

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Grow Up

Pastor Scott Dudley

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

¹ Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still 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 quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

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 has been making it grow.

⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.

⁹ For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Transcript:

The scripture is from I Corinthians, and it goes like this. "But we have the mind of Christ. Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ. I give you milk, not solid food, for you or not yet ready for it. Indeed, you're still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos.' Are you not mere humans? 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. I planted the

seed. Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who makes things grow."

So, back when I was teaching at Stanford, the English department that I was a part of hired some consultants to tell us how we could go from being a top 10 English department to number one in the country. They solicited feedback from the faculty who said things like, "Well, because I am the top scholar in my field, I should be paid more than everybody else." It turns out they all said that they were the top scholar in their field, verifying the statistic that 90% of professors think that they are in the top 10% of their field. 90%, top 10%... So, obviously we're dealing with the English department here, not the math department.

One professor said, "Well, if we really want to be a number one English department, I should have a bigger office." What? What does that have to do with anything? Right? The logic train definitely left the station. Then when they all saw what each other had written, what their colleagues had said, they started fighting and bickering. "No, I should have the bigger office." "No, I should have the bigger office." It was so childish. It was so embarrassing, which is why I became a pastor to escape all of that in the church. Awkward, nervous laughter here and online, right?

It's everywhere, right? That kind of bickering and striving and jockeying for position, it happens in churches. It happens where you work. It happens with friends. It happens in Little League. It happens in soccer teams. It happens in retirement communities. It happens everywhere. Where are you caught up in jockeying for position or power, in your family, where you live or where you work, where you play, where you learn?

That's what's happening in the church at Corinth from the text that I just read. And on the surface level, the issue is division in the church. But deeper down, the issue is spiritual immaturity. There's a lot of problems with spiritual immaturity, one of which is it makes everyone miserable. That kind of quarreling and jealousy makes everybody miserable. Wherever you live, work, play, it's making people stressed and unhappy and angry and all of that. But more importantly, more importantly, that kind of spiritual immaturity prevents so so many beautiful things from happening.

It kills authentic community. It kills joy. It kills teamwork. So much more is possible, and in this text, the Apostle Paul says that he planted the church in Corinth. Then he says, "But God," that's the theme of our sermon series. "But God is making it grow." Then in the next verse, he says, "We do all of our work, but God Who makes things grow is the one Who's responsible." We, myself included, are spiritually immature from time to time, for me many times to many times. But God... But God... But God is in the spiritual growth business.

For me, for you, that's good news because spiritually mature people have more joy. They have better friendships. They have deeper community. Right? A spiritually mature church can change the culture around it rather than just be like the culture around it. It's so much better. Now, the background of this text is that the apostle Paul started the church in Corinth, but then all these other pastors started coming. People were splitting off into factions following this pastor or that pastor or one of those pastors whose name was Apollos. Right?

And they're saying things like these other pastors are better preachers than Paul. They have deeper theology than Paul. They're better looking than Paul. So, seriously, that was one of their criteria. Right? How good looking is your pastor? So, fortunately have you, you have this; so we're good here. But other churches, man, got to pray for those other churches. So, everyone's picking sides. Right? And people were saying, "We're team Apollos, and Apollos is better looking. And a Apollos is a better leader. So, yay team Apollos."

And others were going, "No, no. We're team Paul, and team Paul is better." There's all this fighting. But what it was ultimately about, all it was about was status. Who's better? Who's smarter? Who's team are you on, and that makes you better or worse? Same kind of thing happens where you live, work, play, learn. So, Paul sees all of this; and he says, but we, but we have the mind of Christ. That is, spiritually mature people think differently than the world. They have a different worldview. They think like Jesus.

Then he says "Brothers and sisters," because he's about to just smack them down. Right? He's about to say some really harsh things to them, so he wants to start by reminding them that he loves them. He wants the best for them, and all of this spiritual immaturity is keeping them from flourishing. So, he says, "Brothers and sisters, I couldn't address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ." Oh, ouch. Right? Basically what says in this text is, "Oh, grow up, why don't you. Y'all are acting like a bunch of babies."

What is the mark of their spiritual immaturity? Is it that there's theology isn't deep enough, that they don't know enough Bible? No. He says, "Here's the problem. Here's the mark. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?" So, Paul points to two signs of spiritual immaturity. There are others, but here he points to two. The first is jealousy, which I think all of us have from time to time. Right? Have you ever been jealous of someone's popularity or someone's success or someone's money or something like that? Jealousy is a sign of spiritual immaturity.

Then the second sign of spiritual immaturity is quarreling. He says, "For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere human beings?" In other

words, people who are acting as though you don't have the Holy Spirit of God inside of you. Paul says a sure sign of an immature Christian and a sure sign of an immature church is quarreling, which I find very convicting and a little uncomfortable because I can be a quarrelsome person.

I am embarrassed. I am embarrassed to think of the times where I've been rude to a store clerk because I didn't think they were doing something right, or, oh, my gosh, airline, people who work for airlines. When my flight gets canceled or delayed or I miss a connecting flight because of it, I cringe to think of the times I've been just quarrelsome. Is there quarreling around somewhere? Is there quarreling with your family or friends or teacher or people at school or people at work? Is there quarreling in churches in America? Oh, just, I would love to show you my email. Yes, there is all kinds of quarreling all over the place.

Now, if we're grading on a curve, I think we here as a church do a little better than a lot of other churches; but we're not perfect. I just think it shows a catastrophic failure of discipleship in the American church that churches are fighting about so many things. Oh, my goodness. This year alone, fighting about lockdown or open up, masks, politics. Someone sent me a video, a satiric video; and the title of it was Pastor, You're Doing it Wrong, about how no matter what you say, no matter what you do, there's always some group of people that are upset about it.

Some churches fight about music or how people should dress. It's fine to have our preferences. It's fine to have preference. It's fine to express our preferences. But when we can't let it go or get annoyed and complain, it's spiritually immature. Spiritually mature Christians can worship to any style anywhere. It doesn't matter what the people around them are doing. They can worship anywhere.

Again, it's not just churches; but this happens in families, neighborhoods, soccer teams. I mean, you name it. It happens all over the place. But so much more is possible. Spiritually mature people, when we grow spiritually mature, we have more joy. We have deeper community, more harmony in our homes and in our schools and where we work; and we accomplish so much more together. So, how do we grow up? How do we grow up? Well, fortunately, God... We're not alone in this. God is in the spiritual growth business.

So, a couple of things to help us grow spiritually. First is you got to let the Bible bother you. Paul uses the metaphor of food here, and he says, "Just like you need good food to grow physically, you need good spiritual food to grow spiritually." And he says, "I gave you milk, not solid food, for you weren't yet ready for it." And what does he mean by solid food? Because lots of times in churches people think, "Well, by solid food, he must mean deeper theology or more Bible or something like that." And that's good. Those things are good. They're just not enough.

He goes on to describe the difference between spiritual milk and spiritual solid food. And he says this. "You're still worldly." He uses that word worldly a lot. "For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?" What he's saying is you're acting just like the culture around you. So, spiritually solid food isn't knowing more things. It's doing what you know. The Corinthians knew all kinds of stuff. They had all kinds of good theology. They had all kinds of Bible knowledge. They just weren't doing what they knew to do.

But I think even deeper than that, spiritually solid food is thinking differently than the world thinks, what Paul called at the beginning of the text, the mind of Christ, thinking like Jesus thinks. The Corinthians had all the best philosophers in the world, and they prided themselves in all of their supposed wisdom; but it was worldly wisdom. A few verses earlier, Paul says, "What we have received is not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit that's from God. If any of you think that you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become fools so that you may become. Wise for the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight." It's about worldview.

He says to the Corinthians, "You're following the wisdom of this world. You're not following God's wisdom. You're acting like the culture rather than people who are being transformed by the Holy Spirit." There's a famous quote attributed to Mark Twain that says, "The problem with most people isn't that they don't know enough. It's that they know so many things that ain't so." And one of the things that people know that ain't so is that Mark Twain said that because he actually didn't. It was actually probably a guy named Josh Billings.

Spiritually solid food is unlearning the wisdom of our world because it teaches us so many things that ain't so according to God; and it's learning to think like Jesus with a Christian worldview that affects everything from what we do with our time, what we do with our money, how we behave toward each other, how we behave with friends, how we parent, everything.

The place to get that different worldview is from scripture. But not just reading the Bible. That too, but also letting the Bible challenge you, change you, confront you, because we are super good at... We love the Bible when it tells us what we want to hear. Right? We love our Bible when it tells us what we want to hear. We know all those versus, the ones that comfort us and make us feel good. Right? Like, "I know the plans God has for me, plans to prosper me and not to harm me." Yay, God, prosper me. Let the healing begin.

You know, "I can do all things through Christ, and Bible verses taken out of context, that strengthen me." We're really good at that, but we're not so good at the verses that make us uncomfortable or irritated. But those are important because those are

the ones that change us. Here's the thing. Scripture is most helpful when it tells us what we do not want to hear. Scripture is most helpful when it tells us what we do not want to hear, because then it's correcting our worldview. It's given us a different way of thinking.

Paul is a great example of living out of a Christian worldview. Apollos is moving in on his territory, taking people away from him. People are leaving Paul to go to a Apollos, and Paul is not jealous. Paul is not quarrelsome because he has a Christian worldview that tells him that if he just doesn't do that, that he's going to have more joy. If he doesn't engage in bickering and jockeying for status. He has a Christian worldview that tells him not only will he flourish and the church will flourish and a Apollos will flourish if they all work together rather than working apart.

He has a worldview that says, "My worth isn't in any of my achievements. It's not in my status. It's not how many people are on team Paul. My worth is in Jesus Christ who loves me. And that's what gives me value. So, he's free from that. His worldview makes him a more joyful, freer person and he gets to be part of God changing the world. The way we get that gospel worldview is to stop skipping over the passage we don't like, stop explaining away the passing... Well, surely in the Greek it means something different. No, in the Greek it means just the same thing, just as challenging, just as uncomfortable.

Stop doing that and to say, "Okay, this is what the Bible says," and then letting it change our world. I'll give you an example of how that leads to flourishing in just a minute. So, one step we could take is to just get more serious about scripture. Maybe just start with 10 minutes a day. If you read the Bible just 10 minutes a day, in a year you will read through the entire Bible. But don't just read it. Right? Never read scripture without first asking the Holy Spirit to teach you from it and ask God to use the scripture to challenge you and change your worldview.

Second way that we can spiritually grow... First is let the Bible bug you. Second way to spiritually grow is we do our part; God does his part. So Paul says, "I planted the seed. Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." That is, when it comes to any kind of growth at all, there's a part that we do. There's a part that God does. It's like farming. You got to plant the seed. You got to water the seed. Right? But then it's really the sun that makes it grow. So, there's a part that God does in our spiritual growth, and a part we do.

The part we do our things like the big four that we talk about all the time here: scripture, worship, prayer, community, all of which connect us to God who helps us grow, and then obedience. If the Bible says to do it, do it. And then there's God's part. So, what's God's part? Well, His Holy Spirit lives in us, and His Holy Spirit is the one that

gives us those nudges of conscience when we're tempted to do something. The Holy Spirit says to us... The Holy Spirit never says, by the way, "Oh, you terrible, awful person. Look what you're tempted with."

No, no. The Holy Spirit says something like, "I know that looks good, and I know you think you want it. But deep, deep down, I know who you really are; and you don't want it. You don't want to be the kind of person who neglects his family to get ahead or the kind of person who is addicted to porn or alcohol or something like that or the kind of person that is bullying and controlling other people. I know you. This is not who you are. Choose your better self. The Holy Spirit calls to mind scripture or songs or bits of sermons to encourage us or comfort us or challenge us when we need it. Then the holy spirit takes the little bit of obedience that we do and magnifies it and makes it bigger and causes it to flourish, and I'll give you an example in a minute.

Third, locate your jealousy and quarreling, and you will locate your idols and your pain because often what's behind the jealousy or the quarreling, isn't the issue that you're really quarreling about. There's something going on deeper inside of you. Right? So the Corinthians, they were all jockeying for status and position, which meant that one of their idols is status And position. If you're jealous of someone's money or looks or success, well, maybe money, looks, success are idols for you.

Or maybe there's some pain around that issue. Maybe growing up someone told you that you were a loser or you were ugly, and so now there's all this pain around issues that you're jealous over or quarreling about. Spiritual growth happens when we stop ignoring that or stop trying to justify ourselves and start saying, "Jesus, what's behind this? What's behind this jealousy? What's behind this thing I'm fighting about? It seems like there's something going on underneath? What is that pain? What is that idol? Jesus meet me, heal me, transform me."

And He does. One of the ways He does that is He reminds us how much he loves us, and then we don't have to jockey for status or position or anything because we are secure in His love. Let the Bible bug you. Do your part. God will do His. Locate your pain and your jealousy. Then finally, to grow spiritually, cultivate humility. Paul says, "What, after all, is Apollos, and what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe." Notice he says, "What," not, "Who is Apollos and Paul," because he's being humble.

He's saying, "Look, We're no more than servants through whom God is working; and Apollos and I, we're not rivals. We need each other. If I didn't plant, he wouldn't have been able to water anything. But if he didn't water anything, the thing I planted would have died. We are wearing the same jersey, and we both need each other." It's this humility; and when we have that kind of humility and when we were growing spiritually, beautiful things happen.

So, after I finished my degree and teaching at Stanford, I went on to be a college pastor there. Some of you have heard me talk about this before, about how the church I worked at measured success by how many people went to your group. So, I felt a lot of pressure to grow the group. I competed with all the other Christian groups on campus to get students to come to my group instead of going to those other groups. Now, there is such a thing as healthy competition. This was not the healthy kind of competition. This was the unhealthy kind of competition. Right?

There was this one student that I met with every week for breakfast, and I was mentoring and discipling him. We met every week. He was a key player in my ministry, leader-type of person, socially outgoing, always brought a bunch of people with him. So, he's helping the ministry to grow. One day he and I were having breakfast, and he said, "You know, Scott? A couple of days ago I was hanging out with this leader from this other Christian group, and this leader from this other Christian group plays basketball with his guys every week. Scott, you don't do that with us. In fact, I don't even think you'd be very good at it."

I was like, "Your point?" And he goes, "Well, I think maybe I would fit better in this other group than in your group, so I think I'm going to go there." Everything in me wanted to talk him out of it. Right? He was a key player in my ministry. I've been mentoring him for almost a year. I wanted to say things like, "Really, basketball? That's how shallow you are? Well, if that's how shallow you are, go..." Passive aggressive thing, or maybe point out some theological problems with the other group. If I couldn't find them, make some up.

But I just felt the Holy Spirit nudge me. See, that's God's part. Don't do that, Dudley. Don't do that. So, instead I said, "You know what? I'd love to keep you in the group. But the real important thing here is that you grow in Christ. So, if this is your next step, you go with my blessing. Just know I'm always here if you want to talk; or if you never want to talk, that's fine too. But you go with my blessing." And as soon as I said it, it just felt good. It felt better to say it than trying to convince him to stay in my group and all that. It just felt good.

But then as Jane Austin said, "Self would intrude." And my very next thought was, "Hey, that sounded spiritually mature. Maybe that will convince them to stay." I'm hopeless. Right? It's like I had this great moment, and then he left. He went to the other group, and I brooded on that thing for weeks, man. But then the Holy Spirit started to call to mind, this is God's part, call to mind various Bible passages including this one about Paul and Apollos. These Bible passages kept going through my head.

I remember at one point, I thought, "Oh, shoot." Or something like that. That's not what I wanted to hear, but it is what I needed to hear. I realized my attitude was not biblical. It was worldly. So, stop gussying up my jealousy and my quarreling and my striving with spiritual sounding language like, "I just want to reach the campus for Christ." Oh, far out. It was all about my ego. It was all about my need for status, for approval, for recognition. So I reached out to the other leader of this other group that the student had gone to, and he and I started hanging out.

Then pretty soon some other of the campus pastors joined us, and pretty soon we were meeting regularly together as a group to pray for each other, to pray for each other's ministries, to pray for students on campus, and to pray for the campus. I sent some more of my students to other groups. If I thought other groups are going to serve my students better, I would send them to those groups. Right? And then another pastor eventually joined us, and he was head of a organization called Athletes in Action.

He came to me, and he said, "You know, Scott? I can't preach the way you do. So, I've been thinking about it. What if I do special events and Bible studies for athletes, but I'll get rid of our weekly meeting? I'm going to send all the athletes to you, to your weekly meeting, and we'll work together." And I said, "Man, that would be great, because I could really use the help especially with athletes. They have special concerns, and I don't understand them. I can't help them because as has been established heretofore, I can't play basketball. But you seem to have that spiritual gift. So, let's do it."

Then I said, "What's this going to do to your fundraising? Because I know you got to show your donors results." And he said, "Oh, it'll kill it. It'll just kill it. But it's the right thing to do." And I said, "I'll help. I will tell your donors how important you are to this campus, all the lives you're changing; and I will tell them that you and I have teamed up to have a bigger impact on the campus." So, that's what we did.

My group grew, and other people's groups grew. It was this gospel worldview of cooperation rather than unhealthy competition between all of us. But more than that, more than that, it had a positive effect on the students, because as I said, Stanford is all this unhealthy competition. I mean, sometimes if someone knew you were working on a particular topic, they would go check out all the books in the library on that topic so you couldn't have them. So, in that kind of environment, the cooperation between the Christian groups inspired students to live differently and begin to change the culture around them.

Then all those other pastors that I met with to pray with, I found some brothers in Christ who could encourage me and support me and teach me and guide me, and we all flourished. The student who left my group because I couldn't play basketball, he came

back a little while later; and he stayed. Now, he's a pastor, and he and I have been friends ever since. He is one of the most sacred people in my life.

We humbled ourselves, realized that building our groups was up to God, not us. We acted from a biblical worldview that said cooperation here is better than competition, even if it means our group is smaller, even if it means that we lose donors. We did our part and obeyed. Then God blessed it, and it flourished. I mean, you wouldn't think that your group would grow by sending students to other groups, but that's what happened because God blessed it. It flourished. It was so much better than jealousy and bickering and stress and all of that jockeying for position. It was the gospel applied all the way down to our jobs, resumes, reputations, and status.

So, where is there spiritual immaturity in your life? Because we all got it at some point. Will you allow scripture to challenge you and begin to change your worldview. Do your part by obeying God, and He will do his part. Maybe it's to reach out to that rival you've got to work or school or in your family and begin to cooperate with him. Maybe it's to examine your jealousy or your quarreling for what's behind it so God can heal it. What is it for you?

The point of the Christian life is to gradually and progressively become more like Jesus, and we have to work at that because our culture drags us down. Our fears drag us down. Our insecurities drag us down. Lots of things drag us down, but we are not defeated. We are not overcome. We are not overwhelmed. There's real things that we're up against, but God... But God... But God grows us up to be more like Him.

So, Jesus, thank You, that's what you do. Lord, we give You praise that You are in the spiritual growth business; and, Lord, we bring to You all the places we need to grow and ask that You would help us and guide us and make us more and more like You every day so that the world can see how good You are in us. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Genesis 3

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are some things you could do to help you grow spiritually?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?
- Who might you share this with?