



We're all excited about the Giants and so I want to start today by telling you a story that will require some imagination. Imagine you were new to this area and knew nothing about the Giants. But imagine someone anonymously sent you a ticket to the game on Wednesday night. Of course, you were thrilled. You could care less who wins the game but how often do you get to go to the World Series?

You drive to the ball park early enough to enjoy some of the pre-game festivities and be seated for the first pitch. But parking is a bit different than you've seen at other stadiums. They're making everyone park according to who their favorite player is. This is confusing for you because, again, you know nothing about the Giants. But there is an area for followers of the Panda, and one for Huff Daddy, and one for Pat the Bat, and one for the Freak, and one called "A pocket full of Poseys." You have no idea what any of this means so you just follow a bunch of weird looking people with black beards and park.

When you enter the ballpark and head for your seat it gets even stranger. Everyone is dressed according to the section they're seated in. Again, there is one section where everyone (even the ladies) have black beards; there is another where everyone has a strange furry hat on that looks like a Panda bear; there is one where everyone has long stringy dark hair with "the Freak" written on their shirts, and there is one that's really strange; people wearing red thongs with rhinestones!

Then the game starts and that's when things get out of hand. No one seems to care about the game. All they care about is their favorite player. When their favorite player comes up to bat or makes a play they go crazy, but when another Giant comes up they boo him. And when they boo, the people from the section of the player they're booing starts throwing food at them. It's like a giant food fight.

This is the most bizarre thing you've ever seen. These people don't care about baseball, they don't even care about their team; they just care about that one player they're in love with. The night ends with a massive brawl between little bald headed people yelling "Cody" and another group yelling "U-Ribe." You barely escape with your life and decide to never go to another Giants game.

I know that sounds pretty goofy, but what if I told you that kind of thing happens in the church all the time? Down through the ages, time and time again Christians have focused more on the

distinctives of their particular leader than the much larger work of the Kingdom itself. Rather than fighting our common enemy together, we've tossed food at our brothers and sisters as if they were our enemies. Rather than seeing the church as part of a diverse team where every player is needed, we've created super-stars where one player's role overshadows everyone's else's.

All of this is rooted in a faulty view of leadership. That's the issue we're looking at today. How should we view spiritual leaders, especially in light of our tendency to put them on a pedestal? Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3. This was an issue for the church in Corinth. We've seen how Paul confronted them on how they were dividing up according to which leader they felt was the most impressive, especially when it came to their definition of wisdom. Now Paul dives deeper into the subject of why they're so prone to idolize their leaders and how to correct that. In doing that he uses several vivid images.

### **Babies and adults**

**And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? (verses 1–4).**

The first image is of babies and adults. Remember in the end of chapter 1 he talked about how believers have the Spirit of God and the Spirit gives us the ability to understand spiritual truth. Apart from the Spirit no one has that ability. But the Spirit actually gives us the capacity to grasp spiritual things. He gives us the mind of Christ. But here Paul says he couldn't speak to them as spiritual men but as "men of flesh." And to get the point across he says they're like babies. They're "infants in Christ." They're believers, they're in Christ, but they're spiritual babies.

What's the difference between babies and adults? One of the things is in what they can eat. Everyone knows you can't feed an infant solid food; they can't chew it or swallow it or digest it. Paul couldn't feed them the solid food of the truth but just milk. That means they could only be given the most basic truths about the Christian faith—the ABC's. He clearly infers they should have been further along than this. He says "even now you are not yet

able." In other words, enough time has passed that you should be able. You should be studying calculus, but you're still on basic addition and subtraction.

The evidence for this is there is "jealousy and strife" among them. They're acting no different than people in the world. They're "walking like mere men." Each is joining their little personality cult around Paul or Apollos. They compare and compete: "My guy has a better fastball than yours." "Yeah, but have you seen how my guy can hit?" Just think of how this might go in the church. One group says, "Our guy is really deep. He gets us deep into the word. None of this lightweight stuff." Someone else says, "My guy is really friendly. He really gets to know people. And he's so funny."

Paul says when we act that way we're acting like mere men. We're acting like people without the Spirit of God. We're showing we're still in spiritual diapers. Just because you have God's Spirit dwelling in you doesn't mean you're walking in the Spirit; it doesn't mean you're Spirit-filled. It's like in a marriage. You can be married but not act married. You can choose not to respond to your spouse. In the same way, you can choose not to respond to the Spirit but rather to the flesh. You can quench the Spirit. You can grieve the Spirit. The flesh is your carnal, sinful nature which continues to have a downward pull in your life. Gal 5:17 says, *"The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please."* It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian. The battle between the Spirit and the flesh will continue until the day you die. This means a brand new believer can be more mature than a long time Christian if he's walking in the Spirit while a long time Christian walks in the flesh. The passing of time itself doesn't guarantee spiritual maturity.

So this first image of babies and adults challenges us to grow up spiritually, especially in our thinking about spiritual leaders. But what does that really mean? What does that look like?

## **Planting and watering**

**What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building (verses 5–9).**

The second image tells more. Paul uses the image of planting and watering in a field or farm. He says in v. 9, *"you are God's field"* and that image controls these verses. He starts out and asks, *"What then is Apollos? What then is Paul?"* Paul says, "What

are we? We're his servants. We work in his field. We don't own the field. We don't own the farm. God owns it. It belongs to him." I hear pastors say all the time, "My people did this or my church did that." Don't ever let me say that because you're not my people and you're not my church. You're God's people and God's church. Paul also says, "As workers in his field, we each have specific tasks God has assigned to us." Paul's job was to plant the seed. He came to Corinth and preached the gospel. He sowed seeds of God's good news among them. Apollos's job was to water that seed. He came later and reinforced Paul's teaching and preaching. They both did their work; it was hard work; they toiled and sweat, and then they waited.

I'm no farmer, but I know enough to understand you can do all the right things, you can plant and water, you can work your tail off, but if certain conditions don't exist, there won't be a crop. There is the need for the right amount of sun to shine, for the right amount of rain to fall, for the right balance of nutrients in the soil. There is the need to ward off bugs and pests and birds. My wife planted tomatoes in our backyard. She used good soil and she watered faithfully. She waited and finally they began to grow and produce fruit. But then one day she went out to pick a few ripe tomatoes and they were all gone. Some squirrel or bird or raccoon had come and destroyed her crop.

This is what Paul is getting at when he says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth." When it comes to producing spiritual fruit, when it comes to seeing a harvest of people who respond to the Gospel in genuine repentance and faith and begin to grow in their walk with God, we're totally dependent on him. It's not that what we do is unimportant. We have a role to play. Leaders have to roll up their sleeves and get out in the field and sweat. But apart from God our work is in vain. Nothing of significance will happen. So he concludes, "Neither the one who plants or the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth." Augustine used to say, "Work like it all depends on you, but pray like it all depends on God."

Maybe you're called to teach 3rd grade Sunday School or work in our high school ministry. Maybe you're witnessing to your family, neighbors or coworkers. Maybe you're leading a small group or you're a stay-at-home mom trying to influence your kids for Christ. Maybe you're one of our Elders or Pastors or Directors or Coordinators. Work hard. Sweat. Toil. Show up. Plant seeds. Water them. But don't forget ultimately the success of your work isn't up to you but God. So pray like crazy. Hold God to his promises. And know when it's time to stop and let go and wait for God to do his work. One thing about farming—it requires patience. It takes time to grow a crop. If you're looking for quick results, you're in the wrong business. But when there is growth and a little fruit comes, or maybe a lot, thank him, give him the credit. Don't let anyone put you on a pedestal. You're just a servant.

But there is something else here. This image of planting and watering also reminds us we're not alone in our work. Paul and Apollos had different jobs to do. Paul didn't say, "I planted these seeds and I'm not going to let anyone else near them. They're mine. Stay away. You'll just mess it up." Apollos didn't come later and say, "Forget everything you've learned up until now. I have something new to teach you." No, they complemented each other. They had different roles and they knew they needed each other. It wasn't a one-man show. That's what he means when he says "Now he who plants and he who waters are one." And "We are God's fellow workers." In other words, "We're in this together. We're on the same team with the same purpose. He plays shortstop; I play left field. He hits home runs; I steal bases. Everyone does their part."

Remember when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, he sent them out in pairs (Mk 6:7). Have you ever wondered why? He could cover a lot more ground sending them out alone. We often think of ministry as some heroic solo mission we're on for God. We're like Rambo. But Jesus does this because true leaders understand they need others; others who have gifts and abilities they don't have. We serve and bear witness in community and when we do that there is much less of a chance of one person gaining superstar spiritual leader status and getting all the credit. Henri Nouwen wrote, "Whenever we minister together, it is easier for people to recognize that we do not come in our own name, but in the name of the Lord Jesus who sent us."

So we have this image of planting and watering to show us that spiritual leaders are mere servants in God's church who are completely dependent on God and on one another for success.

## Foundations and builders

**According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

The third image Paul introduced in v. 9 when he said "*You are God's building.*" He elaborates on this above in verses 10–15. We move from the image of a farm to the image of a building. Paul says God in his grace gave him a job as a "wise master builder." He didn't earn this job; he didn't even deserve it. It came to him as a gift. God granted him to be like a foreman who oversees a team of builders. Again, I've never built anything besides a cutting

board for my mom in 8th grade woodshop. But I know what Paul says here is right: the most important thing a foreman does is make sure the right foundation is laid. Paul says, "There is only one foundation for the church and that's Jesus Christ. I laid that foundation. I preached Christ and him crucified." In the previous image, the workers in the field were secondary to God causing the growth. Here, the workers are secondary to the foundation. The foundation gives the building coherence and stability.

But the foundation is just the beginning. He says the foundation has been laid and now other workmen are building on it. It's very important they're careful how they build. He mentions the materials they might use from gold to straw. Only if a workman uses materials that will survive a fire will he receive a reward. If he builds with gold, silver and precious stones he'll receive his pay, but if he builds with wood, hay or straw it will all burn up and he'll suffer loss.

What does this mean for spiritual leadership? It means we ought to be very careful how we do it. If the foundation is Jesus Christ, if he gives coherence and stability to everything, we best make sure our work is consistent with who he is. There is no place for sloppy work. There is no place for shortcuts. There is no place for using cheap materials just because they're easier to use or more readily available. I think of preachers who just say what people want to hear. I think of leaders who rely more on pop psychology than Holy Scripture. I think of those who somehow think right-wing or left-wing politics will bring us close to the kingdom of God. I think of those who say the Christian faith is just one of many different ways to reach God. I think of others who teach that the Christian life is all about keeping rules. Although any one of these things might build an impressive ministry, it's all wood, hay and straw. That's why you can't ever measure the true value of a ministry or a church by its size or its wealth. You can build a big church on wood, hay or straw.

A day is coming when our work will be evaluated. He says, "each man's work will become evident, for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." This "day" is the day of judgment. Make no mistake, as believers we'll have our work evaluated. And we'll either suffer loss or receive a reward. The issue here is **not** salvation. He clearly says you can suffer loss but still be saved. The loss isn't of your salvation but of your reward. We don't know exactly what that reward is. Some say it's how big your mansion will be in heaven or how much responsibility you'll have in the future kingdom. One thing we know is the Bible talks about how we anticipate God saying to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And with that you have the satisfaction of knowing your work will remain for eternity. It could be that's the reward. In that case, the reward has nothing to do with your status in heaven, but simply with the satisfaction of God's "well done" and knowing your work has born fruit for eternity. Isn't that what we

long for? For him to be proud of us because our work remains? To not have that would be to suffer loss. And all of this isn't because we did anything ourselves, but because we allowed him to work through us. Even our work is the product of his grace.

Paul isn't finished with this image. In verses 16–17 he adds to it. *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”* Here is the clincher—this building we've been talking about isn't just any old building; it's the temple of God. The church, God's people, is the holy dwelling place of God Almighty. We're not talking about a physical building; we're talking about the church as the gathered people of God. Wherever the church gathers, in a high school theater or a French cathedral or a hut in Ethiopia, that's God's holy dwelling place. So if someone comes along and tries to destroy the church, God will destroy him. God can play hardball, too. There are people who come into the church and try to destroy the church. They tear down what God is doing. Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing. There are people like that in every church. One of the things these people do is exactly what was happening in Corinth—they divide churches. They cause splits. They nurture infighting and rivalry. Do you know what Paul says to do with these people? In Rom. 16:17 he says, *“...keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”*

So Paul has used the image of a building or a temple to argue that the church is founded on Jesus and its leaders are accountable to him. We who build on that foundation will have the quality of our work evaluated at the final judgment. All things will come to light: motives, desires, ambitions. We will suffer loss or receive a reward.

### **Final admonishments**

Remember Paul is saying all this because some leaders in Corinth were professing a wisdom that was above and beyond the gospel. And people in the church were buying into it. Like Hollywood groupies, they were forming little fan clubs around their favorite leader because he lived up to what they thought a leader should be like. So Paul concludes all this with two final admonishments. In verses 18–20 he says, *“So then let no one boast in men For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or*

*the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”* In other words, God's not impressed with your wisdom. What you consider wisdom God considers foolishness. You need a little of God's foolishness if you want to be truly wise.

Then another admonishment in verses 21–23. *“So then let no one boast in men for all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”* These are very intriguing words: Don't boast in men because all things belong to you. Don't say “I belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas” as if you belong to them because they belong to you! And that's not all that belongs to you: life, death, things present and things to come. It's all yours because you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. In other words, if you have Christ you have God, and if you have God you have all things. So when we boast in our leaders we're like people splashing around in a stagnant, muddy pool when the vast ocean is right beside us. We're like people drinking from a polluted faucet when sparkling mountain water is at our disposal. Why boast that you belong to a certain leader when through Christ the entire universe and all its truth, mystery and wisdom are yours for the taking?

So as people who want to get out of our spiritual diapers and grow into mature adults; as people who want to eat solid food instead of our mother's milk; as people who belong to Christ and thus have all things at our disposal, start seeing your leaders for what they truly are: God's servants in God's church, dependent on God, accountable to God—nothing less, nothing more.

Can you imagine a conversation in heaven going like this: One guy says, “How did you get saved?”

The other responds, “Oh, my neighbor shared the gospel with me and then he brought me to his little church down the street.”

The first guy says, “Hmmm.”

So he asks, “How about you?”

“Rick Warren led me to Christ. I went to Saddleback. Ten thousand people. Pretty amazing, huh?”

Somehow I don't think that's how it's going to go!

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*