

Series: 1 Corinthians
Title: Ye Are God's Husbandry
Text: 1 Corinthians 3: 4-6
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1 Corinthians 3: 3: For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 4: For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

This problem at Corinth was idolatry. They were putting an object between the believer and Christ. And that object was the preacher.

Now, there were more than two divisions. But Paul confines it between himself and Apollos. The reason is because the thing that started this division was their preaching styles. Paul was not eloquent in his speech. Apollos was from the school of the Greeks and was more eloquent. (Acts 18: 24, 27-28) Yet, Paul asks:

1 Corinthians 3: 5: Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 6: I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7: So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 8: Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9: For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry,...

Proposition: The church is God's vineyard and his people are his husbandry, and therefore God our Savior is to have the preeminence in all things and his people are to be one in Christ.

GOD USES LABORERS

First, God does use laborers in his vineyard—"Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" (1 Cor 3: 5)

A preacher is only a minister. Paul says, "Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers..." A minister is a servant—an instrument in the hands of our great Master, Christ Jesus. A "minister"—is one who executes the commands of another—preaches his word. (1 Cor 4: 1) It is through his ministers that God gives faith to believe on Christ—"ministers by whom ye believed,..." (1 Cor 3: 5)

But some at Corinth saw this division over preachers and went to the extreme. Back in chapter 1, we read,

1 Corinthians 1: 12: Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

This last group said, "We are of Christ." This particular clique claimed, "Christ saved us, not the preacher." And that is true. Christ alone gives life and faith in him. But their answer to this division was to throw out all preachers. Their thinking was "We'll give more glory to Christ if we don't support any preachers."

Brethren, the devil would love for all men to take up this position. The devil would love to see there be no gospel of Christ preached anywhere anytime. But this is the extreme to which this division leads. It still exists in our day. And it is still wrong! The next step in this error is to say it is not necessary for a sinner to even believe so long as he is the elect of God. No! That is wrong, too! Paul says, "We are only ministers. But we are ministers by whom God gave you faith to believe."

You see, it is God's wisdom to give life and faith using preachers who are but ministers of his word.

1 Corinthians 1: 21: For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Romans 10: 13: For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14: How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15: And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Ro 10:13-15)

So God *does* give preachers to his people and through the gospel God gives faith to his people, as the apostle Paul says by the Spirit of God, "Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" So first, God does use laborers in his vineyard. But they are but ministers given by God through whom God gives life and faith in Christ.

GOD GIVES THE INCREASE

Secondly, though God uses ministers, it is God alone who gives the increase—"I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (1 Cor 3: 6-7))

Now, we saw, God's preachers are "but ministers." God's preachers are but instruments in God's hand to minister. But they are used to minister. Paul says, "I planted." Paul was a minister in God's hand to administer the seed of the gospel. He says, "Apollos watered." Apollos was a minister in God's hand to administer water of the gospel.

When I had a garden, I used various instruments to minister; they were instruments in my hand; instruments I used to administer something. When scattering, broadcasting seed, I used an instrument which administered seed. I turned the handle and a little wheel moved and scattered the seed on the ground. That instrument was in my hand to administer seed. Paul said, "I have planted." Paul was a minister in Christ's hand to scatter the seed of the gospel at Corinth. When I was watering my garden, I used another instrument which administered water: either a water hose with a nozzle attachment or a bucket to administer water. He said, "Apollos watered." Apollos was a minister in Christ's hand to administer the water of the gospel. That is how it is in God's garden. God's preachers are "ministers." We are instruments in God's hand to administer—seed and water—the gospel of Christ and him crucified—"We have sown unto you spiritual things." (1 Cor 9: 11)

Now, let's look at this seed and water for a moment. Paul declared that this seed and this water they preached was Christ crucified.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

Christ's preachers are saved by this same gospel by this same Christ. So Paul and Apollos preached the same gospel, "according to the scriptures"

- We preach the Scripture promises. (Gen 3:15)
- The Scripture types—the coats of skins in the garden pictured Christ slain to cover the nakedness of his people in his righteousness; the blood of Abel's lamb—we cannot come with our works we must come with Christ the Lamb of God; Noah's Ark—Christ bore the justice of God in place of his people.

- The Scripture prophecies (Dan 9: 24)
- Paul preached the resurrected, triumphant Redeemer seen of many witnesses. (1 Cor 15: 4-11)

You see Paul and Apollos were merely ministers by which Christ administered the gospel of Christ. But here is where my illustration breaks down. In my garden, I used instruments to sow and water. But I could not make one thing grow. I had to wait on God to make it grow! So it is in Christ's garden! Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." (1 Cor 3: 6) Be sure to get this: spiritual life—righteousness, holiness—is the gift of God's grace in Christ and it IS Christ.

The seed is put in the ground. It is watered. Soon the seed breaks open with life. Before long a little green leaf pokes its head up out of the ground. You keep watering it. It keeps growing. Soon it blooms. It brings forth fruit.

Christ is the Life, the Seed that gives life in the sinner—"Christ in you the hope of glory." Christ is the Vine and the believer is the branches.

John 15: 4: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5: I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Php 1: 11: Being filled with fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

So we do not glory in men—by choosing one above another—instead we give all glory to the Lord—"So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." (1 Cor 3: 7)

God's ministers are to be loved, respected and heard. But they are nothing in themselves! They are sinners chosen and saved by God's grace the same as the rest of God's chosen saints. They have nothing except what they have received, the same as the rest of God's people. All their gifts are from God.

If sinners are born through our preaching, the glory belongs to the Lord, not unto us. God's preachers are not popes or lords or masters, we are brethren with the saints. Christ said,

Matthew 23: 8: But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren.

GOD'S PREACHERS ARE ONE WITH ONE GOAL

So lastly, God's true preachers are not against each other but we are one—"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one:" (1 Cor 3: 8)

God's true preachers are one. We are born of one Spirit, redeemed by one Christ, called into one body. Paul at Ephesus and Apollos at Corinth were in one body. They were in Christ's body. So we preach one gospel. We have one Head, Christ the Lord.

God's true preachers seek one goal and we are sure to receive it—"and every man shall [the important word] SHALL receive his own reward according to his own labour." (1 Cor 3: 8)

Our reward is not selfish mercenary pay for our labor. Nor are we in competition with each other. No true believer is seeking a greater reward in glory than his fellow believer.

The reward we all seek is what Christ promises to bring to pass: that God receives all the glory in salvation and that all his tender plants are saved and grow up into Christ in all things. He says we shall receive it, why?—“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry,…” (1 Cor 3: 9)

Remember, Christ reward is with him and the effects of his work before him—by his hand, by his presence, by him making the word effectual. He gives each preacher a work as he sees fit, a people to minister unto, and a preacher to minister. Christ gives each preacher grace for the work. Christ gives the people grace to believe on him. So we labor together. This is not my ministry, it is our ministry, together with Christ. And Christ promises to give us the one goal we seek. He will glorify himself in the salvation of each and every one of his people—“For we are labourers together with God, ye are God’s husbandry,…”

Zechariah 8: 11: But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. 12: For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.

1 Cor 3: 21: Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22: Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23: And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.

Amen!