

“God Gave the Increase”

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

Church growth – there is much given today on that topic, and although a good deal of what is said is good and biblical, a fair majority of what is taught, both in the church itself as well as in the system of higher biblical education, is not based on Scripture. The underlying principles that are used are success-oriented in focus, and not God-oriented.

These verses before us are given to the church at Corinth so that they would know that the growth, and human success of the ministry, was all of God. As will be seen, without man working, God cannot provide the growth, but without God, the growth is of little consequence.

This text is part of a greater whole, that began in verse one, dealing with the issue of spiritualness and carnality. The emphasis in this section is that of being mature enough in one’s faith to understand that what we do for the Lord is to be done for no personal recognition but is to be done all for Him. It’s not that we don’t have anything to do with it, for it will be found that we do. The point to be made is that it is all done for the Lord – all we do, all we are, all we have, is because of Him.

[Acts 17:28](#) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

With that said, even though it is all of God and for Him, we still have a job to do, and without us doing our job as a church, and as believers, then the ability the Lord has to give growth will be very much limited.

I. RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK – VS. 5

A. In order for church growth to happen, in order for the Lord to give the increase in both spiritualness and numbers, we, as pastor/teachers, and the church as a whole, must be involved in the work

B. Verse 4 mentions the faction groups in the church that were choosing a person to follow that they had a particular affinity to – and as can be seen this verse, it was apparently because they were the one instrumental in their salvation. That may be natural or normal to do, but if continued (which apparently was the case in Corinth) it will cause problems.

C. "But ministers"

1. All Paul and Apollos were, all that any of us are, is summed up here – servants
2. The word for "ministers" (διάκονος) is one of service, one of helping
3. This is spoken of Paul, the apostle that planted the church; and Apollos, the pastor/overseer of the church in Corinth
4. If pastors today would understand that we are only servants of the Lord, and not someone to be revered or put on a pedestal of recognition, then the Lord would have more opportunity to give growth

D. "By whom ye believed"

1. We have a responsibility to preach the gospel, and be the instrument by whom others believe, and that's all we are

2. Notice that there was no other requirement here for their salvation but belief, faith – salvation is by grace through faith (which involves repentance), with nothing in addition

E. "Even as the Lord gave to every man"

1. Considering the placement of this phrase immediately following the reference to Paul and Apollos being ministers of the Lord, as well as right before the text of Paul speaking of himself laying the foundation for the church in Corinth, it would be logical to consider this phrase speaking about the gifts and abilities that God has given to "every man" as a minister, as a pastor, as a servant.
2. The only ability we have, no matter our place of service, comes from the Lord – we have no ability apart from Him, and without Him, our efforts will be fruitless (whether humanly successful or not).

2 Corinthians 3:5-6 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; (6) Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

II. REACTION TO THE WORK – VS. 6-7

A. By this is meant the reaction that God takes to the work

1. It's His work, but we are stewards of His household, and we are caretakers of His fields

2. If we don't work, His reaction to our inaction will be stagnation for the church

B. "I planted" – Paul, that is

1. Aorist tense (finished action in the past)
2. Comes from a word (φυτεύω) that is used for a plant, to put in the ground. In this context here, it is dealing with planting the seed of the Gospel in the hearts of the Corinthians and watching it take route and grow in those that received it.
3. The Parable of the Sower in Matt. 13 demonstrates this with the four types of ground that the seed of the Word of God was sown

- a) "The way side" – Matt. 13:4, 19

Matthew 13:4

(4) And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Matthew 13:19

(19) When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

These are those that hear the Gospel message, the message of the Bible, but are so hard-hearted, and so non-caring that before anything can happen with it, the Devil intervenes and any opportunity for salvation is gone

- b) "Stony places" – Matt. 13:5, 20-21

Matthew 13:5

(5) Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

Matthew 13:20-21

(20) But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

(21) Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

These go further than the previous, they have some indication of concern, and seem to receive it at first, but once any type of trial or occasion to forsake comes along, their root is too shallow, and they forsake what they professed to have

- c) "Among thorns" – Matt. 13:7, 22

Matthew 13:7

(7) And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Matthew 13:22

(22) He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

These go a little further than the previous but still fall short of true believers. The cares of the world choke out the Word of God. Many in churches today are like these – they hold to some profession with no true possession.

- d) "Good ground" – Matt. 13:8, 23

Matthew 13:8

(8) But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Matthew 13:23

(23) But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. These are those that understand it, receive it, and keep it – those that are truly born again by faith in the work of Christ on the cross.

C. "Apollos watered"

1. Also, aorist tense (finished action in past tense) – points to a definite act here more than the finished action
2. More than just giving water to a plant – this has to do with irrigation, and preparation of the soil to accept the water, along with adding nutrients through the water
3. This speaks to the mandate the pastor/teacher has of feeding "the flock of God"

Acts 20:28

(28) Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

1 Peter 5:2

(2) Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre,

but of a ready mind;

- a) When a shepherd feeds the sheep, he doesn't take the food to where the sheep are, he provides a safe place to eat, and the sheep comes to him, and the food
- b) The pastor, in feeding the "flock of God" is mandated to provide nourishing food, and a safe place to receive it – it's up to the flock to do the work of eating and digesting

D. "But God gave the increase"

1. This is in the imperfect tense, demonstrating a continuous action. If we do our part in the work, then God will continually do His part in giving growth. This is for both the individual as well as the church.
2. God causes the growth. Just as in a biological body or organism in life – once man has done all he can do, the rest, the growth, the benefit, is all of God.
3. An interesting point here – in the Greek, the word for "God" (Θεός) is last in the sentence, and it is placed there as a means of emphasis

E. Vs. 7 clearly defines the previous point – the one who planted and the one who feeds and provides nourishment (waters) is nothing if God doesn't do His part in causing the growth. The amazing thing is, if we do our part, then He has promised to do His.

III. REWARD FOR THE WORK – VS. 8

A. "Now he that planteth and he that

watereth are one”

1. There will be no reward for work done if there is division in the leadership, or if there is a perceived recognition of one over another
2. “Are one” – without the seed being planted there will be no point to the watering, and if there is a seed planted with no watering afterwards, then there is no point to the planting – they both must work together
3. I may not have planted this church, but I am no less important to the equation than the one that did, and he is no less important than me. The same is true in the individual life. The one who plants the seed – be it in a gospel witness, a gospel tract, a TV show, a radio broadcast, etc. – is no less, or no more, important than the one who feeds and nourishes that seed after it is planted.

B. “And (but, now) every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour”

1. Even though, when it comes to the cause of Christ and the advancement of the gospel, we are all one, all of equal importance, all seen by the Lord as “one,” we still have a responsibility in our individual gift and working of that gift, and there will be a reward individually, rather than corporately.
2. “His own” - ἰδιος – this is pointing to the individual, not a group, or in public
3. “Reward” – μισθός – wages earned,

payment for work done – there is a “pay day” coming for all of us, one fitting of the work put forth

Romans 14:10-12

(10) But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

(11) For it is written, *As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*

(12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

4. “His own labour” – not success, but the reward is for the work and effort put into the ministry done for Christ

IV. RECOGNITION OF THE WORK – VS. 9

A. Recognize we are not in this alone – that we labor together

1. He’s speaking specifically of himself and Apollos as the founder of the church and the current pastor – they were not at odds with each other, as the text seems to indicate the people thought
2. Not only were they not at odds, or in a seeming competition, as the case may be today, but they were working together
3. If we are going to do anything for the Lord, and if we are going to see growth in our own personal lives, and, more specifically, growth in the church, we are going to have to work together and in agreement

B. “Ye are God’s husbandry”

1. "Ye" – the believers in the church at Corinth
2. "God's husbandry" – only time in the Greek New Testament that this word is used (γεώργιον) – it speaks of a cultivated field, one that is ready for planting, watering, and eventually harvesting

C. "Ye are God's building" – more on this in the next message

Conclusion: We, both as leadership and as the faithful, have a responsibility to work. As we work, we will see God react in a positive way with the "increase" – with growth. The growth is all of God, yes, just as all biological life and growth is up to Him, but if we don't plant and water the seed, then it will produce no fruit.

Are we working – planting and watering – so God can give the increase, give the growth?