

# Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Epistle, Year A

GROWN UP CHRISTIANS

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Steven E. Albertin

1And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

5What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building

DIAGNOSIS: Grow Up!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Acting Like Babies  
The Corinthian congregation is acting like a bunch of babies. Divided into various factions, jealous and quarreling, they look like many human groups and associations. "I belong to Paul . . . or to Apollos!" is more important than the life and health of the group, the Corinthian congregation. Stuck in their childish

and selfish ways, like children fighting over a toy, it is all about getting their own way at the expense of someone else. Paul laments that they have not gotten past sipping their milk when he wanted to give them solid food. Will they ever grow up to act like adults, like the brothers and sisters they are?

It is sad to say that far too many congregations are similarly divided. Instead of the one body of Christ, it is more important to be aligned with one party or another: The New Guard vs. The Old Guard, traditional vs. contemporary or loyalists of the previous pastor vs. fans of the new pastor, Paul vs. Apollos!

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Belonging to the Flesh

The infantile and divisive behavior reflects a deeper problem than just bad behavior. They are captive to their “flesh,” to their sinful drive to be in charge of their own lives and get their own way because they are afraid that they are nobody. They shout out the names of their favorite leaders but it is all a cover for their own insecurity and desire to call their own shots. It is all about power, theirs and not God’s. They are no different than children stomping their feet and having a tantrum. No wonder Paul hardly regards them as “spiritual people.” The milk has gone sour. They need to move on to some good solid food. But they cannot . . . and will not.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): No Growth

If you never eat more than baby food, you will never get the solid food that you need to grow up. Stunted and stuck in their infancy, the Corinthians are doomed. Their community will continue to fracture and eventually die. Trapped by their flesh, afraid and convinced that it is “my way or the highway,” they will not grow. They will wither and die. If Paul is having a hard time dealing with them, we can just imagine what God would do. It is not pretty . . . for them . . . or for us who are just

as childish and stubborn.

PROGNOSIS: Grown Ups!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God Gives the Growth

If they are ever going to grow up and escape the grip of their sinful flesh, God is going to have to intervene. It will not be Paul or Apollos or any other charismatic leader. Instead, this is exactly what God does in Christ. To be sure, Paul and Apollos had their roles to play. Paul “planted, Apollos watered but God gave the growth.” Because God still loved these unlikable babies, Christ suffered the fate that they, the Corinthians and we, deserve. When Christ is raised, God confirms what Christ has done and offers to all of us selfish and whining babies a new and undeserved beginning.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Belonging to God  
We now belong not to Paul or Apollos but to God. Paul and Apollos were only servants and bearers of the message. It was never about them. It was always about God and God’s love for us. Believing that promise, we are free from our fears and anxieties. Confident of who and whose we are, we are ready to move beyond baby food. No longer sipping on milk or getting sick on sour milk, we get to eat solid food. We get steak and potatoes. We get to feast on Christ and his Spirit in Word and Sacrament. We know to whom we belong.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Acting Like Grown Ups

No longer feeling the need to stomp our feet and get our way, we can start acting like grown ups. Recognizing that we are brothers and sisters, we no longer need to resort to jealousy and quarreling. Partisan division is unnecessary. United by a common purpose, we are all servants, respecting everyone’s

individual gifts. Some excel at planting and others at watering, but it is all God's doing. And aren't we glad that it is! In our hands alone, it would all surely come crashing to an end.