

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans
“Infant Diets, Gardening and Jesus’ Words”
1 Corinthians 3: 1 - 9
Pastor Jonathan

February 16, 2020
6th Sunday after Epiphany

How do we know right and wrong? How do we know what’s true and false? How do we know what we hear from God is truly from God? We read the Scriptures. We teach and study the Scriptures together. We try to apply what we read to ourselves, honestly, and openly. Are we perfect in such exercises? No. But is it important to search the Scriptures and follow what God says there? Yes. Is it reliable? Yes. Should we try to apply the Scriptures consistently? Yes. Do we always apply the Scriptures consistently? No. Do we need the Holy Spirit to rightly understand the Scriptures for our days? Yes. Only He can lead us rightly.

Paul spent a good bit of chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians teaching people that without the Holy Spirit, sin or rebellion against God, the Gospel, relationship with Jesus, biblical standards and principles, make no sense. It’s all foolishness without a spiritual understanding, that is, without the Holy Spirit making sense of it to you.

Paul introduces three categories of people. He is writing in Greek so let’s take a moment to look at the Greek phrases, because our modern translations tend to use quite different turns of phrase for each one. The first category is the natural person (*psychikoi*=from ‘*psyche*’ or “*soulish*”). The natural person is a person without the Holy Spirit in their lives. 1 Cor. 2:14 “The person (or man) without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him.” (NIV) That is the *psychikoi*. The natural person has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and has not come to terms with their sins, their brokenness before God. A natural person can be a religious person, with “religion” defined as what we do over and over in a service to a higher power or not. So you can come to church for many years and serve here or anywhere else without knowing Jesus Christ personally, without having the Holy Spirit in your life, but being a good person or trying to be one. Once you acknowledge your sin and brokenness, ask Jesus Christ into your life, trust Him as Lord and God, then you have the Holy Spirit and you are a spiritual person, that is, someone who belongs to the Holy Spirit as well as to Jesus.

So the first distinction Paul makes between persons is that between the natural and the supernatural person. He uses the Greek words for natural or soulish, versus spiritual or belonging to the Spirit, “the person with the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:15, or “the spiritual man,” NIV).

One of the major things every Christian assembly is called to do, is announce the message of the Good News, that Jesus is the answer to our rebellion against God, and that accepting Him as Lord or Master and Saviour from our sins, is the best news we could ever expect to receive. It is also a challenge to anyone who believes there is another way to God. Because this is the way to God. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life. No one comes to God the Father except through Him (John 14:6) and salvation is found in no one else, there is no other name by which we might be saved (Acts 4:12). So our primary mission is to make sure everyone here understands this primary fact of who we are. First, in relationship to Jesus, moving from being a natural person to a Holy Spirit person (spiritual).

But Paul also introduces another category of persons in 1 Corinthians 3:1, which is the “worldly” in the NIV, the “fleshy men” in NASB, “people of the flesh” in ESV. The Greek word is *sarkinoi* or *sarkikoi*, from *sarx* or “flesh.” If you know Spanish, the word is “carne” or “meat,” as in “chili con carne”= chili with meat. The fleshly are worldly Christians, not mature, still controlled by their own desires, not by the Holy Spirit. Before we analyze ourselves, remember Paul is simply trying to be wise in how and who he talks to and teaches.

Paul notes that the divisions and jealousy and quarreling that is going on in the church shows the individuals involved as fleshly or worldly. They know Jesus, they just haven’t advanced very far in the faith, neither toward God nor toward one another. And we too must be aware of those parts of our lives that are not yielded to Jesus, where we still want our way. Jesus’ own words will convict you. It’s not my place to convict you. He is the Lord.

So because Paul recognizes that these are still Christians very young in the faith, no matter how long they knew the Lord, he uses a breastfeeding image to talk about how he has to present his case to them. Like an infant diet, they only have one item on the menu. Milk. That’s it. Later on, when babies get some pureed solid food and juices, then they get teeth and eventually a full diet. But the Corinthians weren’t there yet, and many of us aren’t either. How do you know where you are in maturity in the Lord? May I suggest that

the milk of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good, the centre of who we should be as an organization. But you know there is more to Christian faith than just the teachings on how to enter it, believing and being baptized. There is more. There is mission and service beyond ourselves. There is leadership as well as following. There are many parts of the Christian life beyond the accepting of the Gospel: giving yourself away to others as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Cross of Jesus brings us life eternal and forgiveness, it also brings us to a life of serving others, helping and teaching others, working out our salvation, our life challenges, those sins our parents may have introduced us to and bad friends' influence. There is much beyond the milk of the Gospel.

In fact, Paul begins to talk about the Church, which is a large subject in his writings as a whole, and certainly in 1 Corinthians. Rather than seeing the divisions of the Corinthian church in terms of the names people were taking on themselves, of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas, of Christ, Paul begins to teach about gardening. He says there are many parts to gardening. You know this, even in the dead of winter. There is the clearing away of debris, the preparation of the soil, the planting of the seeds, then the watering, fertilizing, finding bugs and other pests, and weeding. In farming operations, each of these can be a specialized team, based on how much land is being tilled. But in your garden you likely get to do it all. Paul says he was a planting specialist. He planted the church. By the way, this passage is where we get the image for church planting, as Grace was planted in the early 1980s, with Gordon planting.

Paul planted, he teaches, but Apollos watered. Now there wouldn't be anything left if Paul didn't plant and Apollos didn't water. No. But the point Paul is making is that it is neither the sowing of the seed, nor the watering that makes the garden grow, but God makes the garden grow. He causes the transformation of that seed into what it becomes, the whole point of the garden, the wonderful fruits and vegetables that we wouldn't believe could happen if we only had the seeds to look at and had never seen the fruit in advance. Yes, it is God who gets the praise for the produce of the garden, more than the planter or the watering person. That's Paul's point. And he steps away from giving milk on this subject for a moment in 3:9. We are not competitors, Paul says. We (the church leaders) are God's fellow workers. You are God's field or God's garden. You are God's building.

If you've never talked to a passionate gardener or farmer about their work or recreation, please do. Every part of it has spiritual lessons, including the dull and boring parts like weeding or tilling by hand. There are pests and predators and many things to learn about gardening and farming. It is not automatic. But it is a wonderful calling, which we all benefit from, if you eat fruits or vegetables or meats. Next week Paul talks about construction work, which should be interesting to those of us on the east end of the housing boom in Ottawa.

Let us turn to Jesus' teaching for just a few minutes. You heard the portion that Tomm read from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: 21-37. One of the things Jesus is clearly doing in His preaching is expositing important parts of the Law in the Old Testament Scripture. He says He hasn't come to do away with the Scriptures: the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. (5:17) This sets up his preaching on murder, adultery, divorce and vows. On each of these items, he sets a higher standard than expected.

He teaches that your anger can be like murder of another, and it needs to lead to forgiveness and reconciliation with others, and if that is insufficient motivation, then he places your relationship with God on the line with phrases like "subject to judgment" and "in danger of the fire of hell." Jesus urges us in the strongest of terms to get help with our anger, and to make amends and be reconciled with the objects/persons on whom your anger is placed. If you are hard on others in this area, consider your own thought life, your own area of challenge.

Similarly He urges us to take our lust seriously. He says our lust is like adultery itself. Our minds and thinking matter. How you think of others matters more than you think. If you have a porn problem, it is a cancer and needs to be dealt with. A porn problem is an adultery problem. There are internet accountability programs like Covenant Eyes that will make you accountable for how you spend your time on the internet. The cutting off of body parts again is again a way Jesus uses to urge serious life changes. Many of us would have no hands or eyes left. Jesus mentions hell in this context again to emphasize the severity of the issue. If you are hard on others in this area, consider your own thought life, and your areas of struggle.

Regarding divorce, He continues to teach very high standards, above the Jewish practices of his day. In Jesus' day, men could divorce women for any

reason. But Jesus did not approve of that practice. He told you to stay with your spouse, unless there was infidelity or sexual sin, however *parektos logou porneias* is to be translated. Most translators say “except for the reason of unfaithfulness” while *porneia* may be a broader term for sexual sin. There is a more specific word for adultery used in 5:27 *moixeuseis* along with the word for “don’t” *ou*. Jesus here is trying to raise the standard for marriages, and not making divorce and remarriage as easy as it was in his time. Luke 16: 18 and Mark 10:11 clearly teach that any divorce and remarriage is adultery. So again Jesus is trying to get those in marriages to work on them and to teach broadly that there are a number of situations he considers adultery that were not considered adulterous in his time. He allows for divorce and remarriage, yes. Jewish law allowed certificates of divorce and freedom to remarry for any reason, which was against Jesus’ point of view. Again if you are hard on others regarding their sexual sin, please realize that God will apply that same standard to you. (Matthew 7:2) We all face one judgment seat of Christ, and He has a very high standard. I am not the judge. Jesus is.

Similarly and finally, Jesus teaches us to keep our word. If we say we are going to do something, do it. Don’t make conditional vows. Just say, “Yes, I will tell the truth before God.”

Whether we struggle with religious thoughts and behaviours, carnality of all kinds, anger, lust, marital relationship challenges or keeping our word, let us trust Jesus for who is for us. His truth and His love will keep us going through the most difficult times. Jesus brings us together. He will help us keep high standards and caring for one another with compassion.

Let us pray.