

God Gives Growth Into Christ

Into Christ - From God

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? ⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I *am* of Apollos," are you not carnal? ⁵ Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building.

The first time I ever went skiing I was in high school and I did the smart thing, sort of. I went to take the class and the instructor had us on a slope that wasn't even a bunny hill. It was barely a slope. He told us to ski back and forth between a couple of poles and when we made it through a couple of times we would be ready to go on the ski hills. I tried it a couple times and kept getting my skis crossed. Bored with that hill and those exercises I decided that the problem was I need more of a challenge. There was no real slope how could I possibly be expected to ski when the ground was practically even? Clearly I needed a bigger challenge.

The church at Corinth had a problem, a problem which is well known in every Christian church. They wanted to grow and felt like they weren't growing. Just like every other church since the time of Christ they decided the reason for their problem was very obvious. It's the pastors fault. It's Paul fault.

You're not giving us real meat. You're only teaching us the basic things. You're keeping us on the bunny hill. They said to Paul. We are ready for the double diamond death run.

But says Paul, how can you possibly tell me you are ready for deeper teaching, for real meat, for the double diamond when you keep falling down on something so simple as being united. If you can't keep your skis united and working together you are not ready for the more challenging hills, so also if the members of a church are always crossing one another and diverging in strife and division and envy, how can you say we are ready for mature teaching? Where there is quibbling and fighting and strife and envy, you are not acting as mature Christians but as children.

Corinth was a city of philosophers. And the Corinthians were used to deep philosophy. They were bored with the bunny hill and wanted to dive into deeper things of Christ, yet because they were not ready they ended up arguing and bickering.

They want to grow but they are growing in the wrong way. They want the diamond hill but they aren't ready. Paul explains how we can grow.

Growth is always into Christ

IF we want to get off the bunny hill and grow as mature Christians the way forward is always further into Christ.

Many Christians make the mistake of thinking that the cross of Christ, the miracles of Christ, the death and the resurrection that these things are the milk that Paul talks about. That therefore we need to leave these things behind and learn more about the law. Learn more rules. Learn more how tos. Learn more God wants me to do this and that.

This is exactly the mistake of the Anabaptists, that is the Mennonites, the Amish, etc, the Catholics, the evangelicals and many more.

This is exactly the attitude of the Corinthians in our text. More laws, more rules, learn how to follow these rules better, this is what makes us better Christians. This is partly the attitude which caused the bickering and fighting which Paul describes here, even as Paul himself predicted:

Titus 3:9 ⁹ But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless.

We saw this also last summer when we studied the book of Colossians:

Colossians 2:20-23 ²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Strivings and contentions over the law have an appearance of wisdom and maturity, but do not aid in the maturity of faith. As Paul shows us in our text growth for a Christian is always into Christ.

This is shown clearly by the context for Paul chides them not to be divided but to be united and this very thing he calls milk. Reprimands that people ought to stop quarrelling is milk for babes says Paul not meat for the mature.

Secondly also notice the difference between 1 Corinthians and most of Paul's letters. Here he says I am forced to feed you milk and starting with verse ten he confronts the Corinthians with the Law. But in most of his other letters when he is writing to mature Christians it is not so, instead in most of his other letters he starts by discussing the wonderful things that Christ has done for us. Consider Ephesians the first three chapters there is very little law but a lot about Christ. How Christ chose us before the foundation of the World. How he made us alive together with Him. How He proclaimed through his apostles the glory of His riches

Growth in faith then is always achieved by diving deeper into the things of Christ not by learning more laws

As Christ himself says:

John 15:5 ⁵ "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Consider even your own experience in life. How do you talk to children versus how do you talk to adults? Even your own children when they are grown. Rules are for children. Discussion is for adults. It is children to whom you say don't touch, don't go outside, go clean your room etc. When your children are grown and mature you no longer speak to them rules do this and don't do that but you discuss politics and history and sports and farming. Whatever things you like to talk about you discuss them.

So it is with those who are Christians, those who are mature in their faith do not need a list of rules and commands do this and don't do that. So instead of discussing rules we can discuss Christ, whom we love. What did he do? How did he do it? Why did he do it? With those who are mature in Christ we can search out the hidden wisdom of God that we heard about last week. We can probe each and every bible story seeking by the help of the Spirit to understand the mind of God.

As an example let us consider the Sunday school story from a couple weeks ago, Jesus Feeds the 5,000. As a child you probably come away from that story learning that Jesus can take care of me and provide for all I need. By no means a bad thing to learn, however it is the least part of that story.

As adults we can discuss the connection between Jesus and Moses. How Jesus purposely blessed the bread in such a way as to show all the people that this bread came down from heaven just like the manna. How he gave them bread in a manner similar to Moses but also in a manner greater than Moses. How in so doing he proclaimed himself to be the prophet Moses told them to look forward to. How the feeding of the 5,000 was not only a look back on the manna in the wilderness but also a looking forward to the Last Supper.

Someone might say to me, "what does this have to do with me? How does this help me in my life?" The answer is probably nothing. It's not about you, it's about learning and growing and understanding Christ better. This is the way adults talk, not with rules, that is for children, but discussion, searching out the things of Christ.

This is what is so great about the season of Epiphany. Epiphany ought to be every ones favorite season of the church year. Because in Epiphany we discuss the miracles and life of Christ more so than any other season. In advent we ask what can I do to prepare for Christ. In Lent we look at our sin and learn to repent. But Epiphany, Epiphany is ALL Christ, digging into the works and words of Christ. What did he do? Why did he do it? How did he do it?

This is what it means to eat solid food.

If we want to grow in our faith we must put aside the rudimentary rules of this earth, don't touch, don't taste, etc, We must also put aside the foolish notions that the Sunday school stories of our youth are for the children. We must dive into these stories and fill our life with the wonderful deeds of Christ, all that he has done for us.

True growth then is not into rules but into Christ

True Growth is Also from God not from the pastor

The second part of our text makes this very clear. What are we says Paul? We are merely fellow workers who work together for God. It is God who causes you to grow and prosper. If you look to the pastor and say this type of pastor or that type of pastor will give us growth, then you are once again speaking as children like the Corinthians. It is true that this type of pastor or that type of pastor may cause a church to grow outwardly, but the growth of the true church is only a thing from God.

God gives the increase.

Everything we do without God is in vain. With God nothing we do is in vain. With God there will be growth, without God there will be no growth.

“You are God’s field, you are God’s building” – This is a promise that God gives to you.

Remember what the master said to the lazy servant?

Matthew 25:26 ²⁶ "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

In other words everything that Jesus does prospers. You are God’s field. By calling you His field he makes this promise that He will cultivate you. He will weed you. He will water you, and you will grow.

God is not a lazy farmer that he would every fail to take care of His field. He is not an incompetent farmer that he would fail. If you are his field he will cause you to grow.

Therefore the growth is into Christ and from God, and I have this confidence for each and every one of you that what the Lord has planted he will bring forth to bud and bear fruit. Therefore you have and are and will continue to grow in Christ until you come to the maturity of your faith.

Amen.