

TRUE MINISTRY

By Denver Cheddie

1 Corinthians 3 (NKJV)

- 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 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.
- 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each take heed how he builds on it.
- 11 For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
- 12 Now if any one builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw;
- 13 Each one's work will become clear: for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is.
- 14 If any one's work which he has build on it endures, he will receive a reward.
- 15 If any man's work is burned, he will suffer loss: but he himself will be saved; yet so as through fire.

There are many scriptures in the Bible that talks about ministry. But I think that 1 Corinthians 3 provides us with a concise summary of all that ministry entails. Here Paul uses two analogies to describe ministry – the field and the building. These analogies provide us with the scope and spirit of true ministry - what exactly is expected of us and what is not, what is likely to produce results and what is a complete waste of time and energy.

Field Analogy

There are two types of ministry – planting and watering. You may view these, respectively, as witnessing and follow up, or ministry to unbelievers and ministry to believers. However you look at it, IT IS GOD WHO GIVES THE INCREASE. It is not our job to save anyone or change anyone. We just

plant and water. We just share the truth of the gospel with them. God does the rest. What makes the difference is not HOW you plant the seed – whether you gently place it or you slam dunk it. What makes the difference is how receptive the soil or ground is. When you share the word with someone, it doesn't matter whether you were gentle or firm, as long as it is the truth of God's word that you are sharing. If the person's eyes are closed, then there is absolutely nothing you could do other than share with them the word. The rest is up to God. It is God's job to take that word and use it to convict that person. That's where prayer and intercession comes in. If that person chooses to be stubborn, that's their choice. If they come to Christ, then it was God who gave the increase.

True ministry can always be categorized as planting and sowing. That's why I don't consider taking some kids out for pizza and a movie on Friday nights true ministry? True ministry must necessarily involve some sort of spiritual impartation involving God's word. That would obviously involve the spiritual gifts God has given to us. Paul mentioned that he planted while Apollos watered. Apollos was the teacher (Acts 18:24,25), so he ministered in a way that his gifting would allow. I am not against church activities, but I do personally believe that many of our church activities are a waste of time and not at all ministry. Nevertheless whatever your activity, make sure that it involves some sort of spiritual impartation involving the Word of God using your spiritual gifts. Otherwise it is not ministry, just hanging out.

Building Analogy

The second analogy Paul uses is the building. Our work is compared to a building. Paul makes it clear that the foundation of Christianity is the person and work of Jesus Christ. We cannot relay that foundation. The foundation, which includes the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, has already been laid. Ministry is not about getting extra revelations to the word of God. I wish someone could tell that to all of those people who claim that God has given them revelations of heaven and hell, in addition to what the Bible teaches.

So we can either build on that foundation (sound doctrine) or on some other foundation (false doctrine). But even if we build on the correct foundation, there are two ways we could build. We could build with perishable material or imperishable material (verse 12). In the analogy, the perishable material will be burnt up by the fire, while the imperishable material will endure. The fire in this analogy is symbolic of the light of God's judgment which will reveal what was useful Christian ministry and what was not. Note that this is not talking about a literal fire – whether hell or purgatory or what have you. The fire is part of the analogy, and represents the light of God's judgment. This is talking about the judgment of Christians. No one goes to hell here. The judgment of believers is purely for the purpose of determine our reward in heaven, not our presence there (verse 15).

Now what kind of work will be shown to be useless and which will be shown to be of worth? It is possible for someone to build on the right foundation (Christ) and yet produce useless fruit. In the context of 1 Corinthians 1-4, there was much division in the church, which entailed envy, strife and pride among the factions (1 Corinthians 3:3). Paul also had to stress to the

church, in verse 7, that the ministers are nothing really, since it was God who gave the increase. The only reason Paul had to urge them to be humble is because there was much pride in the congregation. I believe that Paul had all of this in mind when he penned this passage.

I believe that it is possible to do the work of the Lord, yet do it out of a spirit of envy, pride and strife; rather than love and humility. I think this is what makes the difference between perishable material and imperishable ones. Are you interested in serving others through your ministry? Jesus said that ministers are servants. Or are you interested in your own self interest? Are you putting others before yourself or vice versa? I think that this makes the difference between building with gold, silver and precious stones; and building with hay, straw and wood. This is the difference between work that will endure on judgment day and work that won't.

Ministry is service. Our reward is not based on the numerical result of our work since it is God who gives the increase. We get rewarded for our faithfulness with what God called us to do and the attitude in which we do it. Are we doing it to serve or to be served? Are we interested in eternal reward or earthly gain? Each person needs to answer these questions to him or herself.

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