

One of the great things about being a grandparent is seeing your grandchildren grow and develop – first words, walking, how they engage with you. What's not so good are the times when how they are taught to eat these days – baby led weaning is the thing – you allow the child to eat whatever and in the way that they like – sometimes a bit difficult to watch for those of a weak disposition – food everywhere! Continuing our look at 1 Corinthians we're at chapter 3, where Paul starts the chapter talking about baby food and weaning. Paul reflects, looking on what he's discovered about the behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of the Christians in Corinth have not grown up enough to take on solid food spiritually. They are acting as if their new relationship with Jesus Christ and him crucified, the big theme we considered last week, means nothing – it's not changed them, their growth is stunted. They have failed to realize how the gospel of the cross has brought about a new creation. They are still acting as though the pursuits and the goals that the world promotes are determinative and defining for the church. They are, Paul says, acting like little children. Paul says they are still acting in a wordly way (v3), acting (v4) like mere human beings. What a strange phrase – aren't we? How are we different to our neighbour? We are different because of Christ – we have received the Spirit of Christ (2:12), we have received (2:15) the mind of Christ. For Christians there is a BC, and an AD – before Christ becomes our Lord, our Saviour, and his Spirit lives in and through us, and Anno Domini- we live now in the year of the Lord – Jesus is born in us. But he says, nothing seems to have changed.

He points out the evidence of this, the signs that weaning has not yet taken place. Firstly 3:3 there is quarrelling and arguing – now, there is nothing wrong with having a difference of view from others within the life of the church, but how we graciously express ourselves especially giving a voice to those who are quiet and reflective, is vital. IN chapter Chapter 1:10 Paul called for a unity of mind – this means listening rather than speaking, gently encouraging rather than saying unhelpful things. Make no mistake, I will always call out such behaviour in the life of the church, because arguing, quarrelling and negativity sap the life out of the church.

Second: 3:4 – looking back at what we considered in chapter 1, the cult of leader is strong; they were aligning themselves with whichever leader suited their personality or personal experience best, they focused on secondary things- maybe today for Christians it's the church building and its history rather than Jesus the lord of the church, or our political bias comes before our allegiance to Christ. All this, Paul shows where the meat of the gospel has not fed them – it is dividing them rather than them being united in Christ, and that these leaders, (v4-5) are simply servants of the Lord, equal in calling and purpose. Do we pray for our leaders? I want to thank you for the intercessions that quite frequently mention me, and Helen – what about your daily prayer life – please pray for me to have that servant heart, please pray for yourselves that we do not become focused on leaders, past present or future! Give thanks to those who led you to Christ.

Paul now changes his picture away from weaning to gardening – (bring a plant). Look at this lovely plant - how did it grow? (from a seed planted in soil, given light, sun, water – it takes some doing, growing a plant, especially getting the amount of water right. Now I've done all that, I can just leave it. My job is finished and the plant can look after itself – isn't that right (No!). it still needs to be looked after, watered and fed if it isn't going to die. I still have to help this plant to stay healthy and keep growing.

V6-9 Paul, Apollos and any others have been responsible for different parts of the Corinthians' Christian story, (planted, past tense, watered, past tense) yet they are not competing, but working together. But it also needs acknowledging that in everything we do (V7) that it's all the work of God – God (present continuous) keeps on giving the growth – we are simply co-operating with him. This means each and every one of us need to take responsibility for our own Christian growth (thank Jean for bible notes!) – reading the bible, praying, taking part in worship, serving the lord in Church and in the community – but we also share a responsibility under God for each other. Homegroups, e.g. during lent are not just something else we do for the church, but an essential way of growing with others to spiritual maturity, the maturity the Corinthian Christians seemed to lack. Please think seriously about this, and take action!

V10-15 Paul changes the image for a third time – that of a building and its foundations. It's a bit of a mixed metaphor- firstly (v10-11) he talks about the foundations of the Christian life – essential for any building project. I love looking at building sites and seeing the digger digging down around where the walls will be, and then to see them being filled with concrete – suddenly you can see the outline of what is going to be. So too – the foundations need to be prepared and executed properly – and for the Christian, that can only be one thing – or rather one person – Jesus Christ (v11) and him crucified. Other foundations are not going to support the building – tradition, the church, family heritage, good works, other religions - all will fail in the end. Then the building begins to take shape – materials are chosen with care and plans are followed. We all know what happens when this goes wrong. One of the joys of living in a vicarage is that we have very little control over who come and does work. Last Christmas the diocese finally got round to sorting out some leaking taps upstairs, and a person we thought was a plumber came and completed the work, first by making large holes in a bedroom wall, and then proceeding to break several tiles when there were no replacements, covering this up by turning them upside down and hiding the new bits under the sink. Several weeks after he left I noticed that a picture in my study was going mouldy. To cut a long story short, there was water leaking from a pipe which the so-called plumber hadn't connected properly. It ended up with his firm having to do lots of redecoration upstairs and downstairs!

So build your Christian life properly, with the right materials. Build with what is good for your spiritual life – setting aside time on the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection to worship with other Christians where the bible is taught, where you received the life of Christ in bread and wine. Meet regularly with a spiritual accompanier who can help your prayer life. Look out for the good works God has prepared for you to walk in. Give generously of your time and money to further God's kingdom. V18 – some of this does not make sense in the eyes of the world; there are easier ways to life. Don't be deceived into taking short cuts.

So to conclude (v22)– Like the Corinthian Christians, Congregations can become divided and distracted by old allegiances to former leaders and to former ways of doing things, things that look wise in the eyes of society around us. We so easily think that those things need to define us. Churches too often adopt the world around us's claims about what ought to be valued and pursued as the centre of our identity: nationalism, power over others,

prosperity, and some safe distance from those who would make that prosperity uncomfortable. We, like the Corinthians, often resist being shaped by the wisdom of the cross. But this wisdom, and this wisdom alone will shape us into the image of Christ, the Christ who died for us and this wisdom will in the end set us free.

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