

Video: Faith in Kindergarten There's something seriously wrong with a grown man who would want to stay in preschool. It might be easier, more comfortable and less demanding, but we're not supposed to stay at that stage all through our lives.

We're not supposed to be content to keep learning those basics again and again. Throughout our lives we're supposed to be growing, developing, moving on to new and better things.

And it's the same with following Jesus. When we put our trust in Christ and his death on the cross, when we accept him as the forgiver of our sins and the leader of our lives, then we are at that very instant fully forgiven, declared righteous in God's sight and adopted into God's family. At that moment we become a child of God as a full and free gift of his grace.

But this is not supposed to be the end of the process. Instead this is supposed to be a new beginning. And throughout our Christian lives we are called to grow, to develop, to allow God by his Spirit to work in our lives to transform us and make us more like Jesus.

But when Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth, they were not like that. They were not growing as followers of Jesus. Instead they were behaving like kids.

And so Paul wrote to them in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 to challenge them not to be childish any longer.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. ⁹ For we are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building."

1. Surprising Immaturity

Many of the Christians in Corinth thought that they were really spiritual. They saw themselves as wise and mature in their faith. They thought that they had already arrived in their Christian lives. This is why, later, Paul sarcastically said about them: "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings." 1 Corinthians 4:8

One of the reasons for their arrogance was because they displayed so many spiritual gifts in their life together. They thought that because they taught impressively or prophesied powerfully or spoke in tongues or saw people healed – then that proved their spiritual maturity. It proved that they had it all together!

And many people think the same kind of way today. They think maturity in faith is measured by what someone can do. Can they preach? Can they lead worship? Can they pray impressively? Can they quote Bible verses? Then they must be mature and spiritual.

a) Infants in Christ

But Paul disagreed. He did not measure spiritual maturity by what people could do.

During his second missionary journey, Paul had stayed a year and a half with this church in Corinth, teaching them, leading them and encouraging them. But look at what he said about them when he was with them: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:1

Yes, these people were Christians. They'd trusted in Jesus and his death on the cross for their sins. They'd received the Holy Spirit and had been adopted into God's family. They were part of the church of God in Corinth. That's why Paul could address them here as his brothers in Christ!

But these Christians were not spiritual believers. They were not displaying the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They were not following the Spirit's leading in their lives.

Instead they were immature. Childish. That's because they were worldly. They were following the pattern of this world. They were living lives that were dominated by their own sinful nature, rather than allowing Christ to lead them.

And that wasn't because they were new Christians. Sadly this situation hadn't changed in the couple of years between Paul's visit and him writing this letter. He said to them, ["You are still worldly."](#) 1 Corinthians 3:3.

They were still acting like kids. They had not grown up in their faith. They were still immature.

Maturity in our faith in Christ is not automatic. It does not just come with time. A new Christian can be spiritual and an old Christian can be worldly!

So if we want to be spiritual Christians, if we want to be mature, then we need to choose to grow in our faith. We need to commit ourselves to allowing God to change our hearts and minds.

We need that same attitude as Paul expressed in Philippians 3:13-14: ["Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."](#) We need to choose to grow!

b) Only Able For Milk

But the Corinthians did not have that attitude. They got stuck in immaturity and worldly thinking.

And because of this, Paul was unable to talk to them the way that he wanted to. He could not teach them all of the truths that God had given him. He said, ["I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready."](#) 1 Corinthians 3:2

Milk is really important for babies. It provides the nutrients that they need at the start of their lives. But as they grow, if they are going to be strong and healthy, they need more than just milk. They need to move on to solid food to feed their growing bodies, to continue their development.

It is the same for Christians. As we grow, we need to continue to go deeper in God's Word. We need to keep growing in our understanding of the gospel and how it should transform our lives. We need to keep learning more and more from the Bible.

But Paul couldn't do that for these believers. They were stuck on the milk. They were not ready for him to teach them more about the deeper truths and implications of the gospel. They had got stuck on the basics.

God's plan is that we will ["Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."](#) 1 Peter 3:15 He wants us to get to know him more and more, and his plan and purpose in this world.

But immaturity, a worldly attitude, stops that progress. If we refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to change us and influence our lives, then we cannot grow in our knowledge of God's truths, we can't deepen our understanding of what God has done and we miss out on what God wants to teach us!

c) Fighting With Each Other

So Paul saw that these Christians were immature and worldly and that they could not accept God's deeper truths. But how did Paul see this? What was the evidence that demonstrated the lack of maturity in this church?

Well Paul said, ["For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"](#) 1 Corinthians 3:3

These Christians were bickering with each other. They were arguing over unimportant issues. They were fighting over position and prestige. They were jealous of each other's gifts and roles in church. And it was this that demonstrated their immaturity and their worldliness.

That is really important for us to grasp. Spiritual maturity is not so much shown by what we can do in church or how impressive we can be in ministry. Rather it is about how we treat other people. It is how we handle our differences. It is about how we cope with people who disagree with us. It is about how we fellowship together as a church.

This is what James wrote: ["Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For](#)

where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” James 3:13-18

So the Corinthians got it wrong. Spiritual maturity is not about the gifts of the Spirit in our lives. It is not about how impressively we speak, or how powerfully we minister, or effectively we share.

Rather it is about the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It is about “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Galatians 5:22–23

This is God’s priority in our lives.

- He’s focussed on our character rather than our ability.
- He’s more concerned with the kind of person we are than with what we’re able to do.
- What is important to him is our love for others much more than our own achievements.

That’s because God’s ultimate goal in our lives is that we will become more like Jesus, and “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28

When he went to the cross, Jesus expressed his selfless love for us. He died in our place, so that we could live. He took upon himself our sin, so that we could be forgiven. He suffered, so that we could be blessed. And God’s goal, is that we will express that same attitude in our lives.

So are we willing to grow up in our Christian lives? Are we willing to repent of those childish, worldly, self-centred attitudes and allow God by his Spirit to create in us a selfless love for others, even for those we disagree with? Are we willing to allow God to make us more like Jesus?

2. Serving With Maturity

The Corinthians were immature and worldly because they were fighting with each other rather than expressing the fruit of the Spirit in loving each other.

But what were they fighting over? What was at the heart of their quarrelling? Well, as we saw in chapter 1, they were arguing over their favourite celebrity leaders. “For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?” 1 Corinthians 3:4

Instead of being united by their faith in Christ, this church had formed cliques around who they thought were the most important leaders. And these little groups were arguing with each other, criticising each other’s ideas and preferences and fighting for dominance and influence in this church.

And so they were acting like mere men. They were just doing what comes naturally to human beings. They were being selfish and proud and divisive. They were not expressing the fruit of the Spirit. They were not living as children of God.

And so Paul here challenged this behaviour by correcting their thinking. He wanted them to have a proper view of these leaders, so that they could have a proper attitude to each other.

a) God is in Charge

Firstly, he wanted them to see that God was in charge. “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.” 1 Corinthians 3:5

People in this church had come to faith in Christ through the ministry of Paul or Apollos. As a result, they had put these guys on a pedestal. They had elevated them to a celebrity status.

But that didn’t make any sense, because in reality, Paul and Apollos were simply servants who were just doing what God had commanded them to do. They were not anyone special. They were just fulfilling the specific role that God had given to them.

It was God who was in charge. He’s the leader. And so God is the one we should focus on. This was always Paul’s attitude to his own ministry: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” 2 Corinthians 4:5

b) God is At Work

Of course, Paul and Apollos had seen great fruit in their ministry. People had come to faith in Christ and this church had been established. But that was not down to them. **"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it."** 1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul had gone to Corinth to plant the seed of God's Word. Apollos had followed after and watered that seed, encouraging it to bear fruit in people's lives. Their obedience was vital. Both were needed for this church to be planted and to grow.

And our obedience to God's call is also important. Whatever role we've been called to, it is essential that we obey. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:10: **"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."** If we're going to be the church that God has called us to be, then each of us need to be willing to serve in the role that God has called us to and gifted us for.

But whatever service we're involved in, the impact of our work, is not down to us. Instead it is God who works. Yes Paul planted the seed and Apollos watered it, **"But God made it grow."** 1 Corinthians 3:6

Paul and Apollos faithfully preached the gospel through their lives and their words, but it was God who opened blind eyes. It was God who softened hardened hearts. It was God who brought people to repentance and faith in Christ!

Yes, Paul could say, **"We are God's fellow-workers."** 1 Corinthians 3:9. They worked together with God in his field, the church! But they weren't equal partners. The effectiveness of their ministry was all down to God! Without God, they would've achieved nothing.

That is what Jesus said in John 15:5: **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."**

We have the immense privilege of working together with God in his kingdom. We are invited to bear fruit for him. But on our own we can do nothing. Our fruitfulness is only possible as far as we remain in Christ. Whatever we achieve is because God is at work in and through us.

c) God is Glorious

And **"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."** 1 Corinthians 3:7
If it is God who works in power to save sinners, transform lives and build churches, then it is God who deserves all the honour. He alone deserves the glory and the praise.

d) God is Judge

And so Paul and Apollos were not competing with each other. They were not fighting over position and prominence in the church in Corinth. Instead, they understood that **"The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose."** 1 Corinthians 3:8

Paul and Apollos were united together in a common mission. Yes they had different ministry roles. They worked in different ways and had different gifts. But they were completely united in working together to see this church built up and see the name of Christ honoured.

And they were doing this with the awareness of knowing that God was watching all that they did and so **"Each will be rewarded according to his own labour."** 1 Corinthians 3:8

We'll think about this in more detail next week. But Paul and Apollos were not looking for the praise and honour of other people. They were not looking to make a name for themselves. They knew that they were servants of Christ – and so they were committing to serving Christ and seek his, **"Well done, good and faithful servant."**

And that should be our attitude whatever we are doing. **"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."** Colossians 3:23-24 We don't need to compete with other Christians for the limelight, because in the end, it is what the Lord thinks about our service that matters.

Conclusion

And so this is why it was so ridiculous of this church to argue about which preacher or leader they were following.

- It was absurd for them to make a celebrity out of a servant, when it's God who's in charge.
- It was immature to form a personality cult around these leaders, as it was God who had worked in power in their lives.

- It was childish to fight over which leader was better or more important, when all the praise and glory should go to God alone.
- It was unspiritual to be jealous over position and prestige in the church, when we are called to be united in serving the Lord and him alone.

So let's not be childish. Let's not follow the way of this world. Let's not fight for our preferences and push for our position and power.

Instead, let's follow Jesus and, in love, seek to serve one another, fulfilling God's call on our lives and letting him work in and through us for his glory and his honour.

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