

## *“But God Was Causing the Growth”*

*1 Cor 3:5-9*

### *Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly*

Although the apostle Paul deals with a specific issue within the Corinthian fellowship, the underlying problem is widespread. We live in a day and age when convenience and self-gratification reigns supreme.

Let us not deceive ourselves into believing that we are untouched by this devilish push for self-gratification and convenience. It is what lies at the root of our old nature. It calls us at every turn and at every minute of every day. Every decision we make is a wrestling match with our self.

Paul shows the essential folly of polarizing around individuals with its glorification of self. How do we win against this relentless foe? The paragraph before us puts all of our activity into perspective.

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.

Our paragraph has three primary thoughts.

#### I. God determines who serves and how they serve (vv. 5, 9)

The word choice in verse 5 is intriguing. He identifies those under God as “servants.” The word means, “attendant or waiter.” It refers to one who runs errands. Think about what Paul is saying. Do we build movements and monuments to waiters or busboys?

It is appropriate to give honor to whom honor is due, but we are never comparing and competing against each other.

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.

#### II. God determines the size of the harvest (vv. 6, 7)

The contrasting connector in verse 6 is emphatic. God uses some to plant and some to

*Continued on the other side...*

water, but He is the one who gives growth. As much as He might use others in wonderful ways, only He can cause increase. God determines to use the unassuming to perform the unimaginable.

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.

The issue is not what do we have, but rather are we willing to give what we have and are to God? If we give God what is already His, we will be shocked by the expansive way in which the singular gift is used.

### III. God determines the appropriate reward for each of His servants (vv. 8, 9)

Paul goes even further to show how in the midst of the diversity of gifts there is to be no division, only unity. Both, though different, are one.

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. And God shall reward His workers for their labor.

We are to take great comfort knowing that God will reward His people and His system of justice will be based on who He is and not on what we have done.

“The cure for division is turning away from self and setting our eyes on the one God whom we all glorify. When our attention is focused on our Lord, as it always should be, there will be no time and no occasion for division.”