

1Corinthians 3:3-7 "Are You Worldly Minded, Or Spiritually Minded?"

Over the years I've had people come up to me and say, wouldn't it be great to live during the time of the apostles and be part of the church when it was in its purest state? And my response is, sure it would be great to sit under the teaching of Peter, or Paul or any of those men who sat under Jesus Himself.

But what amuses me is to think that when we talk about the purity of the Church that somehow during those early years after Christ's resurrection they had no problems or that they were somehow more advanced in their walk where they were never prone to error or false teaching.

And when you read the beginning of the book of Acts it sure looks like they got off on the right foot. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached a powerful sermon on who the Messiah is and the need to accept Him as Lord and Savior.

ACT 2:37-41 "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call." 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."

This is the beginning of the N.T. Church and what a way to start. 3,000 people, mostly Jews, came to Lord that day and were water baptized. Consider the logistics of just baptizing that many people. You have 11 apostles at this time and 3,000 new converts. That's 273 people for each apostle to baptize. That's an all day affair.

What a glorious day that must have been though. It was only a short time before this that Peter had denied the Lord three times while the rest of the apostles had fled for fear, with the exception of John. And now, they stand boldly for the Lord and proclaim Jesus Christ as King and Lord and Savior, risen from the dead.

But now, you have a church which seems to be invincible as their dedication and love for Christ and each other grows each day by leaps and bounds. They must have thought it was heaven on earth.

ACT 2:42-47 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

What an awesome time this must have been. What joy must have filled the apostles to see God turn the hearts of people who days and weeks before were no more interested in Christ than the man in the moon.

And now, the unity and the peace which overcame them in Christ could be seen by all and in their love and excitement, as they shared their faith, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Who wouldn't be excited about this? Who wouldn't want to return to such a time? But here is where it's a bit deceiving. If we think that simply because there was such love and unity with these believers in the beginning, that they were not prone to let their worldly baggage follow them, then we understand very little about the human sinful nature of man.

In fact, only four chapters later in the book of Acts we begin to see some of this nature come to the surface.

ACT 6:1 "In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."

Here was one of the first tests for the church as well as the apostles. There was grumbling and complaining because the Greek Jews felt they were being slighted in favor of the Hebrew Jews concerning the distribution of food.

How could such a thing happen? How could these loving people all of a sudden turn on one another and take sides based on

nationality? The Greeks vs. the Hebrews. Praise God that the Lord was able to take that situation and turn it around, but had they not been open to the Lord it could have gotten very ugly. Here's what the apostles did.

ACT 6:3-7 "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."

God's awesome hand was touching the hearts of people all over Jerusalem, even some of the priests who may have been involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ Himself. Yes, it was a great time to be part of the church, but when we consider that the letter written by Paul to the church in Corinth we're only looking at some 28 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

28 years is nothing. 28 years ago I was a senior in high school. That was 1970. Where were you in 1970? Some of you were raising kids, maybe they were teenagers like I was. Some of you were still in school, while some of you were still in diapers. But as you look back, it seems like the time has flown by.

28 years is not really that long and yet here in our text, 28 years after our Lord's resurrection, Paul is having to rebuke a church for not growing in the apostle's teaching and not growing toward each other in Christ.

As we saw last week Paul addresses them as men of flesh, mere infants in Christ, unable to receive solid spiritual food, but only spiritual milk fit for infants. He had spent 1 and a half years with them continually teaching them the word of God. Apollos was also with them after that.

And now, some five years after Paul's first visit they are still seen as spiritual babes and Paul exhorts them to begin moving forward in their walk with Christ and to grow up in the Lord as they put aside petty differences, some of which included being divided over personalities.

1CO 1:12-13 "What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

And now, in our text, Paul reminds them again that this is the very thing which brings division in the body of Christ, which is always destructive.

1CO 3:3-4 "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling 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?"

Paul equates worldliness here with jealousy and quarreling or strife. You don't want an apostle to accuse you of being worldly as opposed to being spiritual. And yet, that's what we find in our text. Jealousy is an inward attitude, while strife or quarreling is the outworking of that attitude.

And so, while the outward expression of strife and quarreling was going on, Paul makes it clear that it's the result of what was happening in the hearts of these people. Their jealousy and their petty complaints were actually causing divisions in the body of Christ there in Corinth.

Jealousy, therefore, is an expression of spiritual immaturity, according to what Paul has said so far. It is fleshly and therefore to be put off while seeking to put on those things which would enable us to grow unto maturity.

But if we're not willing to put off those things then putting on the mind and will of Christ will not become a reality. In the case before us, here in this letter, these people were placing one man above another. Paul's point is to take our eyes off of men and place them on Christ.

And in so doing they will automatically begin to put away fleshly attitudes as they grow toward Christ. That's where it all starts. Yes, the actual act of maturing in Christ comes through studying the word of God and being obedient to the Lord, but it's only possible as we take that first step in looking away from men, including ourselves, and directing our eyes to Christ.

Without that first step we will always have one foot in the world and one foot in the truth. It's not until we relinquish that that we will begin to see the kind of growth that Paul encourages here.

But notice what Paul does here. He begins to show the true role of men with God as it relates to the kingdom of God, together with why we must not look to men, no matter how high up they may be in their responsibility to feed the church.

1CO 3:5 "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."

Here he reminds them of the two most prominent men who happened to be a part of the lives of these people. And what Paul is doing is reminding them of how they must view each. They must not place men in such a position that they would divide the body over these men.

Now, keep in mind that we're not talking about the teaching of either of these men. If either one of them happened to be bringing false teaching then, by all means, we should divide ourselves out from under their false teaching. But, in the case before us it's simply a matter of liking one over the other.

We like Apollos because he's a good looking guy who speaks eloquently. He notices me when I applaud him for such a great sermon. Paul on the other hand is a short scrawny guy who is really hard to listen to because he's not so eloquent. If anyone deserves to be an apostle it's Apollos, not Paul.

By the way, it's worth noting that neither Paul, or Apollos, were in competition with each other. The problem was not with Paul trying to lord it over Apollos or Apollos trying to show Paul up. They knew their roles and their place in the body of Christ.

The problem is with the people who sat under each one. This is why Paul says, "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."

Paul calls himself and Apollos servants. Now the word Paul uses here in the Greek is not the word he has used in the past when speaking of himself as a servant for Christ. The word he has used in the past is *doulos*, which designates a slave or bondservant for Christ. That word was meant to show his dedication and position as one who was now connected to a new Master.

The word he uses here is *diakonos*. This is a word which alludes to one who serves tables. John MacArthur likens it to a busboy. He goes on to say, "No one builds a movement around a waiter or

busboy, or erects monuments to them. Apollos and I are just waiters or busboys whom the Lord used as servants to bring you food. You do not please us by trying honor us....

.... Your honor, your glory is misplaced. You're acting like the world, like mere men. Build your monuments, give your praise to the One who prepared the spiritual food we delivered."

In other words, what Paul is saying is, why would you direct your attention to the people who only serve your table? Direct your attention to the chef who created this spiritual food for your nourishment, the Lord God.

It's very easy to place men in such a position that we honor them above God. This doesn't mean that servants for God should not be appreciated, it just means that ultimately even those servants are chosen by God to further His will. Who then should receive the honor and glory? God who provides such servants.

Paul is trying to help these people see that when you put men in such a position it will often lead to division. Why? Because there will always be one man who will be liked over another. How often do we see this in sports? 'Yeah, we love our Dolphins, until they start losing.' So, we find another team, like the Bucs, who we can cheer for, until they start losing.

We're fickle. We flit here and there until we find something in someone we can identify with. What if that someone is teaching truth, but we just don't like their personality? That's what Paul is addressing. He says, 'you're making choices based on fleshly attitudes. You're creating problems that don't need to be created.'

It's tough enough trying to live to the honor and glory of God in a world which is not very forgiving when it comes to trials or temptations or biases. Don't compound your problem by helping the enemy out by devouring yourselves with selfish attitudes, is what Paul is saying.

Now, if Paul calls himself a busboy for the Lord, how should we view ourselves? You see, this should also be a speed bump in the life of every leader in the church as well, who thinks himself to be pretty special because of his position in the church.

But a leader, above all people, should view himself, first and foremost, as a servant. Did not Jesus Himself say, I did not come to be served, but to serve?

Paul wants these people to know that as important as he and Apollos are, with the responsibilities they've been given by God, they are still only servants. Servants through whom these people believed. That's no small task. It's a great privilege to be used by God to bring people to Christ, to introduce people to the Savior through the gospel.

But, it is our Lord who is the One really bringing anyone to Himself as he chooses and moves His servants around to do His will. That's why Paul says that we are "servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task."

Paul says, 'look, the reason I even came to Corinth was because God assigned that task to me, and out of obedience I followed Him and loved you with the truth. So, I thank you for your appreciation of me being obedient to the Lord's call, but give Him the glory. Don't place me on a pedestal, that's not my position to hold.'

In fact, Paul goes on to give us a very interesting insight into how the Lord actually uses men in the kingdom of God to further His work.

1CO 3:6-7 "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."

Paul is using a metaphor here of an agricultural setting. He uses terms like planting, seeds, watering and growing. The imagery is a farmer going out into the field and painstakingly digging up the ground and making sure it's ready to receive the seed and then planting each individual seed. His partner then comes behind him and waters those seeds.

Now, from a farmer's standpoint, his work is done once those seeds are planted and watered continuously. He is now at the mercy of those seeds growing. He can't make them grow. It's beyond him at this point.

Now, whether he believes in God or not, it is ultimately God who gives life to those seeds, since He was the One who originally created the life that goes into those seeds. How do you explain a kernel of seed coming to life, which for all intents and purposes is lifeless in your hand, until you begin to care for it with the proper setting, which is the soil, and the catalyst, which is the water?

It seems like magic after that. I remember when I was in grade school where we would do experiments with seeds of different

types. We would take napkins and wet them and then place seeds on them. It used to amaze me that after wetting those seeds, the next day when I got up you could actually see a little root beginning to protrude from the seed and within the next day a green leaf.

How is that possible? Did I make it grow? Of course not. Did I help in the process? Absolutely. It's a matter of understanding what role we play in seeing a seed grow. But, despite the fact that one plants and the other waters, unless God causes the growth, nothing will grow.

This places life back into the hands of the only One who can give life, and the sustainer of that life. This should take a tremendous burden off of our shoulders when it comes to planting the seed of the gospel and watering that seed with love and truth.

This is why we're not called to save anyone. We're called to be witnesses. If we could save people then we would have the ability to change their hearts with our eloquence and our knowledge of the truth of God's word. But that's simply not the case. Giving life is the prerogative of God alone.

Our job is to bear witness to this life and the One who gives it, Jesus Christ, who says, "I am the way, and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me."

So, when you share the gospel with family or friends, or even strangers, you need to see yourself as a planter or a waterer, not the one who gives life. And so, if they reject it, it's not because you were somehow delinquent in your role as a witness, but because their hearts had not been touched by the One who gives life.

The same is true for a church. There are those who want to put the role of the Pastor and the elders and deacons on the same level as that of the life-giver, when in fact they are just planters and waterer's and reapers.

If God is not causing the growth you can't force growth. I'm amazed that of all the tilling of the soil, and the planting of the seed of the truth of God's word, and the watering with the love of Christ that we've done here in Port Charlotte, that we don't see more growth in new converts to Christ.

And if it were up to us it could be a very discouraging proposition. We could begin putting the blame on people. But as Paul says, "So

neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1CO 3:7)

And so the question might be asked, as I have asked on numerous occasions, "Lord, why aren't you causing the seed which has been planted by us to grow?" Now, don't get me wrong. We've been privileged here to actually see God bring life to the hearts of people as they've embraced Christ as Lord and Savior. But like Peter, we want to see 3,000 added in one day.

Well, maybe not 3,000, but what about 3 per day Lord, or 300 per year? It's not for us to say. The only thing we can know for certain is that we have been called to be servants to plant and to water, and when God causes the growth, to reap the harvest.

'But, Lord, we've been doing that to the best of our ability. Why aren't you bringing the growth?' I sometimes struggle with that and yet the Lord impressed upon my heart that just because we don't see the kind of growth we expect, that doesn't mean that He isn't involved in bringing life.

Those experiments I talked about earlier with the different kinds of seeds were seeds which are designed by God to sprout in a very short time frame. Certain types of beans, for example, have a very thin shell covering the seed, and so when water is applied it breaks it down quickly and the growth begins, sometimes within hours.

But you take a coconut and its outer covering, which is thick and fibrous, you'll find that that seed, which may float in the ocean for days or months, and finally finds land, may still not germinate for months. The process has started, but you don't see the fruit for quite some time.

Sometimes I think we're dealing with coconuts. Hard-shelled, hard-hearted. But God is able to crack through it and He is in the process of doing just that. By the way, bean plants, which sprout quickly, may last only a few weeks. Once the sprout comes from that coconut and plants itself in the soil it can last up to a hundred years.

But you know, the same can be true of believers. Remember, that Paul is addressing the church here in Corinth. When Paul calls himself a planter and Apollos the waterer, he's dealing with believers. And even in the lives of believers we still need that life giving ability to grow in the faith.

What is different between a believer and an unbeliever though is that once life has been given through faith in Christ, the life-giver is always providing the sustenance we need to grow. But, unlike the unbeliever, we can actually contribute to our growth in the power of the Holy Spirit as we submit to Him.

This is why Paul is able to exhort these people to grow, to become mature. They have the ability, in Christ, to be part of this growing process we call sanctification, becoming conformed into the image of Christ.

And yet, even Paul realizes that he can't force these people to grow up, it's still a work of the Holy Spirit, even though at this point, neither Paul, or the Holy Spirit can be blamed for not prompting the believer to move forward in their walk with Christ.

If Paul could simply convince them to do so he would have done so long ago when he was with them for a year and a half. This is where the heart of a believer needs to make his own decisions to grow up.

It doesn't mean we don't teach and encourage and plant and water. It simply means that at some point the individual believer needs to take responsibility for his or her own actions, knowing that they don't have any excuses because the Holy Spirit now resides in their hearts and constantly gives them the grace and power they need.

And so, it's not really an issue that, "I can't". It's more of an issue that, "I won't". That is what grieves Paul. He knows that these believers, who are acting like babes in Christ, have everything they need to be mature in the Lord, they simply will not submit and dedicate their lives to Christ.

They would rather play the game of putting their trust in individuals like Paul and Apollos thinking that choosing one man over another will make them part of a special group. Paul assures them that neither he, or Apollos want that designation. Rather, he directs them back to the One who not only gives life, but is the only One who can cause them to grow in that life.

There is no man in this world who will ever be able to be strong enough for us to designate them as our rock and firm foundation. If we ever think that then we are bound to fall as we find ourselves on sinking sand. There is only one Rock and firm foundation, and it's found in our Creator and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We must continue to plant and to water, not only those in the world who don't know Christ, but we must each take a part in planting and watering each other with the truth and love of God and His word so that we are encouraging each other toward love and good deeds, which is the result of a life which is maturing in Christ.

But may we never think that we can take the place of the Holy Spirit who causes the growth. May we give God the glory for every aspect of our salvation and in gratitude desire to become mature and useful servants in His kingdom to His glory.

May we be like the seed Jesus speaks of in Luke's gospel.

LUK 8:14-15 "The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 ***But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.***"