

To underscore the fact that God is the senior Partner in the work of the Gospel Paul summarizes in this final verse of the section. In three important pronouncements the truth about Paul, Apollos, and all true children of God in His service is given:--

- a. God's Fellow Workers. The preposition which is prefixed to this term in the Greek suggests the fantastic thought that servants are indeed at work with God Himself! Some have shrunk from this bold idea, but it is true. The servant is the agent by whom God works in souls. To this idea or joint-labor must be added the idea of dependence. Perhaps the translation which best suits is: "God's day laborers, working with Him." Hallelujah.
- b. God's Husbandry. This is a good translation, for the word used in Greek speaks more than the term, "field." It embraces the idea of cultivation along with that of the field. This figure suggests the organic growth of the church. It looks back to the thoughts of vv. 6ff.
- c. God's Building. This Greek term notes a building which is in process of construction. The workmen are still at the job! This idea is developed in the text which follows (vv. 10ff). Let no one miss the threefold use of "God's" in this text. They are all possessives. Hence, when one really comes to grip with the fact that God has all comprehending rights in His work, there will be little or no time lost in thinking of His various servants rightly!

Conclusion: What gravity there is in thinking of the work of the Lord. Too often it is considered with terrible laxness. To cultivate the field which is His! To build the House which is His! To labor under His tutelege! God alone can estimate our labor and you may rest assured that He will do it. May the Lord prompt us to a solemn view of these things so as not to trifle with eternity! Amen.

THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

"God's Fellow Workers"

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

Introduction

1. Paul has disclaimed any connection with the problems of divisions. He cannot countenance them as being consistent with the Christian message. They are utterly incongruous.

2. Particularly is this seen in connection with the Gospelization of the lost. This enterprise of the Cross has no place for schism.

3. Those who labor in the Gospel share His Word and have specific roles to play. They must not be confused. God operates in His sovereign manner over all the witness which His servants provide. To make this indeliably clear is the function of this section of the Word. Study these major supports to the premise: - -

1. POSITION OF WORKERS. vv. 6, 7.

Since question had been raised about various messengers of the Lord, Paul politely and with firmness indicates their roles. He answers the question as to "Who then is Paul...?" Incidentally, the word, "who" is really "what" and is an emphatic term which breathes disdain.

The answer is that these men are "servants." The root of the word so rendered means "raising dust by hastening," from two Greek words. It is used of a servant (Matt. 20:26) or a waiter (John 2:5). Paul so described himself (2 Cor. 3:6; 4:5; Col. 1:23, 25) in view of his service unto the Lord. Hence, no stated importance can be given to these men! In this capacity, they served as: - -

- a. Planter. The verb in v. 6 is aorist and obviously points to the once-for-all activity of Paul. In the next verse (v. 7), the present participle is employed suggesting the substantial timeless thought of "planter." This is actually the role assigned to Paul and probably in reference to Corinth meant

that he was used to start the work there (cf. Acts 18).

- b. Waterer. This verb is also used in v. 6 and is identified with the present participle in the following verse, hence the translation. It probably refers to Apollos' work of strengthening what Paul had started at the city of Corinth. Neither planting nor watering can refer to baptism or catechism as some have tried to make out. Such meanings distort the text.

BUT GOD! - - What a phrase. The Greek term rendered "but" goes well beyond its apparent significance. It excludes both Paul and Apollos from any essential part and affirms something of God which is utterly unique! For He is the - -

- c. Increaser. The verb used of God is in the imperfect tense. It notes that all the while that Paul and Apollos did their jobs, He (God) was involved in continual activity! He was making it to GROW! Hence, the planter and the waterer, in comparison with the Lord who dispensed their powers, are reduced to nothing! God gives the growth and He alone remains! He is Everything! No worker has any individual or independent worth. All is left to Divine operation.

2. PORTION OF WORKERS. vv. 5, 8.

One almost might despair of the situation as far as men are concerned. But the Lord marks them out as playing the role He has designed. What is this? Consider how they are marked out: - -

- a. Gifts. v. 5. This is a blessed truth indeed. The Lord arranged for each one to be a servant in the manner which was consistent with His own bestowal. "Each" (every) is emphatic and marks out individual distinctions of His own blessed choosing. The Lord is the sovereign

Dispenser in His own House.

- b. Instruments. v. 5. The decisive act which makes one a child of God is "believe." Let this never be diluted (cf. 1:21). The point of this item is that the servants are agents only and have no inherent powers. The Corinthians did not believe in them (although this is not denied) but their salvation depended upon their belief by them. God uses the instrumentality of humanity to bring men to Himself.
- c. Complements. v. 8. If one were to consider what Paul and Apollos are with respect to God, they are nothing. In relation to one another they are not rivals, but men with one aim! Their functions are complementary, not competitive. Vanity and variance are alike impossible when viewed in this light. Between two gardeners, one of whom plants and the other waters one and the same garden, who would think of setting up any rivalry?! The labor of the one would become useless without the labor of the other. What folly then to disparage one and exalt another!
- d. Rewards. v. 8. There is a difference among the workers of the Lord. While they are one in aim, they are distinct in reward and responsibility. The word, "own" notes that each servant will receive a reward consistent with his very specific unique situation and effort. The word, "reward" points up a specific wage and "labor" suggests the same. It actually marks the exertion which is put forth. Paul speaks here against anyone who rises up against the group and refuses to share. He also shows that every individual has his own specific responsibility and cannot merge himself with the group. It is an awesome item which is mentioned here. God has given you a gift. How you use it and the energy with which it is employed will determine your reward! Oh, take heed! There is a fixed ratio between present labor and final reward!

3. PASSION OF WORKERS. v. 9.