

Teach Us the Gospel Again

1 Corinthians 3:1–9

Dear Friends in Christ may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit with you all!

Changes are certainly part of life. As we grow, we display changes, as we experience them. It is the same with our spiritual life too. As we grow spiritually, changes are evident. From birth at our baptism to becoming mature Christians growing in the likeness of Christ, we will experience changes. In our thoughts, our speech, our relationships. Yet that change is only caused by the work of the Gospel. It is God's work, and it is a continual, a work in progress. But change is the evidence that we are growing spiritually. Are we growing spiritually? That's the question...

Somebody posted on Facebook these words, and I quote some of what she wrote: "Church is hard. Church is hard for the person walking through the doors, afraid of judgement. Church is hard for the prodigal soul returning home, broken and battered by the world. Church is hard for the girl who looks like she has it all together, but doesn't. Church is hard for the couple who fought the entire ride to service. Church is hard for the single mom, surrounded by couples holding hands, and seemingly perfect families. Church is hard for the leader with an estranged child. Church is hard for the wife who longs to be led by a righteous man. Church is hard for the teenage girl, wearing a scarlet letter, ashamed of her mistakes. Church is hard for the sinners. For the church is a body of imperfect people..."

For the church is a body of imperfect people... that statement doesn't give us any assurance of change, does it? A church is supposed to be the community of saints, of special, forgiven and changed people. But the reality is that, yes, we belong to a community of imperfect people who are being perfected by the Gospel. As you see, without the Gospel we just permeate what that person summarizes in her comments. Without the Gospel anything can happen, in our relationships, the way we see the world, and even the way we see God.

The congregation at Corinth is a case in point. The Corinthian congregation as it grew, faced several problems. They argued which of their pastors was the greatest: "I

follow Paul! Said some, others: I follow Apollos!" They argued which spiritual gifts were the best: "I speak in tongues!" said some, others: "I prophesy!" One of them had sued his fellow church member, which caused a public embarrassment. Some were living sexually immoral lifestyles, and no one corrected them. They had divisions between male and female, and they fought about women's roles in the church. They had divisions between rich and poor. Not the description of changed Christians, don't you think?

They knew God's laws, and they also knew they that Jesus died for their sins, but they didn't consider the implications. Its not enough to know the Law, they need to be practiced. Likewise, they forgot of the power of the Gospel, and foolishly thought they know everything there is to know about Christ and his cross (Epistle, 1 Cor 3:1-9). Even though they thought they were indeed mature, yet their actions proved them wrong. For that Paul tells them: "You're still babes. You are still fleshly. You are still thinking like the world."

Do these words still apply today? Absolutely, to many Paul would say, "You're still babes. You are still fleshly. You are still thinking like the world."

No, if you were Paul, how do you clean up this mess? Well, Paul says, "Go back to the beginning." back to the message of the cross. He says, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

The Corinthians had tried to move on from that message. They thought they were mature, and that cross thing was baby stuff. Paul's sermons are just so basic. Let us move on to more mature issues. But in doing so, moving away from the cross, that they had all these errors.

As you see, the cross is neither basic nor advanced Christianity. The cross is the whole thing from start to finish. The cross is the key to it all! The cross is obviously at the center of our faith. We believe that Christ died for us, and whoever believes has eternal life. But the cross is also our temporal life, for we seek to live our lives following Jesus. And his leading takes us to seek to imitate the Crucified!

If you follow Paul's logic throughout this letter, he addresses problems by asking two basic questions: What decision would bring glory to Christ? And how can we imitate Christ crucified toward one another? So, for instance, consider the issue of

lawsuits. Should you sue your fellow Christian? Well, let us apply Paul's questions. First, would it bring glory to Christ to sue your brother? Would this cause the name of Christ to be praised or to be mocked? Second, would it be Christlike to sue our brother? Would it be helpful and build the congregation up in love?

When you ask the right questions, the decision becomes quite clear. If you ask the world's questions, like "What's in it for me? What would make me happy? What is my heart telling me?" you'll arrive at one conclusion, the wisdom of the world. But if you stay under the light of the cross, looking not to your own interest but to the glory of God and the benefit of neighbor, you'll come to an entirely different conclusion! However, be ready to be told, how foolish is that approach, we have rights! We have rights you know!

I'm sure that was the thought of the Corinthians too, but Paul says they were still thinking like the world. They were still thinking like babies. So, Paul tells them that they need to learn the mind of Christ—which is foolishness, baby stuff, in the eyes of the world, but for us it is the wisdom of God.

So, what is the mind of Christ? Well, it is to think like Christ thinks. In his letter to the Philippians, he writes: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:3–9).

Do you want to be great? Then be like Jesus and make yourself nothing! Do you want to be first? Then serve God and serve neighbor and place yourself last. Deny yourself, take up a cross, and follow Jesus. This is how Christ the crucified thinks.

But the world says, get even! We've all done it before, and we know how good it can feel. It comes to us all too naturally, doesn't it? Just think back to your childhood. You can only put up with the class bully stealing the dessert from your lunch tray so many times before you've had enough and begin to plot your revenge. Or that driver on the freeway who cuts you off not once, but twice—you'll teach him a lesson.

We could go on, but what would be the point? Didn't Jesus taught us "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mat. 5:44)? But how? you ask. Where's the fairness in that? Does Jesus mean to say that there should be no justice?

Have you ever noticed that Jesus never once looked to his own interests? Have you ever noticed that Jesus only used his miraculous powers for others? When he was hungry, he did not make the stones into bread. He entrusted himself to God. But when others were hungry, he fed the five thousand and again the four thousand. Likewise, when others were sick, suffering, or dying, he gave them healing. But when he was dying, he stayed on that cross, and he did nothing for himself. Rather, he persevered out of love for you. If you want to be mature, have this mind—the mind of Christ.

This seems so basic to our arrogant hearts. We think, "I've heard that all before." Yet our actions and behaviour betray our knowledge. I know not to be selfish! Then why haven't I stopped? We think just because our ears have heard it that we have already mastered the teaching and are ready to move on! But James reminds his hearers to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). James says this to crush their pride. And I hope ours too. If we are hearers of the Word but not doers, we are clearly like babes in the faith!

As humans, we like the idea of progress, of moving on to bigger and better things. The only way we can do that spiritually is to seek, to go back to the cross, to the transforming power of the Gospel. For that we need first to allow God's Law to crush us, especially our pride, and then let the Gospel to build us up again. We need the Law to prune away all the branches bearing no fruit, and then we need the Gospel to give us new growth that will produce the good fruit by God's power.

The message may seem basic, but in this basic message, we find power. As Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). It may seem basic but wait and see until you see its transforming fruits in your life.

"Church is hard." The comment reads. It is hard because the church is "a body of imperfect people..." indeed! Yet here is the good news, we are all in the same boat. No, we are not perfect, we are not looking to be perfect, we are not looking for power

perhaps, we are not looking for our best interest... we are in the same boat, because we are imperfect, still babies in the faith. And I'm glad to say we are in the same boat because we come, not to please each other or the world, but to be renewed, to be rescued, to be changed, to restored, by Christ the crucified. There all our pride, all our sense of superiority over the sinner, my sin, es done with once and for all, there at the cross!

And as we continue to grow, as we are continually changed by Christ, Paul prays that we "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:18–19). If you are ready to move on from the cross, you have not scratched the surface of the mystery of God's love.

So, friends, I invite you to learn it once again—to sit at Jesus' feet, like humble Mary. I invite you to hear the message anew. The season of Lent is just around the corner, we will hear again of Jesus and his cross, his passion, is suffering. Do not assume you already know this story but hear it with fresh ears. For in the cross, all things are revealed. First and foremost, our faith! But then also, our way of life. There is so much to learn, and we are still babes. We have been foolish, but God is willing to teach us again. And again, and again... all through generation after generation, God has been patient! Teaching all people the same message: "You are all poor, miserable sinners, but I have reconciled you to myself by the blood of my Son." And there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And this is always the message we need when our egos overinflate.

God must repeat himself constantly if we are ever to learn, but surprisingly, he's okay with that because he is so very patient. For he desires all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Pray then that he would give you a love for that message, and pray that he would grant you the Holy Spirit to act accordingly. For the one who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door shall be opened. Oh, may the Father never grow tired of teaching us about his beloved Son. To God alone be all glory! Amen.