

Sunday, January 4, 2016—I Corinthians 3:4-8: God That Giveth the Increase

Introduction/Review

- Three weeks ago, before the Christmas Program and before our guest speaker last week, we began our study of I Corinthians 3 by looking at verses 1 through 3 in a study titled *The Carnal Corinthians*.
- Given the time interval between our last studies in this series I would like to refresh your memory about a couple key points before we move on.
 - I Corinthians 3:1—when Paul was in Corinth in Acts 18 he spoke to the Corinthians as though they were spiritual babies.
 - I Corinthians 3:2— Paul says in verse 2 that he fed them with milk and not meat because they were not mature enough to eat/digest meat. Paul concludes verse 2 by noting that their spiritual condition had not changed, they were still carnal babes in Christ not yet capable of eating meat.
 - I Corinthians 3:3— Paul tells the Corinthians that in his estimation they are still in the state of being carnal and fleshy. Paul cites the envying, strife, and divisions that exist among the Corinthians as proof of their fleshy conduct and lack of spiritual maturity. The word translated “men” in verse 3 is the same word translated “man” in I Cor. 2:14 when Paul speak of the “natural man.” The fundamental problem with the Corinthians that they are living as though they were not saved.
- I Corinthians 1:10-11—Paul’s entire reason for writing the book of I Corinthians was to beseech the saints in Corinth to put away their fleshly contentions and divisions so that they could speak the same thing, as well as be of the same mind and judgment.
- Picking up this morning with verse 4, we are going to see that Paul is still addressing the Corinthians with respect to their carnal divisions.

I Corinthians 3:4

- **For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?**
- I Corinthians 1:11-13—we already know from chapter 1 that “every one” of the Corinthians were identifying themselves around these man following factions. In other words, this was a widespread problem in Corinth.
- Having already dealt with this issue extensively in chapter 1 from his point of view (see verses 14-17), Paul cites their man following here in chapter 3 verse 4 as further proof of their carnality and lack of spiritual maturity.

- Unfortunately, this type of man following is still all too prevalent in our day especially on social media. As members of the body of Christ we need to guard against this type of mentality.
- Galatians 5:20—heresy is the work of the flesh. This means that any pastor possesses the capacity to be easily led into heresy particularly if there is a prospect of personal gain is involved.
- Acts 20:28-31—Paul warned the Ephesians elders about these things in the book of Acts.

I Corinthians 3:5

- **Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?**
- Given the man following mentality of the Corinthians, Paul uses verse 5 to raise a question about who these men are.
- According to Paul, he and Apollos were simply ministers by whom the Corinthians believed. The Greek word translated “ministers” is the word *diakonos* which is various translated as minister (20x), servant (8x), and deacon (3x).
 - II Corinthians 6:4
 - Ephesians 6:7
 - Colossians 1:7, 25
 - I Thessalonians 3:2
- I Corinthians 3:5—according to Paul, he and Apollos were simply ministers through whose ministry the Corinthians believed.
- Verse 5 ends with the statement that the Lord has given every man such a minister. In other words, most every believer can identify that one person or minister of the gospel who took the time to share the gospel of the grace of God with them. While it is natural to hold that person in high esteem in one’s thinking it is carnal to follow after them in a factious way as were the Corinthians.
- The point Paul is making here is that all he and Apollos did at Corinth was give them the Gospel, they did not produce anything, and any converted under their respective ministries were given to them by the Lord. Since the Lord is the one who affected their salvation, why should they become followers of men?

I Corinthians 3:6

- **I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.**
- Paul says that he planted. Paul planted the seeds of the gospel when he was with them in Acts 18. Note the past tense on the word “planted.”
- Apollos came along after Paul in Acts 18:27-19:1 and watered the seeds the Paul had previously planted. Again note the past tense on “watered.”
- The idea here is the Apollos added value or helped what Paul had already begun. Apollos was not setting out to create trouble in Corinth.
- *But*—note the strong contrast in verse 6 that sets apart God’s role from that of Paul and Apollos. The increase or the growth was given by God. God caused the seed to germinate thereby making them new creatures in Christ. Likewise, whatever growth or increase that seed experiences is the result of God’s working not the human agents.
- God’s method of producing growth is through His word. My job as a minister is to teach God’s word rightly divided. For some of you I am planting. For some of you I am watering what has already been planted. For others of you I am doing both. The bottom line is to remember that whatever increase in occurring is God’s doing not mine.
- As believers we are called to pitch. In the lives of most people we never know if we are the starting pitcher (planting), middle relief (watering), or the closer. Regardless of our place in the rotation we just need to give people God’s word and allow God to do his work through his word.

I Corinthians 3:7

- **So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.**
- *So then*—serves as the conclusion to this argument Paul has been making regarding “planting” and “watering.” Neither Paul, the planter, nor Apollos, the waterer are anything. This means that neither the evangelist nor the teacher can take credit for anything because they haven’t produced anything.
- *But*—the strong conjunction emphasizes the fact that God is the one who gives the increase and produces growth. In contrast, the men involved produce nothing and are merely passive bystanders to the spiritual processes of the new birth and spiritual growth.

I Corinthians 3:8

- **Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.**
- *Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one*—in the context who is he that planteth? Paul. Who is he that watereth? Apollos.
- Paul’s point here at the beginning of verse 8 is to state emphatically that he and Apollos are not at variance with one another with the goal of establishing rival sects but that they are one in the spiritual growth process of the saints in Corinth.
- As we have seen, one of the big problems at Corinth was the factionous devotion to those who ministered to them. Paul has attacked this problem by pointing out that these ministers are nothing because it is God that gives the increase. By declaring these ministers to be one Paul further attacks the problem.
- Paul argument is this, if they are nothing and if they are one, why are the Corinthians bothering to become devotees of the human ministers?
- The fact is both “planting” and “watering” have a single object i.e., the production of fruit. Both Paul and Apollos had the same object in mind as they ministered in Corinth. Namely to produce spiritual fruit-bearing believers.
- *And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour*—not only are they one in terms of planting and watering but they are also equal in terms of their reward for service. Each minister will be rewarded according to the actual energy he has expended. There is no discrimination on the basis of who they are. Equal labor output results in equal pay.
- The end of verse 8 introduces the reader to the next theme/topic Paul is going to tackle in I Corinthians i.e., the issue of reward and labor.