



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, JULY 26TH 2020

SPEAKER: CRAIG VERNALL

SERIES TITLE: ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 3

When I mention the title Arrested Development, your mind may go to the television sitcom of this name. But thinking further about this will bring to mind people or situations where, for a number of reasons, their progress was halted. I learned French at school for 2 years. Then stopped. The arrested development of my French language skills means that I can barely get beyond a bonjour and where do I find the cafe au lait and baguettes!

Q1. Can you name any areas of arrested development in your life? This could be amusing!

SADLY, THIS WASN'T AMUSING FOR PAUL WHEN HE CONFRONTED THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH ABOUT THEIR SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4.

"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 quarrelling 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?"

We understand the difference between milk and solid food. Babies transition from one to the other as they mature. In fact, it's unhealthy for the child to feed upon milk for too long. Paul points out that it's jealousy that leads to quarrelling about one leader over another. Paul calls this spiritual jealousy "worldliness".

Q2. Can you see how spiritual jealousy can happen within the wider church? Can you identify when this is happening within yourself?

LET'S SEE HOW PAUL ATTEMPTS TO CORRECT THIS QUARRELLING. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-9.

"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."

What I like about Paul's approach to this immaturity problem is that he takes a step back and as described above he reminds everyone of the bigger picture. Essentially right-sizing Apollos, Cephas and Paul, (himself). Therefore, with humility Paul models and then illustrates the role the "servants" of God play.

Q3. Do you find the "seed, water, grow" illustration helpful? When have you seen yourself taking on some of these responsibilities? I find it reassuring that I'm only part of the process of someone's salvation. Do you?

In verses 10-11 Paul describes his own work of introducing people to Jesus Christ crucified as laying down a sure foundation.

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

On Sunday I explained how the Apostles Creed has been used since the 4th century to define the foundation of what Christian Faith is built upon.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,*

*the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

(*meaning the universal Christian church—all believers in Jesus Christ)

Q4. Do you find it reassuring and helpful to find that our faith in Christ has such a solid and consistent tradition of belief?

Having reassured the Corinthians that his foundation for belief in Christ is solid, Paul now challenges the other Corinthian teachers to build on this foundation with the appropriate teachings or they will not last. I just love how Paul uses such a well-known and yet graphic illustration.

*¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. **1 Corinthians 3:12-15***

It's interesting to note that Paul doesn't identify what would be taught that would ultimately go up in smoke. This leaves his illustration with an open-ended discussion point.

Q5. What do you think Paul could be referring to that gets burned up in the flames?

Q6. Do you notice in verse 15 that despite someone's failure to build accurately they are still saved by grace not by their works? Discuss what this can mean for you.

(It's interesting to note that this passage above is the sole scripture that Roman Catholics use to defend their doctrine of Purgatory. But that discussion should be for another day)

Paul is a master builder of the Church. But sadly, there were those who through their immaturity will either intentionally or unintentionally destroy the Church. Paul says that God's judgment is upon those who will seek to destroy His work.

*¹⁶ "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." **1 Corinthians 3:16-17.***

Q7. In what ways do we risk destroying the church? Do you think each of us personally have the capacity to do this?

Finally, Paul rounds out this rather lengthy rebuke to those who are dividing the church. But he does this in a very pastoral way by reminding the readers that God won't be fooled. But notice how his final words affirm that these teachers that people are using to divide are actually all a gift from God. What a wonderfully gracious spirit Paul displays. Clearly Paul is willing to share this responsibility of building the Church with others.

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. **1 Corinthians 3:18-23**

Q8. Within the same spirit, what do you think we can do to affirm the body of Christ (The Church) within our city or nation?