

“Unity: Being a Grown Up Church”

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Graphic: baby food, steak, gifts, unity in diversity,

Key Verses: So neither the one who plants or the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Theme: Being a grown up Christian means using our spiritual gifts together for the Kingdom, eating solid food of worship, discipleship, and mission, growing in the image of God and the mind of Christ. Move from milk to solid food, be sanctified by the Holy Spirit in you, and grow!

1) Introduction

- a) Grab your Bible and open with me to the book of 1 Corinthians...
- b) We're in the middle of a sermon series entitled **Unity in Christ**...Paul is writing this letter to the young church he started in the city of Corinth...and if you'll remember, there are some **SERIOUS** problems in the church, not unlike some churches today...
- c) First, they couldn't agree who to follow...so Paul told them, don't follow anyone but Christ! Don't **BELONG** to anyone but Jesus! If you follow Jesus together, you'll be unified as a church and be effective for advancing the Kingdom of God.
- d) Next, Paul heard that they were boasting in their accomplishments – in their human wisdom. “Aren't we great because we can know and do all these great things?!” Paul said that's wrong!...God is to source of all good things – of all divine wisdom – so boast in nothing but the Lord! When we boast in Jesus together, then we are unified and no one is trying to outdo anyone else with what they know or can do.
- e) And last week, in chapter 2, Paul drew a very distinct line between those who have the Holy Spirit in them, those who are saved, and those who are not. Only those who have Christ in their lives can understand the things of God – spiritual things. Only those who are walking with the Lord can understand and use the spiritual gifts that God has given them.
- f) And today, as we move into chapter 3, Paul is subtle like a sledgehammer. He knows that the church isn't where it should be – not the ideal maturity like he described in chapter 2. And so Paul, after all this, shoots straight and says, “Grow up!” “Grow up, church!” “Grow up, Christians!”
- g) Anybody ever hear those words from a parent...a teacher...a good friend? “Grow up!, would you please?” We hear those words when we're acting

like infants...when we're doing something immature. When we're not acting our age...

- h) I don't think anyone ever told Mother Theresa to *grow up* when she was in India helping the poor to survive.
- i) **God wants a grown up church filled with grown up Christians, not a church populated with immature people that look exactly like the world and who want the church to as well.**
- j) Let's find out what that means...grab your Bibles in let's dive into chapter 3...
- k) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

- i) Paul starts off by going back, again, to the beginning, when he first came to them. In **verse 1**, Paul says, "Look, when I came to you, brothers and sister (again relating to them as siblings), I couldn't speak to you as spiritual people..." Why not? Because they weren't!
- ii) They hadn't yet responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They weren't saved. They hadn't accepted Jesus as their savior. So Paul had to present the gospel in ways they **COULD** understand.
- iii) I think so many times, we fail to meet people where they are in their faith. We talk about transformation and walking with the Lord and prayer and reading the Bible...and people get freaked out because they don't know what that means. How to approach it...it's intimidating. Paul's tactic was to start slow and build up to something greater...
- iv) He wrote, "I couldn't speak to you as **SPIRITUAL PEOPLE**, but **RATHER**, as people of the flesh – as infants in Christ." The NIV translates that as **MERE INFANTS**. Nothing **MORE** than infants. **ONLY** infants – with all the limitations of an infant...people of the flesh – worldly people. People not yet interested in allowing the Holy Spirit to grow them and awaken certain gifts in them.
- v) Paul is not making fun of them! Paul is not chastising them! He's making the point that when he first came...he had to start with the basics.

- This is natural, as far as progression goes. Start slow in faith and build as you learn and grow.
- vi) It's like eating...look at **verse 2**. Just like baby food. (SHOW JAR OF BABY FOOD) "I fed you milk, not solid food. You weren't ready for solid food." This is just the way it was. I fed you Beech Nut because you weren't ready for Delmonico.
 - vii) I had to use simple words, simple ideas, and simple theology. And this is what we all get when we are immature in our faith. When our elementary Sunday school classes tackle issues about love and salvation, it's in simple terms. Yet when one of our adult classes or small groups talks about those things, it's more complicated...more theological – the solid food about God's wisdom, use of spiritual gifts, forgiveness, and repentance.
 - viii) Unfortunately, the church in Corinth was still eating baby food! Great for babies, not so good for youth or adults. They weren't ready for solid food. They weren't grown-up Christians. Have you tasted this stuff? (Open the jar and eat some food). You can't LIVE on baby food as an adult. I'd have to buy 100 cases per week to feed my teenagers, right?
 - ix) Ands Paul KNEW they weren't ready...HOW? Because the church was still so tied to the world. Paul couldn't tell the difference between the world and the church. They were acting like ordinary, worldly people, not believers in Jesus Christ. They were quarreling like ordinary people. They were jealous of each other, like ordinary people. They couldn't forgive each other, love each other, or do good – those things come from God.
 - x) They were following their HUMAN INCLINATION – acting like MERE humans. They were giving their allegiance to other humans instead of to Christ. They were limited to being human...just human...only human.
 - xi) "Grow up!" Paul says.
 - xii) Here's the shocking thing about being a Christian (listen, listen): **we don't have to live like everyone else. We don't have to act like ordinary people.** In fact, if we're serious about being spiritual people, filled with the Holy Spirit, we will never be like ordinary people ever again. Some of you know how that feels...people look at you sideways sometimes - like your weird (which you may be).

xiii) Being a **grown up church** looks **RADICALLY** different from the world. We don't handle **MONEY** like the world, right? Who gives \$21,000 to small Haitian kids? Who does that? And, in the church, we don't address conflict like the world, right? If we're healthy, we talk about our differences directly (and some are serious) and we ask for forgiveness and understanding. We don't hold grudges or foster hatred like the world. Let it go! Let God take the hurt and the pain. We have different standards than the world in everything we do.

xiv) Can't you feel the freedom that brings?!?!

xv) Freedom to **BE** different. Freedom to use the gifts God gives us. Freedom to celebrate our diversity instead to making everything and everyone the way **WE** want them.

xvi) Look at verse 5...

b) Read verses 5-9

i) The Corinthian church had Paul as a church planter. How'd you like Paul to be the founder of your church? Pretty cool, right? Bet it would be easy to invite people to church! And then there was Apollos, who was a leader in the church – a guy who helped people in their faith.

ii) Great! But if we're putting all our trust and faith in humans, even spiritual humans, then we've lost sight of the One who has the power to make us different than the world. Was Paul or Apollos the one who God sent to be incarnated as God in a human body? Was Paul or Apollos or Peter or John the one who drove our demons with their **OWN** authority? Was Joyce Meyers or Billy Graham or Steve Taylor the one who suffered and died on the cross for sin? No! Right? So **WHY** would you follow any of them more than you follow Christ?

iii) Because no matter how godly or holy or powerful any of those people appear, no matter how spiritual any of us here today may seem, we are still sinners! Broken, frail, humans...we still have lots of the **WORLD** in us.

iv) At **BEST**, says Paul in **verse 5**, they are servants for God who is the One that does the growth in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

v) And we each have our tasks to do as we serve God. Some people are used by God to bring others into an initial relationship with Christ. They

- know how to feed milk, and are really good at it. Others are used to cook steak and help people eat it. We each have our own task...
- vi) Paul uses this agricultural metaphor, here...something the people could get! Paul planted the seed, Apollos watered it, BUT (there's that word again) GOD DID THE GROWING.
 - vii) What's the seed? The seed is the good news about Jesus Christ, and him crucified and resurrected. Each of us carries around that seed in us to sow into someone else's life.
 - viii) I had a partial bag of bean seeds once that sat in the corner of my shed for years and never got used. One day, during planting season, I decided to get out the bag and throw the seed in the ground. I watered them and cared for them, just like the other seeds, but nothing grew except for a few pathetic plants. And I wondered why. Then it hit me...I was careless...I neglected the seeds and they became stale and useless. Seeds are fragile and tender and need to be used in order to make more seeds.
 - ix) The seeds of the gospel, even though they are eternal and don't ever GO BAD, need to be planted in order to make more seeds. Paul's point is that it's less about the planter or the waterer, and all about the seed and the One who makes the seed grow. About Christ crucified.
 - x) In that seed is everything that is needed for the plant to germinate and grow, except for water, nutrients, air, warmth, and soil. And if you look at that list, we can understand those things...right? We know how to water and fertilize and care for the plant. What we don't know is how the thing actually grows. We don't DO the growing...only God knows those things, really.
 - xi) And so compared to God, verse 7, the one who plants and the one who waters is NOTHING...God is the One who does the growth. God is the One who challenges us and guides us and grows us, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - xii) And even though God could do all that all by himself, he allows us to be part of His plan, using the gifts He gave us.
 - xiii) There's a common misconception in the Christian church that God needs us. Not so! God doesn't need anything or any of us. God WANTS us. And God gives us spiritual gifts because God wants us to be

fulfilled and whole by using those gifts to serve Him. And when we do, verse 8, we will be rewarded for using those gifts.

xiv) Together, we are God's fellow workers. Together, we are God's field, ready to be cultivated and produce fruit. Together we are God's building, ready to go up from the foundation, which is Jesus Christ.

3) Application

- a) In Philippians 3:15, Paul writes, "Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you."
- b) The Greek term for mature, here, is *teleios*, which means complete, whole or mature. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be mature...to be whole, complete, spiritual beings. For us, this is the Holy Spirit actively working on our lives.
- c) Paul has shown the problem when the church is not mature. He's shown that immaturity in the church leads to jealousy, fights, division, to people getting mad and walking away, people holding grudges. Immaturity leads to a lack of desire to grow.
- d) And according to Paul, the church in Corinth THOUGHT they were mature, yet they were doing all these things that proved they weren't. If we think we are mature as a church, yet contribute to any kind of division or quarreling or jealousy or WHATEVER, then chances are we have an incorrect self-assessment. And that goes for the individuals WITHIN the body as well. Paul warns us to not fool ourselves into thinking we are more mature than we are...just look for the signs – the fruit.
- e) But as I said earlier, God desires a grown up church filled with grown up Christians so that the body of Christ is not deluded. So that the church is effective and efficient at building the Kingdom of God on earth, through the power of the Holy Spirit, united under the banner of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.
- f) So here's what being a Grown Up Christian looks like. A GUC, if you will...
 - i) First, GUCs (Grown Up Christians) are honest about where they are in their faith journey. Paul asked the church in Corinth to be honest with themselves. I don't care how old you are or how young you are, a sign of maturity in your walk with the Lord is being honest about where you are

IN that journey. And being honest about your sin and areas in which you need to grow. If you are a new believer, then honestly start walking from where you are. You aren't expected to know everything or do all the right things right away. This takes time. On the other hand, if you've been coming to church since before time, and you think that makes you mature in the faith, it's probably that you are, but show the fruit. Listen, coming to church is essential to Christian growth, but coming to church does not guarantee spiritual growth and maturity. Be honest with where you are in that journey and begin pressing into God to show you more about where to go next in your walk.

- ii) #2, GUCs are becoming more aware of their spiritual gifts and are learning how to use them. Each and every one of us has a distinctive set of spiritual gifts that God has given to us to use for the Kingdom. The gifts that WE have are used in combination with the gifts of the people AROUND us for transformation of the world for Christ. Grown up Christians are aware of and use their spiritual gifts to serve Christ with their lives. As you've heard, we will be spending some significant time on spiritual gifts this year, so be ready.
- iii) Third, GUCs eat solid food. John Wesley would call it engaging in the means of grace – things like studying the scriptures, prayer, participation in the Sacraments as often as possible, tithing, fasting, and worship. Grown Up Christians are hungry for the things of God, and are authentically engaging with God in every day life. If you don't have a regular Bible reading and prayer time, find some time and carve it out. Start with a few minutes and work up from there. Start during Lent and try it for a few weeks. Don't beat yourself up if you aren't able, right away to keep it. If you aren't currently tithing, which the Bible defines as giving 10% of our income to the local church, start where you are and pray about how God will increase that. Eat the solid food that God has provided for us to grow as disciples of Christ. Stop making excuses and just do it.
- iv) I encourage you to make your own lists that GUCs do, but here's my last one: GUCs are ready to be used as instruments of God's grace in the world. Maybe this means being a servant to others. It certainly means working as a fellow worker in God's field – planting seeds, watering, fertilizing, caring for others. This means allowing God's grace to flow through you as you love others unconditionally. It means allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you to overflowing for Christ's sake and not your own.

4) Conclusion

- a) Grown up Christians don't look like the world. Grown up Christians follow Christ's example in life and death and resurrection. Grown up Christians boast in the Lord and not their own thing. Grown up Christians have the mind of Christ.
- b) When we settle for baby food instead of steak, we cut ourselves short from the immense blessings that God has for us.
- c) We block God from challenging us to live for Him and not for the world.
- d) God and all the saints and angels in the kingdom of God want grown-up Christians who aren't afraid to be changed in order to advance the kingdom.
- e) When we do that, then the church of Jesus Christ becomes a powerful force in the world for transformation and healing.
- f) When we grow up, we no longer desire the things of the past, or the things that hold us back. We desire nothing but what God wants in our lives.
- g) I've told Stacy many times that I want to grow old with her...I don't have any guarantees of that in this world. What I do know, though, is that we are growing up together in God's grace. As a church, let's grow up together and do AMAZING things for Christ here and now...those things will bring blessings and fruit, and more people into the kingdom of God.
- h) (kneel) Let's pray...