

Text: I Corinthians 3:4-23
Title: “Your Favorite Preacher”

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by asking you just to take your Bible and hold it. Today I stand in awe of God’s revelation in His Word. Isn’t it amazing how God can speak to all of us from the same book.

ILLUSTRATION – Can you imagine attending a college class where in the same class are freshmen and PhD students ... and the textbook is the same for every student. Well, that simply wouldn’t work. If you chose a textbook for the PhD students, it would be over the head of the freshmen. And if you chose a textbook that the freshmen could understand, the doctoral students would be bored.

So how is it that in the church we can have such varying levels of spiritual maturity, and yet the “textbook” is the same for all of us? The reason the Bible works like this is that the Holy Spirit teaches us all out of the same book.

Now open your Bible with me to I Corinthians 3. When we talk about spiritual growth, we inevitably think about individuals who have helped us grow.

The problem in Corinth was that spiritual immaturity caused the church members to divide up along the lines of loyalty to particular leaders or preachers. In spite of the fact that they had been believers for some time, they were still “worldly,” that is dominated by their old fleshly, sinful nature. And this showed up in the form of selfishness, quarrelling, and squabbling over personalities.

Read I Corinthians 3:3-9.

Now as believers we need to learn to stand on our own and walk on our own.

ILLUSTRATION – This morning we had a parent/child dedication. Each of those babies was held in the arms of a parent. They can’t stand, they can’t walk, on their own. And there’s nothing sweeter than a baby in the arms of a loving dad or mom. Right? But eventually, that baby will learn to crawl and then to walk, all by themselves. But for the child to do that, the parent has to put them down and let them develop those skills, with a little help, of course. And we all celebrate when that baby takes their first steps of walking on their own. That has to happen. Can you imagine, teenagers, you going to school, and your parents driving you to school? Parking the car in front of the school, opening the back door of the car and pulling you out of the baby car seat? Then your mom picks you up, and, struggling, places you in a baby stroller. And then she rolls you down the hallway of your school to your first class. What a sight!

The same thing can happen spiritually. At first we are dependent on others for everything. We don’t know how to read our Bible, or pray, or witness, or serve, or worship. We depend on others to help us do those things. But then we must be able to begin to stand on our own feet, and walk on our own, spiritually.

The problem in Corinth is that they most of the church members were still spiritually immature; and it was showing in their immature attitude about their spiritual leaders.

Carnal people focus on the gift rather than the Giver ... they focus on the “gifted” rather than the Giver.

1 Corinthians 3:3-4 - You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? 4 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?

What is he saying? He’s saying that as you grow spiritually, you learn that you are not following a man, a preacher, a SS teacher or any other minister. “I follow Paul ... I follow Apollos.” You are following God.

Note: Some preachers we really loved. Others may have hurt us or disappointed us deeply. The point of this section of I Corinthians is that we are not to think too highly of our favorite preachers or be harshly critical of those who aren’t.

So all of us have a ministry of some kind. How should we view ourselves?

1. OUR SERVANT’S ATTITUDE

1 Corinthians 3:5 - What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe...

Note: I’m reminded on this Fathers Day that dads are to be the great servants in their homes. Dad, do you have an attitude of service to your wife and your children?

The word here means a common worker. It was used of people who waited tables ... busboys and table waiters. (*Diakonos* is the word from which we get our word “deacon.”)

That’s so foreign to our way of looking at things. We measure a man’s value today by how many people serve him. God measures our value by how many people we serve.

That’s the way we are to view ourselves in ministry. We set the table for others to be fed by God and led by God.

You see, as ministers, we are not the source of salvation for others. We are rather the servants of the salvation of others (“servants, through whom you came to believe...”)

Ministry is an undeserved gift from God’s hand. We receive it with humility. We didn’t “earn” these positions, but rather we are entrusted with them by God’s grace.

ILLUSTRATION – When Dirk Nowinsky comes off the court tonight after scoring 50 points on the Heat, will the announcers being interviewing the basketball? No.

When Emeril appears on a talk show and prepares a delicious meal ... BAM! Does the host interview the plate of food? No, he interviews Emeril.

And as we minister to others, we are the basketball, we are the plate of food. Give praise to God.

2. OUR PERSONAL ASSIGNMENT

1 Corinthians 3:5 - What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

Differences? Yes, because the Lord “has assigned to each his task...”

In the next verse Paul talks about how he had been the one that planted the seed by preaching the Gospel to them. They were saved, and Apollos, a powerful preacher, came and watered the seed. Paul and Apollos had different assignments. One was not better than the other.

In ministry in the Body of Christ this is so important. We all have an assignment in the Body that God has given to us.

3. OUR LORD’S ASSISTANCE

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 - I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

We can do nothing of eternal significance without the assistance of God. We do our work, but God must do His work if it is to really bless someone.

So when we are blessed we glorify God, because ultimately He is the making the Word grow in our lives.

Now that’s not to say that we are not to appreciate the persons God uses. In some churches I’ve observed through the years they take this literally: “Oh, you aren’t anything.”

That’s not exactly what Paul is saying here. He’s saying that the blessings come from God through people.

ILLUSTRATION – It wouldn’t be accurate to say that a farmer is “nothing.” He does important work. The farmer knows that he must do his work. But then He is dependent on God to do His work deep in the soil.

The same thing is true in ministry.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 - Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Hebrews 13:17 - Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Note: I’m so thankful to serve in a church where this is the case, and has been for many generations.

4. OUR COMMON AMBITION

1 Corinthians 3:8 – The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

All the ministries in the church and for the church have one purpose ... God’s purpose. And to see God’s purposes fulfilled has to be our highest ambition.

1 Corinthians 3:9 – For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

Friend, are you fitting into God’s purposes and God’s plans for the people around you?

Dads, on this Fathers Day, do you see your purpose as being an instrument that God is using to fulfill His glorious purposes in the lives of your children?

The one purpose is tending God’s field ... constructing God’s building.

5. OUR EXPECTED APPLAUSE

1 Corinthians 3:8 - The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

Notice that the rewards are not according to results, but according to their labor, their faithfulness, if you will.

ILLUSTRATION – It’s not like getting the Salesman of the Year award for the number of accounts you booked.

“Each will be reward according to his own labor...” – There is a work that no one can do but you. God has assigned that to you, and to you alone. Are you doing it faithfully.

ILLUSTRATION – There’s a young man who has a very important job. It’s not a very visible job, except to those of us who are blessed by it. Greg arrives early at church every Sunday morning (he never misses), and he helps the tech crew get set up the platform here. And one of his jobs is to bring my microphone to my study, along with other information that I need for the service.

Now when Greg stands before God in heaven, his rewards will be based on his faithfulness to what God gave him to do.

“Each will be reward according to his own labor...”

CONCLUSION

What is your “labor,” your “work”? Are you doing it faithfully? That’s one of the most important things that happens in a person’s life ... finding your “work” in God’s Kingdom and doing it for God’s glory.