

The Benefit of Diversity

1 Corinthians 3: 5-9

As we continue our series – *Church: A New Testament Model*, I was reminded of the various gifts and abilities within the church. Every believer is gifted of the Spirit for service within the body of Christ, and yet all are not gifted the same. This stands to reason, and our Lord, through His infinite wisdom, has gifted and placed individuals within the body as it pleased Him.

Paul was well aware of the great need and benefit for diversity within the church. In order for her to function effectively, she needed a diversity of gifts. [1 Cor.12:14 – For the body is not one member, but many.](#) [1 Cor.12:18-20 – But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.](#) ^[19] [And if they were all one member, where were the body?](#) ^[20] [But now are they many members, yet but one body.](#) He encouraged and promoted diversity within the church, especially regarding spiritual gifts.

The church was ordained of Christ our Lord, being His body. He created a sovereign design for the church that included a wide variety of gifts and abilities. In order for us to prosper, we too must recognize and embrace the need for diversity within the church. I want to examine the [certainties](#) within our text as we consider: [The Benefit of Diversity](#).

I. The Challenge in Diversity (5) – [Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?](#) Paul was convinced of the benefit of diversity within the church, and he was also aware of the challenges it presented. Consider:

A. The Tendency of the Flesh (5a) – [Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?](#) While ministering in Corinth, a dispute regarding loyalty and leadership became apparent. Some had been led to the Lord through the ministry of Paul, and others through the work of Apollos. No doubt some favored the personality and approach to ministry of one over the other. A division among the people had developed over which preacher to follow. This division was not caused by differences in doctrine, but largely through preferences and personalities.

- These tendencies remain in the church today. Many divisions have formed within the church primarily over preferences and individual personalities. Some favor one leader or worker, and others favor someone else. As we will discover, this is not pleasing to the Lord and it only creates a hindrance within the church. The scope of our vision is not centered on individuals within the church, but following the will of God and His plan for our lives.

B. The Reality of our Faith (5b) – *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?* Paul urged the people to consider their actions. There was nothing special or supernatural about him or Apollos. They were both just men, called of God to minister to the church. If the people were focused, or depending upon Paul or Apollos instead of the Lord, they had missed it. They were mere mortals, seeking to be used of God in ministry. The loyalty of the people needed to be toward the Lord, not men.

- We need to embrace this reality as well. While God does use men to fulfill His purpose within the church, our dependence doesn't rest in men. We should never be divided over whom we support in one area of ministry, because we are all dependent upon the Lord. Like those in Corinth, our loyalty must be to Christ the Lord, not individuals within the church! *2 Cor.4:7 – But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

II. The Concession in Diversity (6-7) – Here Paul humbly admits his dependence upon the Lord while acknowledging the contributions of others. He conceded that ministry required the power of God and the contributions of many. Consider:

A. The Participation (6a) – *I have planted, Apollos watered.* Paul emphasized the cooperation between himself and Apollos. He often planted the seeds of the Gospel, and Apollos came along behind and watered those seeds. Both aspects of ministry were essential to fruit being produced, and without the work of both, the work would not have prospered. While they had different gifts and abilities, both were essential to the work of ministry. One was not more important than the other.

- I am aware that God doesn't need any of us to accomplish His purposes, but I am glad He chooses to use us individually. Some positions and tasks are more noticeable than others, but that doesn't mean they are more important in the scope of ministry. Some of us are called to plant seeds, and others are gifted to come along and water them later. Both are essential in producing fruit for the Lord.

B. The Providence (6b) – *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.* Paul revealed the futility of their debate. He conceded that while he and Apollos both labored in different ways, their efforts alone were never enough. They faithfully performed the task they had received, but it was God who eventually gave the increase. Paul knew the Lord had to move in the hearts of men for there to be any conversion and lasting change.

- We could divide up based on preferences and opinions regarding who needs to be in what position, doing a particular task, but if God doesn't bless our efforts it will all be in vain anyway. I am certain the Lord is disappointed in such senseless debate and division, because we are unable to produce anything of our own accord. We are dependent upon Him, if we are to see any fruit!

C. The Perspective (7) – [So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.](#) Paul again emphasized proper focus and perspective. He knew that apart from the Lord working in their lives and supplying the increase, he and Apollos would have nothing to boast about. They were nothing apart from the Lord. If anyone was to be praised and given the credit for the fruit in Corinth, it should be the Lord and Him alone.

- Far too often personalities get in the way of what the Lord desires to accomplish among a congregation of believers. This isn't my church or my ministry. It isn't your Sunday school class or small group ministry. This is His church and His work; we just have the privilege to join in what He has chosen to do among us! We are nothing more than vessels of clay within the mighty hand of God. He alone provides the blessings we enjoy and the increase we receive.

III. The Cooperation through Diversity (8-9) – Finally we see Paul's thoughts on the benefit of cooperation nurtured through diversity within the church. He spoke of:

A. The Unity (8a) – [Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one.](#) Paul was not jealous or upset over the success Apollos enjoyed in ministry. He was not angered that some within Corinth held him in high regard. Paul knew they belonged to the same body, and although they had different approaches in ministry, they shared a common vision. They were in this work together, and both appreciated the efforts of the other. Rather than being a distraction or hindrance, their efforts complimented each other.

- Diversity will only be beneficial where unity exists. We too must realize that we are all in this effort together. We are one in Christ. This body of believers is not made up of a loosely knit collaboration of smaller groups. We are one body in Christ. I can't do what God has gifted you to do, and you can't do what He's gifted me to do. We must each work within our area of giftedness for the good and advancement of the body!

B. The Accountability (8b) – [Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.](#) While Paul and Apollos were gifted differently,

and complimented each other, he knew they would each receive their own reward. Paul was gifted to plant, and Apollos was gifted to water. Paul was not responsible to water the seeds that were sown, and Apollos was not responsible to plant the seeds. Each had a work to do, and each was faithful to his work. While some favored one over the other, Paul knew each man would receive his reward from the Lord, not based on the preferences or opinions of men.

- We would do well to remember this great truth. Each of us should focus on using the gifts we have received to the best of our ability, in an effort to compliment the work as a whole. I am not responsible for the work you've been given, and you aren't responsible for mine. We will not be judged based on the preferences or opinions of men, but how we used our gifts for the Lord.

C. The Sovereignty (9) – *For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.* Paul understood a great truth that put everything in its proper perspective. He and Apollos were not operating independently in ministry. They were called to join the Lord in the work He was already engaged in. He chose to allow them to have a part in the work.

- This is a great blessing, and yet it is very humbling. Like Paul, we have not been asked to work independently. I fear many today choose to follow their own path rather than seeking to join the Lord where He chooses. We are His husbandry – He has placed us within a specific area of the vineyard according to His divine plan. We are His building – we are the body of Christ, entrusted to carry on the work of ministry. The labor we are engaged in isn't about us; it is about being used of the Lord according to His sovereign plan. We are blessed to have a small part in the Kingdom work.

Conclusion: I hope I have shared something that has helped you in your journey with the Lord. I trust we appreciate and value the diversity of believers within our congregation. In order to be effective, we each must be willing to contribute to the work, while appreciating and supporting the work of others. Some are called to plant; some are called to water; some are called to harvest. Each aspect is vital to the production of fruit. Let's celebrate the individual gifts within our church and those who possess them!

If there are needs within your life, seek the Lord for the help you need. He will strengthen the weak, and guide the wayward. If you have yet to respond to the call for salvation, come to the Lord today. He wants to save you by His grace and place you within the body of Christ.