

**SERMON NOTES**  
**I Corinthians 3:1-23**  
***“Spiritual Adulthood”***

Intro:

- The American Dialect Society nominated the verb “to adult” as the most creative construction of the year a few years ago as more young adults are beginning to refer to adult responsibilities as part of “adulthood.”

SHOW PICTURE OF DOG

- *While previous generations acknowledged that these responsibilities were just part of life, young adults today refer to adulthood as if it were optional and that completing adult-like tasks should warrant an award.*
- The reality is, for many young adults, adulthood can be a scary transition.
- According to Time Magazine, *“this generation of young adults go through life stages much later in life than other generations, like dating, starting families, owning homes. Maybe they won’t own homes at all.”*

SHOW PICTURE OF MAN

- *One reason that young adults are taking longer to reach these milestones is the level of anxiety they experience around doing new things, especially things they perceive as hard or beyond their abilities.*
- The following tasks may be too overwhelming or seem out-of-reach for some young adults:
  - *Attending postsecondary education*
  - Finding a job
  - *Forming intimate relationships with others outside the family*
  - Working with others
  - *Moving out of their parent’s house*
  - Cooking and cleaning
  - *Paying bills*

SHOW PICTURE OF DUCKLING

- Many young adults want to hold onto aspects of adolescence while maintaining some degree of independence.
- *To say they are “adulting” is to create distance between them and what are implied to be actual adults who are adulting 100% of the time and therefore have little reason to acknowledge it.*

## SHOW PETER PAN QUOTE

- It also implies some disbelief that they may ever be fully considered an adult. Some argue that adulthood is a state of mind rather than a stage of life.
- *Some Christians also have fears or reservations about growing up spiritually*

## STOP SHOWING PICTURE

- *Spiritual adulting is hard too*
- There are commitments and responsibilities with spiritual adulting and disciple-making that seem intimidating or undesirable for some Christians
- *But God provides everything we need to grow up spiritually to become mature disciples and disciple-makers*

I Corinthians 3:21-23 For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

- *Let’s take a look at some characteristics of a spiritual adult:*

### I. SPIRIT-FILLED

I Corinthians 3:1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

- At the end of chapter 2 and beginning of chapter 3, Paul mentions three kinds of people: *natural / spiritual / and fleshly or carnal*
- These circles used by CRU explain the difference:

## SHOW PICTURE OF 3 CIRCLES

- The natural man on the left is the person without the Spirit – the person who has not received Jesus Christ
- *The spiritual man in the center is the Spirit-filled Christian with Jesus Christ reigning as Lord on the throne of his heart and life*
- The carnal or fleshly man on the right is an immature Christian living a self-directed life rather than a Christ-centered life

## SHOW PICTURE OF SELF-DIRECTED LIFE

- Though all Christians have received and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, not all Christians are filled, controlled, directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit --that is why Paul writes in I Cor. 3: *'Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly- mere infants in Christ. --though the Corinthian believers had received the Holy Spirit and were exercising many spiritual gifts, Paul could not call them spiritual people because they were not Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled --rather, they were being controlled by the flesh / by their own sinful desires*
- When a Christian is being controlled by the flesh or sinful desires – what Paul calls a carnal or worldly or immature Christian – *that Christian's life and attitudes will be characterized by impure thoughts / guilt / worry / discouragement / anger / critical spirit / frustration / spiritual apathy / disobedience / poor prayer life / no desire for Bible study / no enthusiasm for worship / resentment and bitterness / love of money / selfishness / pride --and many other characteristics that produce strife and quarreling and power struggles in relationships*

## SHOW PICTURE OF CHRIST-DIRECTED LIFE

- When a Christian is being controlled by the Holy Spirit, that Christian's life and attitudes will increasingly be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control -- *that Christian will be motivated and empowered to study and understand God's Word, to have an effective prayer life, to trust and obey God, to serve and witness for Christ*

## SHOW PICTURE OF 3 CIRCLES

- How, then, can a carnal or worldly Christian become a spiritual Christian?
- *One becomes a spiritual Christian by yielding control of the will and of the throne of the heart to the Holy Spirit and then relying on the Spirit's power to live as a fully devoted follower of Jesus --the Spirit-filled life is the Christ-centered life by which Jesus Christ lives His life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit*
- You can experience the filling of the Holy Spirit by taking these steps:
- *(1) Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit so that you can serve and glorify Christ as His fully devoted follower (2) Confess your sins and repent of all disobedience. Claim by faith the power of the blood of Jesus Christ to purify you of all your sins and to consecrate you for God's use (3) Present every area of your life to God and submit control of your intellect, emotions, will and body to the Lord Jesus Christ (4) Pray and invite the Holy Spirit to fill and control all areas of your life:*
- *Heavenly Father: I ask you to fill and control all of these cleansed areas of my life with your Holy Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

## II. DIGESTS THE MEAT OF THE WORD

I Corinthians 3:1-3 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh.

- The Corinthian believers thought of themselves as spiritual giants by virtue of their spiritual gifts and knowledge - *but in reality Paul calls them babes in Christ capable of understanding only the most elementary truths of the Gospel and not yet ready to digest the solid food of God's Word –*
- Just as you cannot become a spiritual adult apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit - so also you cannot become spiritually mature apart from the Word of God –
- Patterning your thinking after the mind of Christ is essential to spiritual maturity - and that requires filling your mind with the Word of Christ –

- *Spiritual immaturity is rooted and grounded in what has been called "thinking errors" or "stinking thinking" --we cannot rely on our natural way of thinking nor on the world's way of thinking --natural thinking and worldly thinking will keep you spiritually immature*
- There must be active interaction with biblical truth - not merely the accumulation of facts and knowledge - but the constant process of submitting our thoughts and opinions and convictions to the truths of God's Word –
- *And then there must be an active monitoring of our own thought life – discerning which thoughts are godly and truthful and edifying and which are not – rejecting all thoughts that are false or impure or bitter or contrary to the mind of Christ - and replacing those ungodly thoughts with what is true, right, pure, admirable and in accord with the mind of Christ –*
- *And then, finally, there must be an obedient putting into practice of the truths we are learning from God's Word --for it is not by hearing the Word only that we are made mature – but rather by doing the will of God*

### III. WORKS COOPERATIVELY WITH OTHERS

I Corinthians 3:3-5 For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

- Immature people are often insecure people who feel the need to promote themselves and their interests and abilities and agenda in order to feel significant and worthwhile --*that is the stuff of which conflicts are made -- power struggles do not occur among people who regard themselves as servants --power struggles occur among people who want to be in charge / who want to call the shots / who want attention and recognition / who want their own way - or who see their way as the right way or best way / who may or may not want all the responsibilities that go with being the leader - but in any case want more influence in moving the group in their direction*
- *It is possible to have a sincere desire to serve God - and yet be doing so in such a way as to cause disunity in a church*

- *The first priority for a servant is to allow God to mold you and shape you and your character into the instrument of His choosing*
- Then you must allow God to give you the assignment of His choosing to serve the purpose of His choosing --this assignment may be large or small – *if small, a servant's ego will not be insulted / if large, a servant will not be intimidated or paralyzed by feelings of inadequacy*
- Large or small - the servant will obey --*and then the servant will seek to fulfill the assignment only in God's power -- letting God accomplish His work through our faithful obedience --and finally, the servant will leave the results up to God - striving for excellence but trusting God to produce the fruit and cause the growth in His time*
- Most of all, the servant understands that our service is not about us - *it is not even about our gifts or abilities or ministry – rather it is all about God and His glory and His purposes for the church*

I Corinthians 3:6-9 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

- If a church looks to a dynamic leader or speaker for its success and growth – *what happens when that leader leaves or retires or dies?*
- But if a church body looks to God for its growth – with each member using their spiritual gifts to fulfill their role in building up the body – *then that church will be able to thrive and be fruitful for years to come even if the lead pastor is not an extraordinary talent – and even if the lead pastor does retire*
- It was NOT Paul's intent to build a megachurch in Corinth or any other city based on his unique gifting as their lead pastor
- *Rather it was Paul's mission to start churches in key cities throughout the Roman Empire that he would plant and build a solid foundation – and then turn the leadership over to elders and pastors-teachers who would build up a church that would become a base of operations for reaching that*

region with the Gospel through evangelism and disciple-making and church-planting

- Paul did the planting – Apollos and Timothy and others did the watering – and God gave the growth
- Paul laid the foundation – others built up the church body as the living stones of God’s Temple – and *each member was given gifts by the Holy Spirit to do their part in building up the body*
- We plant / we water / we lay the foundation / we build on the foundation / *we do our work to the best of our ability with the gifts and power of the Spirit*
- And God gives the growth
  
- Paul and Apollos were not rivals – they were co-workers / partners / teammates / fellow servants serving the same Lord
- Paul planted / Apollos watered – but God gave the growth
- *He who plants and he who waters are one*
- Planting is harder work than watering – but Paul did not puff himself up over Apollos
- *Both planting and watering are necessary for a harvest – but neither is sufficient for a harvest – ask any farmer*
- God is the One who gets the credit for the harvest because God is the One who gives the growth – beyond any work done by a farmer – or by a church leader
  
- Beth and I have been planting a lot of flowers and some tomato plants recently
- *I do most the planting and Beth does most of the watering – but God gives the growth*
- And the growth can be amazing at times – far more than can be accounted for by my efforts or Beth’s
- *Same with the corn plants this time of year – when they seem to grow a foot or more a week*
- God gives the growth
  
- To be a spiritual adult is to value your own work and to value the work of others while working together cooperatively and harmoniously, and then acknowledging that God is the one who gives growth and success and fruit

- *Spiritual adults assume responsibility for doing their part rather than letting others do all the work*
- *And spiritual adults appreciate the differences in how others with different gifts do their work differently*
- *And spiritual adults get along with others and work well with others and resolve conflicts maturely when differences arise*
- *Spiritual adults accept the individual differences among different believers of the church body that arise due to different spiritual gifts*
- *Spiritual adults work cooperatively and harmoniously with other believers with different gifts for the common good and edification of the church*

#### IV. CAREFULLY BUILDS UP THE CHURCH

I Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

- None of us started this church
- *Cornerstone DeWitt was planted by Cornerstone Eldridge which used to be Ridgeview which was planted by Grandview which was started by a church in IL I think*
- Only a few of our members were part of the move from Ridgeview to Eldridge in 1976
- Many of you were NOT part of the building of the sanctuary here (1986?)
- *Many of you were not part of the building of the ROCK Center (2002-04)*
- When most of you started attending Cornerstone, we already had many ministries in place for children and youth and Sunday School and discipleship and fellowship and missions in addition to worship
- We are all building on the foundations of others
- My ministry was built upon the foundation of Bryan Johnson's ministry who was Cornerstone's pastor for 15 years before I came
- The next lead pastor will exercise use his gifts to build upon the foundation that we have laid together
- A few of you here are involved in a ministry that you personally started – *but for most of you – whatever ministry you are involved in – someone else laid the foundation for that ministry – and you are building on their foundation*



- So what does it mean to take care how we build upon a foundation laid by others?
- *Does that mean we can never make any changes to what was done before?*
- Does that mean that all future ministry leaders must do things exactly as those who laid the foundation for that ministry?
- NO
- There are two ways we can build correctly on another's foundation:
- First, by keeping Jesus Christ central in all that we teach and do

I Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- The Foundation beneath all other foundations laid by Christian leaders and workers is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ – who is also the cornerstone of the edifice

Ephesians 2:20 Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

- How does a church body remain stable and united in the midst of so many changes – such as we faced in 2020 and will again face in 2021 and 2022?
- By remaining steadfast in preaching and teaching biblical truth
- This is easy to overlook and take for granted – unless you have ever been part of a church where the truth of the Gospel was not preached faithfully
- *It is easy to underestimate the value of a church consistently building on the rock-solid foundation of the truth of Jesus Christ*
- That is a consistent strength in all areas of ministry at Cornerstone that is lacking in many other churches
- This is a church where you can learn the Bible
- *This is a church where your children and teens can learn the Bible – and develop Bible-reading habits on their own*
- There is no excuse for remaining a milk-fed baby Christian in this church
- And I am confident that the next lead pastor will build upon this foundation and will faithfully teach and preach the meat of the Word of God

- And the second way to build correctly on another's foundation:
- *Use building materials that are approved by God*

I Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

- *What kind of building materials are you using in your service for Christ and the church?*
- What kind of workmanship characterizes your service for Christ and the church?
- Did you know that the work you do for Christ and the church will be judged and tested as by fire?
- *Some of the work you have done will be shown to be inferior – wood, hay, straw – and will be burned up – no heavenly reward for your efforts*
- Hopefully much of your work will be shown to have used worthy building materials – gold, silver and precious stones that will survive the test of fire
- *Such work will be rewarded on the Day of Judgment*
- This judgment is not regarding our salvation – rather, it is a judgment of our works
- We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone
- *Even immature carnal Christians are saved even if their works are burned up and they lose their rewards*
- But those who build carefully and skillfully with excellent building materials to build up the church body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit – *they will receive a reward*
- So what distinguishes Christian work that gets rewarded from work that gets burned up?
- *Work that we do that uses our spiritual gifts and is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit will be approved by God and found worthy of being rewarded*
- Work that is done for the pleasure and glory of God and not for the praise of men will be rewarded
- *Work that flows from abiding in Christ will be fruitful and rewarded*

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Many of Jesus' parables and other NT teachings also offer the promise of rewards in heaven for those who live for the line of God's eternal Kingdom rather than for fleeting earthly rewards that will soon pass away

Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Matthew 25:21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

- One of the marks of a mature adult is to understand and practice delayed gratification
- *Immature people forfeit future rewards for the sake of immediate pleasure*
- Mature adults postpone immediate pleasures for the sake of future rewards
- *Same is true in the spiritual realm – living for the line rather than the dot*

## V. HONORS THE CHURCH AS HOLY

I Corinthians 3:16-17 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

- It's not about you or me- or our feelings or needs or egos or opinions
- It's about God and His purposes for His church

- Americans tend to be very independent and individualistic - *and we tend to evaluate everything on the basis of what's in it for me and how does it affect me --church included –*
- And many Christians could tell stories about how this or that church hurt them or disappointed them or let them down or failed to meet their needs --*but how many would be as quick to explain how they have hurt the church or weakened the church or hindered the church from fulfilling God's purposes?*
- You are God's Temple – and God's Spirit dwells in you
- Many people interpret this individualistically in the sense that each individual Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit –
- *That is true and that is what Paul teaches in I Cor. 6:19 - but it's not what he's saying here –*
- The “you” here in chapter 3 is plural
- What Paul is saying here is that God's church is God's temple - not the church building but the church people –
- *The temple in the OT was that special place of God's holy presence --it was sacred and was to be honored as such –*
- No Jew would ever think of scrawling graffiti on God's temple or in any way desecrating it –
- *In the NT God's dwelling place is no longer a building made by human hands*
- Together as one body, we are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in our church body
- And God's Temple – that is, the church – is holy – and is to be treated as such
- *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.*
- *Strong words*
- There are people who would never dream of scrawling graffiti on a church building or temple - *and yet by their words or actions or unfaithfulness or criticisms or grumbling or false accusations or grudges or orneriness and contentiousness or divisiveness have desecrated God's temple, the church –*
- If you have ever damaged God's temple - *this church or any other / stirred up strife and discord in the church / failed to support the church and its vision and leaders / quit the church / publicly criticized the church / have somehow hindered the church from fulfilling God's purposes –*

- You need to repent of that sin against God's holy temple – the church
- Some spiritually immature people like to talk about pursuing a personal *relationship with Jesus Christ that has nothing to do with any local church --that's a dangerous half-truth / half-lie –*
- It is true that belonging to a church is no substitute for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – *but it is equally true that a personal relationship with Jesus is no substitute for participating in a local church*
- The church is central to God's kingdom purposes - and any Christian who is not partnering with God in His purpose of building and growing healthy, fruitful churches is missing out on a significant part of their life purpose as a Christian
- God regards the church as sacred, holy, valuable, purchased with the blood of His Son, set apart for God's holy use and glory –
- If your attitude toward the church does not line up with God's – *then now is a good time for you to change your worldly thinking to bring your thoughts into alignment with God's truth*

## VI. DISCERNS TRUE WISDOM

I Corinthians 3:18-20 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

- Once again Paul contrasts the wisdom of this world with the wisdom that comes from God
- *One of the important characteristics of spiritual adults is that they are able to discern true wisdom from false wisdom*
- And just as there was an abundance of false wisdom in 1<sup>st</sup>-century Greek society – so also there is an abundance of false wisdom in our society
- *And perhaps the most egregious example of false and harmful worldly wisdom in our society today is gender ideology*
- Gender dysphoria is real and rare and such individuals are to be cared for with compassion and kindness and understanding
- *But that does not require an entire society disconnecting the concept of gender from biological reality and teaching young children about gender*

*fluidity and gender transitioning, and requiring everyone to choose a preferred pronoun from among dozens of newly-invented choices*

- And it certainly does NOT require encouraging thousands of children to block natural puberty processes and then affirm and applaud teenagers who have their perfectly healthy male or female body parts surgically removed – leaving them permanently disfigured and sterile
- *No one of any political persuasion would have thought all of that was a good idea 20 years ago*
- The wisdom of the world today is radically different from the wisdom of the world just 20 years ago
- *The wisdom of the world today would have been regarded as insane and ludicrous 20 years ago by nearly everyone in society of any or no faith*
- In most societies – including Corinth and Western society today – the wisdom of the world has always included some ideas contrary to biblical truth and biblical moral standards and spiritual reality
- *But the wisdom of the world today regarding gender ideology is not only contrary to biblical truth and spiritual reality – it is contrary to physical reality and biological reality*
- *If the wisdom of the world remains connected to physical reality – that provides some boundaries as to how far a society can stray from truth – because even unbelievers can recognize and object to ideas that are obviously contrary to reality*
- *But when the commonly accepted and propagated and mandated wisdom of the world is unmoored from physical reality as well as biblical truth – then the errors that can result are almost limitless*
- *Let us pray that the generation growing up today under the influence of this false ideology – while having compassion for friends suffering from gender dysphoria – will also be able to recognize this ideology for the folly that it is – and will return to this basic truth that aligns both with biblical teaching and physical reality: He who created them from the beginning made them male and female*
- How about you?
- *How are you doing in your journey of spiritual adulthood?*
- First of all – however old or young you are – are you committed to becoming a spiritual adult – with all the responsibilities that entails?
- *And then are you growing in the characteristics of a spiritual adult?*

- Are you living and serving in the power of the Holy Spirit?
- *Are you growing in your ability to digest the meat of God's Word?*
  
- Are you working cooperatively and harmoniously with others to build up our church body – taking care to remain faithful to the truth that is in Jesus as the foundation of our faith – and taking care to use building materials that will withstand testing by fire?
- *Does your opinion of the church align with God's – that God's temple is holy – and we as a church body are that temple?*
- And are you committed to following the wisdom of God and His Word rather than the ever-changing wisdom of this world?

Prayer