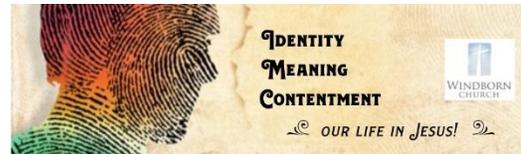


Lent 2018 ✠ Chapter 4  
*Meaning Is Not Given in Spiritual Gifts*



I am so glad that I grew up with Christian music. Otherwise I might have missed Rod Robison’s classic song made famous by Amy Grant—“*Fat Baby*.”

“I know a man, maybe you know him, too. You never can tell, he might even be you. He knelt at the altar and that was the end. He’s saved and that’s all that matters to him. His spiritual tummy can only take so much. One day a week he gets his spiritual lunch. On Sunday, he puts on his spiritual best, and gives his language a spiritual rest. He’s just a fat little baby. Waa Waa Waa. He wants his bottle and he don’t mean maybe. He’s sampled food, solid foods, once or twice, but he says that doctrine leaves him cold as ice. He’s been baptized, sanctified, redeemed by the Blood, but his daily devotions are stuck in the mud. He knows the books of the Bible and John 3.16. He’s got the biggest King James you’ve ever seen. I’ve always wondered if he’ll grow up someday. He’s mama’s boy and he likes it that way. If you happen to see him, tell him I said, he’ll never grow if he never gets fed. He’s just a fat baby.”

I love how the song pokes fun at the tension that is present in spiritual growth. Where and how will we receive meaning in this life? We can be saved, the Holy Spirit can do great things in and through us, and yet we can still be self-centered, operate in the flesh, and be spiritually immature. The test case for this is the Corinthian church. They were the original, but we today are still tempted to be “fat babies” who kind of claim Jesus, as long as it’s convenient.

“I always thank my God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our LORD Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our LORD

Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our LORD.” 1 Corinthians 1.4-9

Okay, Bible scholars, simple observations. How would you describe the Corinthian church?

- They have everything they need.
- They have God’s grace.
- They are saved, they are going to heaven.
- They are enriched in speech and knowledge and spiritual gifts.
- They have the Holy Spirit.
- They are waiting for Jesus to return.
- They have the deluxe spiritual package. Unfortunately...

“I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought....there are quarrels among you.” 1 Corinthians 1.10,11b

The division of the Corinthian church is spelled out in detail by saying they are following after human categories, after human ways of organization. In fact, they even use Jesus to justify division amongst themselves, where one says, “I’m of Paul;” another says, “I’m of Cephas;” and still another says, “I’m of Christ.” You know, back in our day, it used to be, “I’m Baptist, I’m Lutheran, and I’m Presbyterian.” That honestly doesn’t seem to be that big a dividing line right now. Right now, the dividing line seems to be, “I’m of John MacArthur and I’m a hard-core Calvinist;” or, “Well, I follow Rick Warren and the Purpose Driven Life church baseball diamond;” or, “Well, I follow Willow Creek and am seeker-sensitive.” The Corinthians’ division lines were basically the same as ours—What label do you put on yourself and how you approach ministry? And, yes, there are even those who say, “Well, we have the Biblical way and the Jesus way and you don’t.” They even put that into the titles of their books and sermon series. Even as they claim to be the only correct one, their overemphasis on labels instead of on taking their identity from Jesus, reveals that they are as spiritually immature as the church in Corinth.

“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 were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” 1 Corinthians 3.1-3

Today, instead of “feeding” on the Word of God, some use Scripture to create division, revealing jealousy and quarreling hearts. A quick glance at their social media posts and blogs is enough to make you sick. They even use funerals to build themselves up as the only true holders of the Gospel (World Magazine, “Sensible Teacher,” by Joel Belz, January 2018. [https://world.wng.org/2018/01/sensible\\_teacher](https://world.wng.org/2018/01/sensible_teacher)). They study Scripture just to prove everybody else wrong. Oh, and boy, howdy, they know Scripture, but so did the Pharisees. To the religious leaders, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures daily and yet you miss Me.” When they talk, in all their wealth of knowledge, just listen to how much Jesus is there. The ESV translation correctly calls out this kind of divisiveness as coming “from the flesh” (1 Corinthians 3.1-3). In this line of thinking, and, oh, so interestingly, Titus 3.10,11 uses the Greek word “heretic” to describe the divisive person who is “warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.”

At the core, these divisive individuals do not take their identity from being in Jesus. Rather, they take their identity from being right about doctrine. This leads them to a faulty sense of meaning which they gain from religiosity, all the while “living in the flesh.” “Living in the flesh” by being a religious legalistic self-righteous know-it-all feels good—but “living in the flesh” is sinning. If we claim to be an apprentice of Jesus, the question is whether we do Jesus things in Jesus’ way. Matthew 11.28-30 gives us a glimpse into Jesus’ heart as “gentle and humble.” 1 Peter 3.15 tells us not to pontificate truth boldly, but answer questions with “gentleness and respect,” because others have already recognized us as people of hope. James 3 beautifully lays out a diagnostic for us.

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and

selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

James 3:13-18

From this passage, take a few moments to allow the Holy Spirit to evaluate your life. Do you think you alone are right? When was the last time you admitted being wrong about anything? Perhaps you may have a humility problem. Have you given yourself the self-appointed role of correcting everyone else? Do you use other people to advance your own agenda? Are you really good at playing the victim card? Are you really good at filling your life with needy people to play the hero/messiah card? If so, you might have a selfish ambition problem. Do you stir up trouble and chaos? You might even have had injustices done to you, but how's your soul? You might have a disorder problem. How about just a flat addiction to sins, habitually succumbing to those evil practices? Let's be honest. These problems are sin and Jesus died for sins. Good news—as a follower of Jesus, one who is forgiven, the life of the Spirit is already yours! Just as Galatians' "fruit of the Spirit," James "wisdom that comes from heaven" is not the "fruit" of good Christian girls and boys. It is a gift of grace with which we cooperate! Who among us does not want to experience more of the good stuff of the verses in James 3.17 & 18?!? As Billy Graham said, "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge and my job to love." That's wisdom from above.