

“How Do We Think About Our Leaders?”

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

INTRO:

Because the Corinthian believers obsessed over wisdom, they transferred their party spirit, (“I am of Epicurus,” “I am of Plato,” and etc.) to the Bible teachers who served their church “I am of Apollos,” “I am of Paul,” and “I am of Cephas.” Contrary to what they believed, this spirit did not show spiritual maturity. (1 Corinthians 3:4)

“For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not fleshly?”

If the Corinthians shouldn’t put these men up on a pedestal like heroes, or put them on placards and rally around them as philosophical *“rock stars”*, what were they supposed to think about them? There are three things the Corinthians should think about the Bible teachers. **(1)** They are not the ones who deserve the glory that they want to give them.

(2) They are tools in God’s hand. **(3)** They are as God’s servants.

I. They are the Servants of God (v. 5)

II. They are Servants Who Aim to Glorify God Himself (v. 6-8)

III. They are Fellow Workers with God (v. 9)

I. They are the Servants of God(v. 5)

A. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

If the Corinthian believers were not to treat these Bible teachers as celebrities and rally around them, how were they supposed to think about them? This is the point of Paul’s initial question.

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?”

What is the role that God assigned His ministers, even such servants as an Apostle like Paul and an eloquent teacher like Apollos?

B. He then answers,

“[They are] ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?”

We do not immediately get the impact of what Paul is saying because we do not fully grasp what the words really mean.

1. The Greek word translated *“minister”* does not paint a picture of a well-educated man in a suit. It is the word from which we get our term “deacon.” The word means a

servant. This word is also used of the function of elders and pastors in the Lord's church. We usually translate it as minister.

2. So, they need to think of these Bible teachers as God's servants. They are not the center of attention, but their role is to point to the Master. Remember what Jesus taught His disciples when James and John the sons of Zebedee made their attempt at grabbing high places in the coming kingdom. Jesus replied in **Matthew 20:24-28**:
"And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"

The church of the Lord Jesus is to be peopled by servants and that includes the leaders! Remember again what Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:5**?

"We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your slaves for Jesus' sake."

C. So, Paul and Apollos are servants, but servants who have been given an incredible privilege. They were the tools through whom God worked to bring the Corinthian believers to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God did a miraculous thing through these vessels, but they still remain simply servants. That does not mean that they should abuse them. For the Corinthians were also to be servants. They were to respect and revere these men, but they were not to build a party around them.

II. They Are Servants Who Aim to Glorify God Himself (v. 6-8)

A. ***"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase."***

Paul tells us how this all works as we serve God. We have a part in preparing and planting the Gospel in God's farm. No one ever is the sole person involved in another's salvation. In **John 4:36-38**, Jesus said something similar to Paul's statement:

"And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

B. If the laborers do not get the glory, who should? The One who deserves all the glory is God Himself and God alone. Paul says in comparison with what God provides, he and Apollos have done nothing. They are like the unprofitable servant in **Luke 17**, they had

simply done what was their duty to do. **(1)** It was God who gave new life through the Gospel. **(2)** It was God who bound them together in the Church. **(3)** It was God who now lived in them and actively transformed them into the image of His Son. **(4)** It was all of God alone. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, they were simply tools that God used.

C. We should observe that this process is not just a process of getting decisions. The process the Paul uses for his word picture is that of a seed germinating and growing. Conversion is a miracle of God. He changes. He transfers us from darkness to light, from death to life.

D. ***“Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”***

The Corinthians were trying to play one servant against another. Paul and Apollos were one in their desires and their goals. They were not trying to compete; they were trying to complement each other. It would also do no good to water where no one had planted. The one worker depends upon the labor of the other. They are aiming for the same goal.

III. They are Fellow Workers with God (v. 9)

A. ***“For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.”***

They were to understand **(1)** that Apollos and Paul instead of being like the Philosophers; they were servants of God. Apollos and Paul planted and watered the Word of God in their lives. The new life they had was from God. **(2)** The Bible teachers were not in competition with each other, they were working together toward the same goal. **(3)** Finally, they were to understand that the Bible teachers were also laborers together with God.

B. The Bible teachers that God gave to Corinth were not on their own in what they did and taught. They worked together with the Lord Jesus, Himself, in accomplishing the work. We often overlook one of the most important promises in the Great Commission.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” **Matthew 28:19–20**

1. The point is that when we do the work of making disciples by preaching and teaching the Word of God, and we baptize them as followers of Christ and into the Church, and then as we teach them to be constant followers of the Bible and the God of the Bible, He is working together with us. He sends us forth, but never alone.

2. We, like Paul and Apollos, also work as co-laborers with God Himself. This idea of ministry is not us alone, but us together with Him. That is why blessing and the miracles of transformed lives happen.

What Does this Teach Us?

1. Beware of the temptation to give too much of God's glory to men. We plant and we water, but unless God gives the increase nothing happens.
2. We need to busy about the Lord's work, planting the seed and watering it in prayer and exhortation. If we are no sowing, God will not bless.
3. God wants us to give all the glory to Him. He deserves it. Let's not fail to give it to Him.