

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Necessity of Maturity for Unity

The Field to the Planted

1 Corinthians 3:5-9a

Introduction (5)

ILLUS:

What would heaven be like if it consisted of believers grouped by the preachers they followed and continually arguing about which one was best?

The issues at the church in Corinth that Paul was seeking to address was not just their immaturity, but also their misconception of church.

In verse 5, Paul follows up the rhetorical question at the end of verse 4 regarding the carnality of the people evidenced by their allegiance to a particular leader with a follow up rhetorical question regarding the importance of those same leaders.

While not implying no importance, Paul writes that even the pastors/leaders of a church are “but ministers.”

Ministers – diakonos – “servants”

It is where we get the term deacon. In the Greek it often referred to one who waits tables.

This is exactly the description Jesus gives for Himself and what He deems necessary for those that follow Him.

Mark 10:42–45 (NKJV) — 42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **43** Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. **44** And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. **45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

“The cross is not only the paradigm of the gospel, and of God’s ways that stand in contradiction to human ways, but it also serves as the basic model of ministry.” (Fee, 140)

That those who serve are not the ones to believe in, but the ones through whom one believes in Christ.

“By ‘believe’ ... Paul does not mean just the initial trust in Christ ... but ... the whole process of growth in the Christian life to maturity.” (Mare, 205)

But even in this, it was only because of the calling and gifts God gave to each one.

So, although rhetorical in nature, Paul answers his own question and while doing so begins correcting the Corinthians misconception of church.

Who are Paul and Apollos? Just servants of Christ. Who were called by Christ and gifted by Christ. They are not ones to place your faith in, but ones who led you to place your faith in Christ.

The church is wholly and entirely by, through, and for Christ!

Romans 11:36 (NKJV) — 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The Paul says, “Let me show you” and launches into his next illustration – The Field to be Planted. He begins with looking at ...

The Lord of the Harvest (6-7)

Planted

Watered

Paul here notes the diversity in ministry.

However, the emphasis is not on the seed or the water, but on the increase.

Increase

ILLUS: Famer can't make seed grow

ILLUS:

John 4:34–38 (NKJV) — 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. **35** Do you not say, ‘There are still

four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! **36** And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. **37** For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' **38** I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

In saying that the planter and waterer are not "anything" was not to discount their valuable labor (we will see that in verse 8), but that in the big picture of God's church, they are totally beside the point!

The point is the increase to be harvested.

ILLUS: If the planter were the point, you would pull it to the gin. If the waterer were the point, you would take it. If the harvester were the point, you would drive the picker to the gin. But you don't. You drive the cotton to the gin. And no matter how expensive the seed, advanced the planter, irrigation system, or the picker – the farmer is always and forever dependent on God to bring the increase.

"No man, not even the best farmer ... can give physical life or growth to a plant. How much less can anyone, even an apostle, give spiritual life or growth to a person."
(MacArthur, 74)

1 Peter 1:23 (NKJV) — 23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

“We don’t know how the planting and watering of the gospel seed results in people being born again but we know that it does. All glory belongs to God who gives the increase.” (Phillips, 70)

But the Fact that God is The Lord of the Harvest doesn’t mean we are to ignore ...

The Labor in the Field (8)

If verses 6-7 show the diversity of ministries in the church, verse 8 reveals the unity.

“In our eyes, some Christian work is more glamorous, or seems more important or more significant than other work. But if God has called a person to a work, that is the most important ministry he can have.” (MacArthur, 74)

There is one goal – the harvest!

Yet, we will “we each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

Notice that God’s reward is based on labor not results. Why? Because the results, the increase, is based on Him not us!

ILLUS: Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14–30 (NKJV) — 14 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. **15** And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a

journey. **16** Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. **17** And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. **18** But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. **19** After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' **21** His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' **22** He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' **23** His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' **24** "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25** And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' **26** "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. **27** So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. **28** So take the

talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. **29** 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

"Our reward must not be the praise of men, but the 'Well done!' of the Lord of the Harvest." (Wiersbe, 579)

And for the record, God is not going to give everyone a trophy or lie to make you feel better!

So having looked at The Lord of the Harvest, and The Labor in the Field, Paul ends his illustration of The Field to be Planted by looking at ...

The Land to be Prepared (9a)

It is the first half of verse 9 that completes the illustration.

In the Greek text the grammar places the emphasis on God.

"God's workers we are and God's field you are!"

Paul was the planter. Apollos was the waterer. God brings the fruit. But the church is the field!

But not just any field. The term translated here as "field" (in the KJV it is translated "husbandry"), is a particular term that refers to a cultivated field. A field ready to be planted and watered.

ILLUS: Parable of Sower and Soils

Matthew 13:1–9, 18-23 (NKJV) — 1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. **2** And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. **3** Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: “Behold, a sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. **5** Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. **6** But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. **7** And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. **8** But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9** He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” ... **18** “Therefore hear the parable of the sower: **19** When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. **20** But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; **21** yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. **22** Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. **23** But he who received seed on

the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

"The local church is a field that ought to bear fruit."
(Wiersbe, 578-579)

But who is the church? We are! We will never do corporately what we are not doing individually!

"The point of the analogy is finally pressed ... Both workers and farm belong to God." (Fee, 139)

Conclusion

At is relates to the church, God owns the field and gives the growth.

"Like the Corinthians, we can see church growth as the result of a preference for a particular sort of leader or experience rather than as a divine miracle in which a field is scattered with gospel seed and only produces life through the powerful work of God." (Wilson, 33)