

## Need a Change?

I Corinthians 3: 1-9

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. 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. 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.

A baby needs a change. Don't worry, moms; I'm not suggesting I've noticed one of your little ones needs immediate attention. I'm just making a general statement, something we all know to be true. A baby needs a change. Now and then, actually pretty regularly, every baby needs a change. We've all been there; we've all done that. And many of us have been on the other end, doing the changing. A baby can't change himself. Oh, they grow out of it. But in the meantime, if babies *are* going to grow up and be healthy, they need a change.

In our text for this Sunday, St. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they're babies, still spiritual babies. And if they're babies, you know what that means: babies need a change. If they're going to grow up spiritually, they need a change.

Fortunately, St. Paul also tells the Corinthians—and us—that God gives us the change we need to grow. You know how babies are; they need a lot of changes. And this, our text, won't be the first time we've been changed. Already, for many of us years ago, we've been changed! The fact is, every Christian has already been changed. Every human being is conceived and born in sin—an adorable little baby who nevertheless inside is a spitting, spitting hater, enemy of God.

But when a soul becomes a believer in Christ Jesus, a new person is created inside who loves God, and trusts God above all things. That's every Christian. That was St.

Paul and the Christians in Corinth.

There had been a great change in Saul: from his former way of life, from pursuer and persecutor of the Way to proclaimer and planter of the way, the truth, and the life.

There had been a change in the Corinthians. They had heard and believed the Gospel that changes people, so that Paul can now address them as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." This change had happened largely through the ministry of two men, Paul and Apollos. Each had preached the Gospel that changes people so miraculously.

So how are we like the people of Corinth? We are changed already by the Good News! We've been brought to faith in Christ—many of us by Baptism as babies. Before we even remember, the Holy Spirit created that new, believing person in us. Already back when we were needing many changes a day, we were changed!

In certain areas of my life, I'm not a big fan of change. A simple example: when the furniture is arranged in our home, its place is then settled. It doesn't need to be moved twice a year or every five years or ever! But we're still babies who need a change. Change was still needed in the congregation at Corinth.

Change was needed so there could be growth: from mother's milk to solid food, from people of the flesh to people of the Spirit. There were still those sinful rivalries in the church—factions for Paul or Apollos, members against one another, though Paul and Apollos themselves weren't divided at all.

So how are we like the people of Corinth? We are changed already by the Good News, and we still need to be changed! Are we jealous? Do we have rivalries? That's behaving in the way of the flesh, not a spiritual way. These sins that separate us from God and one another—even in the church—are evidence that we're still babies!

We, too, are people of the flesh who need to hear that someone became flesh for all people. It was the Son of God who made the change we need. Christ, the unchanging God, became flesh for all jealousy, for all strife, for all who are behaving only in a babyish, human way. And since "each will receive his wages according to his labor" (v 8b), we rejoice in what the Lord Jesus has done: For the wage of his labor on the cross is full and free

forgiveness. And the wage of his labor in (and out of) the grave is life new and never-ending.

These wages, these gifts, of Jesus' cross and his open tomb are delivered to us in the simple water and strong Word of Holy Baptism and the Supper of our Lord's true body and blood. This is the food we babies need to grow. And God gives us this food, even as we're still babies. This is how God changes us. Only God can give this change!

And when God changes us, we grow. Let's say he gets us ready for kindergarten. That's the place where bigger babies, *kinder*, children, are planted, watered, grow.

There is growth beyond divisions when Paul and Apollos are seen correctly—not as something in themselves, but as the Lord's servants.

There is growth after watering and planting. Servants do this work (yes, the servant called to be your pastor), and these servants wait with patience. And, just as God gives growth in his creation, so he is the source of growth in his new creation, the Church. God is always about change. God is always about growth.

In many parts of the country, it's not even close to planting time (except for the winter wheat drilled last fall). Fields and gardens have not been plowed or tilled to receive seeds. But even though it's February, it is planting and watering time. The Epiphany season—a time to consider and commit to Christ's mission for his Church—is always a time for God to give growth. And the Church faithfully sows the seed of Christ's Gospel and faithfully waters what is planted, that the harvest will be greater and greater.

For this truth must be affirmed and celebrated: It is “only God who gives the growth.”

Yes, God makes the change. Amen.

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