

Being the Church in an Unbelieving World

HOW GOD WORKS

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:4 - 9

INTRO: Church, let me thank you for praying for the Building Team to know the mind of Christ concerning our direction in restoring our Worship Center and the other tasks the church has given to us. We met Monday night and the Lord had brought us to perfect unity, to the same decision of what God wants us to do.

No, we will not have plans to show you by next Sunday. But we have a definite path, and we are diligently pursuing it. As soon as we can flesh out the details that give us adequate information to bring that to the church as a recommendation, we will be doing so.

So pray for God to get us the additional responses we need from engineers, architects, and insurance so that we can bring the information you will need to give careful consideration to our proposal. I believe when we bring it to you, you are going to be delighted and excited.

Give God glory for what He has done.

Now, back into 1 Corinthians – Being the Church in an Unbelieving World.

I wonder if some of you were attentive throughout the week as to what kind of person you were being. We saw last week that there are only three kinds, and they are very distinctive, so at any particular moment it is pretty easy to recognize what kind of person we are being. 1 Cor. 3:1-3 showed us last Sunday, that we are either

- **A person who is controlled by his or her own mind, emotions and will.**
- **A person who has trusted Christ and is controlled by the Holy Spirit.**
- **A person who has trusted Christ but is being controlled by the flesh.**

And I hope that if you recognized you were controlled by just your own soul that you upgraded by trusting in Jesus and His death for you and became a saved person, controlled by the Spirit. If not, you can trust Christ today and be saved.

If at some point you caught yourself in sin or selfishness, and you paused to realize you were being controlled by your own flesh that you repented, confessed, and surrendered anew to the control of the Spirit – a real upgrade in life.

Now if all week long, every moment of every day you as a believer lived your life under the control of the Spirit of God, then glory to Him. There is no upgrade beyond that!

For most of us – battle with carnality – evidenced by division, strife, envy and the like.

Paul resumes his letter explaining why we should abandon division we are a part of and abandon the lure of this fleshly desire as he shows us How God Works.

1 Corinthians 3:4–9 NKJV 4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?

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

7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, *you are* God’s building.

Let’s pray for the Spirit to fill us and illumine us to understand, believe, and apply His Word to our lives.

3:4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not **carnal**?

Paul is here making application of what he just taught about the carnal Christian and **identifies carnality in the church at Corinth as the cause of divisions** centered around the ministers who are or who have been in their congregation.

Paul was the minister of the gospel who planted the church – 18 months in Corinth.

Apollos was from North Africa and came to Ephesus and then to Corinth and had a mighty ministry in that city and throughout the region. – may have been black

After Apollos had been there a while, some said, “Man, I like him better than Paul.”

And others said, “Not me. I liked Paul better. I wish he were still the pastor.”

3:5 **Who** then is Paul, and **who** is Apollos, but **ministers** through whom you believed, as the Lord **gave** to each one?

Who – in the Greek, more literally what – demeaning their importance

Ministers – diakonoi – **servants** – word from which we get the word deacons

Gave – as in granted or bestowed

Paul’s point is Apollos and I are nothing! We are like the servers at a restaurant. We just deliver what the chef prepares. If the food is good or it makes you healthy, thank the chef! We literally had nothing to do with it.

To help us understand, the Holy Spirit leads Paul to an illustration from farming.

3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

God gave the increase – God caused it to grow.

I understand this well. I have a brown thumb. I also like to think of myself as frugal but cheap is probably more accurate. Many have been the times I had a terrible yard. I didn't mow the grass. I mowed the weeds. So sometimes in desperation, I would dig up what little greenery was in the yard and I sowed grass seed. I watered it in the morning before going to work. I watered it in the evening when I came home. Some of the seeds sprouted. Then they died. I could plant. I could water. I could not cause the grass to grow.

Paul knew he could preach, and Apollos could teach, but if God did not cause the seed of the gospel to sprout to new life, no new followers of Christ would be born that day.

Jesus said, in **John 6:44 NKJV No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.**

Only God can grow believers, from sprouting to harvest – only God! So the conclusion is

3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

Literally – So neither the one planting is anything, nor the one watering, but only the one causing growth – God.

So Paul pleads with the Corinthians to see that their choosing sides between him and Apollos is ridiculous. It is not because one is being more faithful to God or loves God more deeply.

One says, "I'm on Paul's side," totally for reasons of the flesh. He loves the way Paul preaches. He likes the way a Jew explains that Jesus is Messiah.

Another says, "I'm on Apollos' side," is completely caused by his carnality, his being controlled by his flesh because he likes Apollos' accent or he delights in his testimony or personality.

The Spirit through Paul says, "Quit that!" **Paul and Apollos are nothing! God is everything! Exalt Him! Praise Him! Thank Him!** Be loyal to Him!

And then Paul adds a personal note.

3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Paul says, “Apollos and I aren’t divided. We are one. We don’t build ourselves up or tear the other down. One day God will give each of us the reward we deserve.”

And what will be the basis of this reward? Will it be the number of converts? Will it be the maturity reached by those they disciplined? No, they will each be rewarded according to their labor.

Reward – recompense, wages – not gift – We receive salvation as a gift when we trust Christ. But our reward, **It is what the believer receives at the Judgment Seat of Christ**, which is the subject matter of the text in 2 weeks. But for now, see what determines a believer’s reward at the judgment seat.

His own **labor – work, especially hard work, troublesome work**

Two things we should note here.

1. The reward a believer receives after he dies and goes to heaven is not based on the success of their ministry, how many were saved by their testimony, how effective their teaching or sharing might have been with others, or anything else by which we might measure the effectiveness of a person’s service for Christ.

It is based on the labor, the effort, the hard and difficult work done to share the gospel, to be a witness, to make disciples.

William Carey labored in India for seven years before he had his first convert!

2. And his labor was hard work, troublesome work.
 - When he and his family first arrived in India they lived in Calcutta in a marshy, mosquito infested area. They were threatened by malaria and yellow fever, but also by tigers and cobras.
 - The support being sent by friends and churches in England was inadequate so Carey took a job in a factory to support his family and the mission work.
 - Having learned Bengali, Sanskrit, and Hindustani, Carey was hired as a professor of Sanskrit. He could have lived exceedingly well on the salary he made, but he used his earnings to provide the necessities for his family and all the rest to fund the missionary work.
 - From his journal, we read about a day in the life of Missionary Cary:
 - Up at 5:45,
 - reading a chapter in the Hebrew Bible,
 - “private addresses to God,”

- family prayers with the Bengali servants,
 - reading Persian till tea,
 - translating Scriptures in Hindustani from Sanskrit,
 - teaching at the college from ten till two,
 - correcting proof sheets of Bengali translations of Jeremiah,
 - translating Matthew into Sanskrit,
 - spending one hour with an expert on Telinga,
 - at seven collecting thoughts for a sermon,
 - preaching at 7:30 to forty persons,
 - translating Bengali till eleven,
 - writing a letter home,
 - reading a chapter from the Greek New Testament
 - and commending himself to God as he lay down to sleep
- During the course of his ministry his wife and several children died due to the difficult living conditions, yet Carey remained faithful to his calling.

Wow! Thinking about this makes me say, “Lord, may I never again say, ‘It was a hard day at church.’”

May I never complain about my bed when in Brazil or Africa.

May I never refuse to serve You, Lord

because I find the task distasteful

or troublesome

or unpleasant

or inconvenient,

remembering that it is this kind of labor you especially reward.

3:8 ...each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

How have you labored for the Lord in the last six months?

What service to the Lord have you refused because it was troublesome?

3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

fellow workers – We are working with and for God!

God's field – We are the produce of God's gospel seed, and will one day be a part of the harvest of righteousness.

God's building – Peter says,

1 Peter 2:5 NKJV you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

PRAYER – Lord, this morning, save the lost from their sins through faith in Jesus who died upon the cross for us all.

And Lord, rescue all of us who have been saved from carnality and division and focusing attention upon mere men. May we glory only in Christ, honoring, obeying, and serving Him who alone is worthy.