

3:1–4 *Baby Christians*

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL FOOD. JOHN COLET: These foods that are harder and more difficult to digest (except of course, for more excellent souls) are those highest truths and purest principles, divine and spiritual, that have as their consequences the most complete and perfect ways of living. They are suitable only for those who are powerful of soul, those who are focused altogether into oneness, who, having despised the world and the body, stand firm in the loftiest part of their minds, in unity and in an indivisible center. These people are so powerful and malleable that they accept with a strong mind whatever truth is given from above, however solid and simple it be and however much it surpasses reason, holding it with a firm faith, to digest it with an efficacious love, to turn it to the best, to venerate and worship it....

In conclusion, then, Paul wishes them to know that he did not impart to the Corinthians the highest principles of reality and the Christian religion, but matters more fit for their minds, which still adhered more to the world than to God. Among the perfect he spoke wisdom; for the imperfect, he accommodated things in a manner foolish, lower, and less refined. This was why he tolerated for a time less complete and less perfect ways of behavior, indulging the Corinthians with gentleness as much as he could. He looked not to how much he was permitted, but to how much something would benefit others, and he thought less about what he could do than what was best for the Corinthians, and the extent to which they could take it in, tolerate it, digest it, and turn it into good nourishment for the soul—lest, through lack of consideration, he might kill those very people whose salvation was his goal. EXPOSITION OF 1

CORINTHIANS 3.⁴

PAUL EMPLOYS A GENTLE REBUKE. HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: Consider Paul's remarkable wisdom here. First, he addresses them tenderly. Next, he shows them their faults openly, though with gentleness, by employing here a metaphor from the education of children.... With these words, Paul indirectly reproaches those who had come to teach the Corinthians after him, as if he were saying: "Who made you children a second time? No one, except those who came to you after my departure." Paul is always on guard lest those who had come to Christ out of Judaism should thrust the ceremonies of the law and the principles of the world on believers. Whenever this happens, the Word of God and faith in Christ are extinguished simultaneously. ANNOTATIONS ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:1](#).⁵

ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS ARE SPIRITUAL. DIRK PHILIPS: Thus the Christians are now one spirit with God, out of whom they are born. But now some have an objection here, namely, that Paul wrote to the Corinthians (who were also Christians), "I have not been able to speak to you as spiritual but as of the flesh." Out of these words of Paul, some persons wish to assert that the weak and young Christians are the carnal children of God and should be so called. But we say that one may not thus understand the words of the apostle. For the reason Paul called the Corinthians "carnal" happened on this account: they were quarrelsome and partisan and also in part carnally minded, as James says, "From where does quarreling and warfare come among you? Is it not out of the lusts that fight in your members?" ([James 4:1](#)).

⁴ Colet, *Enarratio*, 109, 111; citing [1 Cor 2:16](#).

⁵ Zwingli, *Annotatiunculae ... ex ore Zvinglij*, 24.

Now since the passionate desire of the flesh and ignorance were still found among the Corinthians, and also in part had the upper hand over the Spirit, therefore the apostle called them carnal. Nevertheless, they were also spiritual according to the new birth, after they had through faith received the gift of the [Holy Spirit](#), according to the previously quoted words of the Lord: “What is born out of the Spirit, that is spirit” ([John 3:6](#)). Again, “he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” ([1 Cor 6:17](#)). Again, you are spiritual, that is, if the spirit of Christ dwells in you. Again, “whoever does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him” ([Rom 8:9](#)). Out of all this it is easily understood that all Christians are spiritual even though they may indeed still be tempted by the flesh, yes, indeed may become overrun and surprised with human frailties and mistakes. [THE ENCHIRIDION: TABERNACLE OF MOSES](#).⁶

TWO MEANINGS OF “PEOPLE OF THE FLESH.” [WOLFGANG MUSCULUS](#): How can Paul call the Corinthians “people of the flesh” when later in chapter 4 he says: “I bore you in [Christ Jesus](#) through the gospel,” and in this present passage: “as children of Christ, I fed you with milk”? If they had been born in Christ through the gospel, and thus were children in Christ, they certainly had the [Holy Spirit](#).... Now what does it mean to be people of the flesh, than not to be spiritual and to live and be influenced by the flesh? We answer that the term “people of the flesh” is used in two ways. First, people are said to be “of the flesh” who live completely according to the flesh, who have not yet been regenerated and fully experienced the Spirit of Christ and the grace of God, but are still completely established in the sins of the

⁶[CRR 6:281](#)

flesh. This type of “fleshly person” is described by Paul in [Romans 8](#): “Those who are carnal, are concerned about fleshly things.” Again, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh if in fact the [Spirit of God](#) lives in you.” Second, people are also called “fleshly” who, even though they have been regenerated in Christ, are nevertheless still weak and infants in Christ both with respect to knowledge and with respect to putting to death the desires of the flesh. That was the condition of the Corinthians in this passage, who were called by that name because fleshly concerns were still predominant. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:1](#).⁷

PASTORS MUST BE WISE IN NOURISHING GOD’S PEOPLE. [THEODORE BEZA](#): It is the duty of pastors to accommodate themselves to the capacity of the people whom they wish to nourish so as to never offer poison in place of milk. For though milk and solid food are each beneficial, they differ in form and in the way they should be introduced. ANNOTATIONS ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:1](#).⁸

PAUL GAVE THE CORINTHIANS SPIRITUAL MILK. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: “I fed you with milk,” that is, as [Clement of Alexandria](#) wrote in his *Paedagogus* ... “I have catechized you in Christ with simple, true, and nourishing food that was wholesome and easy to digest. For such is milk to children.” The apostle’s charity in condescending to the capacity of his hearers and feeding them, as sucklings in Christ, with the sincere milk of the Word is discussed by St. Ambrose and St. Chrysostom, when they discuss the miracle that occurred when Paul suffered martyrdom. For when

⁷ Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 77–78; citing [1 Cor 4:15](#); [Rom 8:5](#), 8–9.

⁸ Beza, *Annotationes Maiores*, 166.

Paul was beheaded, some of the ancient writers affirm that ... milk issued from him instead of blood. [ANNOTATIONS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:2](#).⁹

THE DANGER OF FACTIONS. [RICHARD BAXTER](#): It is a great and a common sin throughout the Christian world to take up religion in the way of faction; and instead of a love and tender care of the universal church, to confine that love and respect to a party.... Yet it has been found, by long experience, that concord is a sure friend to piety, and piety always moves to concord; while, on the other hand, errors and heresies are bred by discord, as discord is bred and fed by them. We have seen, to our sorrow, that where the servants of God should have lived together as one—of one heart and one soul and one lip—and should have promoted each other's faith and holiness, and admonished and assisted each other against sin, and rejoiced together in the hope of future glory, we have, on the contrary, lived in mutual jealousies. We have drowned holy love in bitter contentions, and studied to disgrace and undermine one another, and to increase our own parties by right or wrong. We who used to boast of our love for the brethren as a mark of our sincerity in the faith have now turned it into the love of a party only; and those who are against that party have more of our spleen and envy and malice than our love. I know that this is not so with all, nor prevalently with any true believer, yet

⁹ Downname, *Annotations*, DD1*. Chrysostom discusses this passage in his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* (homily 8), in [NPNF 12:43–48](#). For Clement's statement, see [ANF 2:218](#). For the tradition that Paul bled milk, see Pseudo-Chrysostom, *In principes Apostolorum Petrum et Paulum*, 2 ([PG 59:494](#)); Acts of Paul 14.5 (Richard I. Pervo, *The Acts of Paul: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Cambridge: James Clarke, 2014], 38).

it is so common that it may cause us to question the sincerity of many who are thought by themselves and others to be most sincere. REFORMED PASTOR.¹⁰

THE SOURCE OF DIVISIONS. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: It ought to be observed in this passage where factions and divisions in the church come from. First, from the flesh, because divisive persons, although they seem to be the most spiritual, nonetheless live in a fleshly fashion. And in particular, factions and divisions come from jealousy and rivalry, when one person is jealous of another. For contentions arise when people desire to elevate another person, in whom they boast, all the way to heaven, while at the same time casting everyone else down to hell. And when this is disputed, factions and divisions are immediately born so that the unity of the body of Christ is torn apart. Accordingly, the apostle is concerned here to remove that first stirring of rivalry because he knows that when that has happened, the Corinthians can quickly be called back to harmony. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3.¹¹

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL ARE EQUAL. DAVID CHYTRAEUS: Ministers that rightfully and faithfully perform these [pastoral] duties are all equal and they are peers as related to the efficacy and power of the ministry; no one is any greater or superior to another. For they together are neither the governors of doctrine nor the lords of the church, but Christ's ministers ... and stewards—stewards, that is, not of their own possessions, but of the gospel and Christ's benefits. Therefore let no one vaunt himself above others in the church, or stir up debate and strife regarding the authority

¹⁰ Baxter, *Reformed Pastor*, 157, 160–61*.

¹¹ Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 81.

and power of the teacher or minister from whom they receive doctrine. Let us banish from the church and congregation statements like these: “I follow Paul; I follow Peter; I follow Apollos.” But let everyone esteem themselves as members of one Christ and ministers of equal standing who, as they fulfill their duties, allow God to judge privately who has excelled whom. And those ministers who have performed their duties aright, let them not seek ... human judgment or the rash and poisonous verdicts of other mortals, whereby they are judged either inferior or superior to others. Rather, let them be content with the witness of their good conscience.

Now the fact that, afterward, ministers were distinguished from one another by degrees—this was a human contrivance for the sake of order. [Jerome](#), in his letter to Evangelus, addresses this matter at length, arguing that priests and bishops are the same office; and that though afterward one was chosen to be above the rest, this was done to avoid schism. “Wherever there is a bishop, whether he be at Rome or at Engubium or at Constantinople or at Rhegium or at Alexandria or at Thanis, his dignity is one and his priesthood is one. Neither the abundance of riches nor the lowliness of poverty makes him more or less a bishop; all alike are the successors of the apostles.” POSTIL ON THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.¹²

3:5–9 Paul and Apollos—God’s Fellow Workers

WHO WAS APOLLOS? JACQUES LEFÈVRE D’ÉTAPLES: Paul left

¹² Chytraeus, *Dispositio epistolarum*, 535–36. The citation is from Jerome to Evangelus, in [NPNF 6:289](#). Chytraeus has replaced the city Thanis for Zoan in this citation.

Apollos behind in Corinth when he returned to Jerusalem via Ephesus. This arrangement is described in the Acts of the Apostles. Now it happened that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul, after traveling to regions in the north, came to Ephesus.... Apollos was a Jew by birth, from Alexandria, a man eloquent and powerful in the Scriptures. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:5](#).¹³

MINISTERS WIN DISCIPLES FOR CHRIST, NOT FOR THEMSELVES. JOHN CALVIN: Here Paul begins to address how we should view ministers and for what purpose they have been set apart by the Lord. Now, he names himself and Apollos rather than other people so as to avoid grounds for jealousy. “For what else are all ministers appointed,” he asks, “except to lead you to faith through their preaching?” From this Paul concludes that there should be no boasting in human beings; faith allows of no boasting except in Christ alone. Hence, those who praise human beings beyond measure strip away their true dignity. For the chief thing of all is that they are ministers of the faith, that is, that they acquire disciples not for themselves but for Christ. Now, although he seems to depreciate the dignity of ministers in this way, he does not however deprive it of its proper value. For Paul is saying a great deal when he says that we obtain faith through their ministry. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:5](#).¹⁴

THE APOSTLES WERE SERVANTS, NOT LORDS. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Here is how the apostles should be assessed: they are servants, not lords. For it is not the role of servants

¹³ Lefèvre d’Étaples, *Commentariorum in Epistolas Beati Pauli ... Liber Secundus*, 105r–v; citing [Acts 18:24–28](#).

¹⁴ [CO](#) 49:349 (cf. [CTS 39:125](#)).

to attract disciples to themselves, and it is not permissible for anyone to identify themselves as their disciples since there is only one Lord, who is head and chief of all the elect. Thus, in chapter 4 below, Paul says: “This is how one should judge us, as servants of Christ.” *Through whom you believed.* Not, “in whom you believed.” Not, “the one who brought you to faith.” But, “through whom you believed,” that is, “through whose ministry God brought you to faith in his Son.” ... The honor for this kindness is due, not to the servant, but to the one who generously bestowed it. COMMENTARY ON [1 Corinthians 3:5](#).¹⁵

CHRIST SUPERIOR TO THE APOSTLES IN EVERY WAY. TILEMANN HESSHUS: The vast distance that separates Jesus Christ from the apostles or other saints must always be kept in mind. (1) Christ is both man and all-powerful God; the apostles are weak human creatures. (2) The church prays to Christ in every need; it is wicked to pray to the apostles. (3) Jesus Christ is completely free from all sin; the apostles and saints are all sinners, conceived and born in sin. (4) Christ is the Mediator, Savior, and Lord of the church; but the apostles are not redeemers, rather they themselves administer redemption and are servants of the church. (5) Through the Word, Christ is powerful to illumine minds, transform wills, persuade hearts, inspire faith, and bring about life and comfort; the apostles are only ministers of the Word and sacraments. (6) Christ pours out and bestows the Holy Spirit; the apostles only baptize with water. (7) Christ is always everywhere present with his church and with each individual believer; the apostles were serving only some members of the church in a certain place for a limited time,

¹⁵ Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 82–83; citing [1 Cor 4:1](#).

until they finished their earthly lives. EXPLICATION ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5.¹⁶

MINISTERS ANNOUNCE GOD'S MESSAGE OF SALVATION. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: After Paul sufficiently reproached the ambitious teachers and their foolish fawners, he now shows how true ministers are to be esteemed so that we attribute to them neither more nor less than what we ought. Therefore he teaches us that they are those by whom we are called to faith and salvation. Yet they are ministers of God, and as such they do nothing of themselves, but God works in them as it pleases him to furnish them with gifts. ANNOTATIONS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5.¹⁷

MINISTERS PLANT AND WATER SOULS. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: This analogy of planting and watering is the most beautiful of all analogies.... First, Paul declares the reason for the ministry of the Word, why ministers of Christ are necessary, when he attributes to them planting and watering, thus making them the farmers of his garden and cultivators of the kingdom of heaven, which are their twin functions. For either they plant, that is they remove what is in the wild, such as a select shoot from a wild olive tree, and engraft it into an olive tree, or they water what has been planted, that is they nurture and guide it so that it might bear fruit that is useful to the Lord. The same thing holds true for the ministry of the Word. For ministers of Christ engraft into the kingdom of Christ those souls (like shoots) that have been removed from the kingdom of Satan. And they do this, first, by leading unbelievers to faith through the preaching of this Word. And then, just as with watering,

¹⁶ Hesshus, *Explicatio Prioris Epistolae ad Corinthios*, 51r–v.

¹⁷ Downname, *Annotations*, DD1r*.

they nurture and guide sinners ... through repentance to an innocent life, while with admonitions and exhortations they strengthen them in the faith, hope, love, and patience of Christ, so that they might not slide back and be overcome by sin and, withering, be lost. The entire ministry is comprised in these two functions, and ministers must be engaged in them constantly. Now let us think about how much diligence, striving, and tiresome effort is required to tend a garden or vineyard so that from this we might appreciate the sense of care, duty, and attention required to plant and water souls. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:6.¹⁸

GOD ALONE GIVES SPIRITUAL GROWTH. HEINRICH BULLINGER: Paul expresses very clearly through a parable what he has already said, that all boasting for the success of the gospel does not belong to ministers, but entirely to God. Now he draws his allegory from the cultivation of gardens and from rural farm life. People labor in vain when they plant a small tree and water it so that it isn't scorched much by the heat or doesn't die from lack of water, if a certain mystery of nature (that is, the power of God) doesn't also occur. Accordingly, its success ... is not due to the planting or cultivation, but more to the heavenly power invigorating it. Let us now add the second and more obscure part of this parable that Paul lays out. In this same way, a person labors in vain who scatters the seed of God's Word in the field of the heart unless the power of the Most High touches the heart and makes it capable of receiving the seed and bearing fruit. Again, a person labors in vain who, by means of holy warnings and private consolation, seeks to refresh a troubled conscience, unless the secret power of the Spirit penetrates within and

¹⁸ Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 84.

transforms the mind. And thus the conclusion follows: the person who plants is nothing, nor is the one who waters; but God is the one who gives the growth. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:7.¹⁹

SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS GOD’S WORK. JOHN TRAPP: This verse made Cyril conclude in his preface to his catechism, “I may teach, and you hear, but God must do the deed when all is done.” Otherwise, we may preach and pray ... to no more purpose than Bede did when he preached to a heap of stones. COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS 3:7.²⁰

WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY WAGES? PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI: Of course, left to ourselves we perform evil works not good works, and we are not at all capable of good works (as has already been explained) unless we are prompted by the spirit and grace of Christ. Nevertheless, we do not deny that the term *wages* is sometimes employed for eternal life and even for salvation. Nevertheless, let us add that Paul does not employ the term in the sense of a debt or obligation that is collected according to the worthiness of the labor, but only according to the will and mercy of God alone. Now it is perhaps appropriate for Paul to call them “wages” because this term speaks of something that is rewarded and refers approvingly to the quality and condition of the works; so too, because good works are afterward rewarded with eternal life, just as wages follow from the good works themselves as well as from the efficaciousness of the promise—although not from the worth of the works them-

¹⁹ Bullinger, *In Priorem ad Corinthios Epistolam Commentarius*, 29–30.

²⁰ Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 664*. See Cyril, “Procatechesis,” NPNF 7:5.

selves. And finally, there is the additional fact that believers are granted salvation, even as wages are guaranteed to those who have fully deserved them. COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:8](#).²¹

GOD WILL REWARD FAITHFUL PASTORS. TILEMANN HESSHUS: [Paul's meaning is that] whether one teaches the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ignorant for the first time, or whether one more fully instructs, consoles, and admonishes people already established in Christ, they are both ministers of the same rank and experience the same reward when they have devoted themselves to Christ. Thus ministers such as Timothy and Titus were as helpful for the church as the apostle Paul. And each one receives his reward for his labor. Preachers should impress this most excellent promise upon the minds of the pious. The labors that godly pastors experience in the ministry are great and difficult. And the world is not only ungrateful but even vicious toward them, paying back good with many evils. In the face of so much human insecurity, pastors are often fearful lest all their labors and strivings and exertions and trials are in vain. But here, Paul emphasizes that God, according to the standard of his justice, will repay each person according to their labor. For there is no good work so small, when performed in faith and in view of the Mediator, that will not be compensated with a very great reward both in this life and especially in the life to come. Witness the words of Christ in [Matthew 10](#), "Truly I say to you, those who give a cup of cold water to one of the least of these in my name will not lose their reward."

²¹ Vermigli, *In Selectissimam Priorem ad Corinthios Epistolam ... Commentarii*, 71.

The apostle also teaches here that the power of ministry does not depend on the worthiness of ministers, but on the power of Christ, just as whatever material a king's seal is made from, whether gold or steel, nevertheless it imprints the same image into wax. And so, in a similar way, regardless of whether ministers are well-educated or ignorant, whether they are apostles or deacons, whether they are godly or hypocrites, when they proclaim the pure Word of God and administer the sacraments to us, there is no doubt that it will be efficacious for our salvation—provided we believe it to be the Word of Christ. EXPLICATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 3:8.²²

GOD JUDGES THE LABOR OF MINISTERS. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: It should be noted here that Paul does not say that people will receive their wages according to the fruit that they produce, but according to their labor. The prophets labored mightily, but produced little fruit because of the great wickedness of the people. Wages, therefore, are reckoned not according to the quantity of fruit but according to labor.... People should not distinguish between ministers of God and judge them according to their differences. For it is God, not they, who judges how much faith, enthusiasm, labor, and diligence a minister employs. God alone discerns the hearts of all people and knows what he should give to a person, and how much. Therefore people who distinguish between ministers of Christ act in a way contrary to God himself. Paul will admonish the Corinthians about this later in chapter 4, when he says: “Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before its time, before the Lord comes.” COMMEN-

²² Hesshus, *Explicatio Prioris Epistolae ad Corinthios*, 51v–52r; citing Mt 10:42.

TARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:8](#).²³

GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS. JOHN CALVIN: Here is the best argument: We are employed in the Lord's work, and it is to him that we have devoted our labors. Therefore, since he is faithful and just, he will not disappoint us by withholding our reward. That is why those who look to other people or depend on them for remuneration are deceived. This is an exceptional commendation of the ministry, that although God is able to work by himself, he nevertheless invites us puny mortals to be his assistants and he makes use of us as his instruments. As for those papists, who pervert this statement to establish their "free will"—nothing could be more ridiculous. For Paul teaches here, not what humans can accomplish through their natural powers, but what the Lord accomplishes through them by means of his grace.

COMMENTARY ON [1 CORINTHIANS 3:9](#).²⁴

²³ Musculus, *Comm. 1 Cor.*, 87; citing [1 Cor 4:5](#).

²⁴ [CO 49.352](#) (cf. [CTS 39:131](#)).