

“God was Causing the Growth”

Prepared by Patrick J. Griffiths © - pastorpat@waukeshabile.org
April 10, 2005

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.” (1 Cor 3:6)

Read 1 Cor 3:5-9

In the previous paragraph (3:1-4) Paul highlights how the Corinthian believers were becoming divisive, disgruntled, and disagreeable. They were becoming cliquish by rallying around “mere men” (v. 4). This cliquishness was (and still is) of the flesh. It is rooted in our old nature.

Paul peels back the layers and exposes the true nature of Christian ministry. His first two questions, “What then is Apollos? What is Paul?” are rhetorical in nature. The answer is obvious; they are mere men, servants of God, and tools in the master artisan’s hands. God used Apollos and Paul for His redemptive purposes in bringing the Corinthians to faith in Christ. Yet each played their role. It was according to what “The Lord assigned to each (v.5).” This same truth is brought out in Romans 12:3 and 6 and First Peter 4:11. Each of us plays a role in the purposes of God. We are only tools, but tools nonetheless. Ministers are tools through which God does some planting and through which He does some watering. And in His time He brings forth the growth resulting in the harvest. It is for this reason Matthew 9:38 identify Him as the Lord of the harvest and we are sent into His harvest. The contrasting connector in verse 6 is emphatic. God uses some to plant and some to water, but He is the one who gives growth. As much as He might use others in wonderful ways, only He can cause increase.

Paul’s point could not be more dramatic in verse 7. The Corinthian church was becoming divided over tools, things that are nothing. “Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything.” The only one who is anything in all of this is the one who gives the growth. Only God matters.

This is the same point made in 1:27-28 “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, **the things that are not**, so that He may nullify the things that are.”

As powerful and persuasive as Apollos (Acts 18:24) and Paul were, they were still cut out of the same cloth of nothingness to accomplish the purposes of God in order that He receive all of the glory.

Paul goes even further to show how in the midst of the diversity of gifts there is to be no division, only unity. Both, thought different, are one. And each of the servants will receive the wage that is appropriate “As the Lord assigned to each.” Verse 8 is not a threat, but a promise. Paul notes how both Apollos and he are God’s workers. Together they are fulfilling the divine blueprint for redemptive history. They are the tools being used by God

Continued on the other side...

to plant and water God's field. They are the tools being used by God to build God's building.

We cannot afford to miss this point. The servants of God who occupy certain positions by divine appointment are His tools for working God's field and building. The Corinthian church is the field and building. They are the recipients of the action.

The Corinthians had lost sight of God. By focusing on personalities and ministries, they lost sight of the one who causes the growth. The application here is too pointed to miss. How often is our service generated in order to please people instead of God? Who are we as servants of the Lord? We are nothing. Why would a fellowship split over nothing? In the midst of planting and watering, let us not lose sight of Him who alone causes the growth.