is bound to mean a great deal to that person. This needs to be understood; however, something else needs to be understood as well. Believers must not...

- pit one minister against another.
- exalt one minister over another.
- focus upon one minister's gifts and ignore the gifts of others.
- talk about and emphasize one minister over another.
- favour one minister over another.
- form a clique around a minister.

This had happened to the Corinthian church. Apparently they were trying to determine what kind of minister was best for them and their church. The discussions had flowed over into the homes and social gatherings, and the opinions had become so strong that cliques were actually forming and arguing against each other.

This passage gives the sixth answer to division within a church: seeing who ministers really are. This is a forceful message, a message that must be understood by both the church and its believers.

- I. Ministers are servants (v. 5).
 - II. Ministers are nothing in comparison to God (vv. 6-7).
 - III. Ministers are one — equal in God's eyes (v. 8).
 - IV. Ministers are co-workers with God (v. 9).
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I. 1 Corinthians 03: 05 Ministers, Servants of God

Ministers of God are servants. The word “servants” (*diakonoi*) means a minister, an attendant or a waiter on tables. The stress is upon the lowly status of the service. Ministers are not *lords* over God’s flock and church; they are the lowly servants. They are the servants of God and the servants of God’s people. Two points of servanthood are stressed.

1. Ministers are only instruments of God. They are only the servants “through whom you came to believe.” To repeat, ministers are not the *lord* of people’s lives. They are not the ones whom believers are to praise nor upon whom believers are to be focused. God is to be the focus of attention, word and loyalty. No minister created the message of the gospel; God did. No minister saves the believer; God does. No minister leads a person to believe; God does. The minister of God is only the Lord’s instrument and servant, not the Lord.

John 13:14 *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*

John 21:16 *Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

Rom 1:9 *God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you.*

1 Tim 1:12 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

2 Tim 1:11 *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

2. Ministers can help people *only* as God gifts them. The gifts of the ministry are not natural abilities and endowments. The gifts to proclaim the gospel and to minister to people are not of the preacher. They are spiritual gifts *given only by God*, and the minister *can only serve effectively* when God gives him the gifts of His Spirit. Therefore, the man, the minister himself as a person, has nothing in which the people can glory. The gifts are of God and of God alone; therefore, the people are to focus their thoughts and praise upon God alone. (See *Spiritual Gifts*, Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Eph. 4:11.)

Mat 25:15 *“To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”*

Rom 12:6 *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*

1 Cor 4:7 *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

1 Cor 12:4 *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

Eph 4:11 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*

II. 1 Corinthians 03:06–07 Honour God, not Ministers

Ministers of God are nothing in comparison to God (v.7). What does such a strong statement mean? Simply this: no minister has any cause for glory or praise or honour or recognition. There is no room, no reason for a minister to feel pride and self-satisfaction; no reason for a person or a people to idolize and follow a minister; no reason for a people to make a minister the cause of favouritism or of strife and division. Respect the minister, yes. Love him, yes. Esteem him ever so highly, yes; for the minister has an impossible task, the most difficult task upon earth. Consider any profession. If a man had to *speak at a conference* before one or two hundred of his professional peers, how much time would he take out of his weekly work schedule to prepare for his speaking engagement? What if he had to speak to the same group two times — three times — *all in the same week*? Just imagine! How much time would he have to take out of his regular duties to prepare? And not only that. What if the professional had to look after, care for, and minister to everyone of his professional peers of the conference — personally minister every time...

- one of them got sick and went to the hospital.
- one of their family members was hospitalized.
- a serious problem arose.
- counselling was needed.
- a major committee met.

And on top of this, the professional had to manage the conference, its committees, schedules, finances, building programs, whatever came up. And still more. He had to constantly be out visiting and enlisting new people to attend and join the conference.

Again, respect the minister of God. Love and care for him, for his call and task are impossible. But he is not to be idolized and followed as though he is the founder of your faith. A picture from farming shows exactly what our attitude toward ministers is to be. One minister of God planted the seed of God's Word in our lives. Another minister comes along and waters the seed. All the ministers that cross our paths contribute to our lives. They contribute either the seed of the gospel or the water of the Word. But note: it is God who gives the increase. No minister can make the seed grow. When dealing with growth, there is only one thing that makes anything grow:

=> energy => force => power

Growth is not caused by a man's hands. Spiritual growth is activated by God's energy, force and power alone.

=> The minister who plants is nothing (v. 7).

=> The minister who waters is nothing (v. 7).

=> God who gives the increase is all (v. 7).

Therefore, glorify and talk about God. Praise God and lift His name up, not the name of a minister. Whatever gifts the minister has are of God; and whatever planting and watering the minister did was by God's call and strength; and whatever growth was experienced was due to God. God alone is worthy to be followed; therefore, follow God, not a minister. Respect him and care for him and highly esteem him, for he labours abundantly for your sake. But honour and praise and follow God.

Rom 15:5-6 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Cor 6:20 *You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

2 Th 1:11-12 *With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Psa 29:2 *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.*

Psa 34:3 *Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.*

Psa 57:5 *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.*

Psa 107:32 *Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.*

Psa 145:5 *They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*

Isa 25:1 *O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.*

III. 1 Corinthians 03:08 Ministers are One and Equal

Ministers are one; they are equal in God's eyes. And they are to be seen *as one* and *equal* in the eyes of the church and its believers. Note two significant points.

1. Both the sower and the edifier, both he who plants and he who waters, are *emphatically said to be one*. All ministers are called...
 - by the same Lord.
 - to the same office: the office of minister.

- to the same work: to serve God's church.
- to stand accountable before God and before God alone.

There is a spiritual unity between ministers. The work of the one who plants cannot be done without the work of the one who waters. Both are absolutely essential. They are not rivals, working against each other. They are planters and waterers, planting and watering lives for God. God called and uses them as He wills and He places them where He wants. If the church and its believers exalt or pit one minister against another, they are going against God's purpose for His gospel and the church.

Rom 12:5 *So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

Eph 4:1-6 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Eph 4:11-13 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

2. Each minister of God is personally responsible to God. Each man is to be rewarded for what he does, not for what another minister does. A man uses his own gifts; he does not try to use someone else's gifts nor to be like someone else. God gave him specific gifts for special purposes, so he diligently labours to use his gifts as *God desires*. In fact, the minister is to be rewarded for how well he uses his gifts. Therefore, trying to be like another minister is not his task. His task is to be who God called him to be and to do as God gifts him to do.

Note: the minister shall be judged for his labour, not for what men may term *success*.

Mat 25:22-23 *"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

1 Pet 4:11 *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

IV. 1 Corinthians 03:09 Ministers, Co-workers with God

Ministers are co-workers with God. Three striking points are declared in this verse.

1. God is the source of all in the church. This is seen in the Greek text. God's name comes first in this verse three different times:

=> "For we are God's fellow workers."

=> "You are God's field."

=> "You are God's building."

All is of God: God is all in all. He is the Source of all that concerns the church: the source of both its ministers and its people. Neither the ministers nor the people are to be exalted or praised above one another. God alone is worthy of our attention and thought, our glory and honour, our worship and praise, our service and ministry.

2. Ministers are co-workers, and they work together with God. They work with God, carrying out His will and doing what He wants done. Their concern is not what men think and want. Their mission is to serve right along by the side of God Himself.

Mat 9:37-38 *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

John 4:35-36 *"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together."*

Mark 16:20 *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

Acts 20:24 *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

1 Cor 3:9 *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

2 Cor 6:1 *As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.*

1 Th 2:8 *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

Thought 1. Note that a labourer who does not labour is a paradox. A farmer who does not labour does not receive the reward at harvest time. There is nothing to receive.

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

2 Tim 4:5 *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

Luke 12:48 *“But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

3. The church is God’s field and building. The church is to bear fruit, and it is to make new additions to its structure. A field does not exist to lie unused. It exists to bear a harvest. The same is true of a building that is supposed to have additions added to it. The building will not have additions — not the kind of additions it should have — if it becomes unsafe for the contractor (minister) to work within its walls.

The church as a field must let the one who plants and the one who waters do their work or else...

- the field of the church lies useless to God.
- the building of the church lies unused for God.

Thought 1. Both ministers and believers are workers together with God. All have a part in God’s church and the crying need is for all to cooperate in building together.

Mat 7:24-25 *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

1 Cor 3:11 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Eph 2:19-22 *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

1 Tim 6:19 *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

2 Tim 2:19 *Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”*

1 Pet 2:6 *For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ■*