

THE GENEROUS LIFE
(3) THE OUTGROWTH OF GENEROSITY

1 Corinthians 3:5-11

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November 18, 2018

SCRIPTURE

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:5-11 NRSV).

MESSAGE

The Corinthian Church of the 1st Century was marked by rapid growth and rampant immaturity. Their immaturity was seen in their partisan spirit and factionalism. Members of the congregation were giving credit for their success to various human leaders and then taking sides in the inevitable conflict that ensued. Paul gives them an illustration from horticulture to show how foolish such behavior is.

In a garden one person may plant a seed and another may water it; but neither can claim to have made the seed grow. That belongs to God alone. The one who plants and the one who waters are on the same level. Both are servants working together for the one Master.

The Corinthians believed in Christ by the help of the Apostle Paul and a gifted teacher by the name of Apollos. But the Corinthians were not to believe in these two servants as ends in themselves. They were to give their loyalty to God. God uses human instruments to bring his message to others, but God alone brings new life to those who hear his message.

Paul "planted" the seed when he shared the Gospel with the people of Corinth. When Paul left Corinth, Apollos came and "watered," that is, he disciplined them and taught them the basics of the faith. What Paul is saying, in effect, is, "Although I planted the seed and Apollos watered, it was the Lord who made the fruit grow!"

The Corinthian Church of the 1st Century had a deep need to acknowledge the goodness and power of God. God had blessed them with amazing growth and they needed to give credit where credit was due. It wasn't time to acclaim their favorite minister. It wasn't time to break into haughty factions. It was time to credit God for all that God had done.

The 18th Century was another time when Christians needed to give credit to God for amazing growth. Spiritual renewal spread throughout the American colonies due in no small measure to Presbyterian Christians. The witness began with the Pilgrims from the Mayflower and was greatly advanced by missionaries such as Francis Makemie and Samuel Davies. Presbyterianism became so prevalent in early America that the British referred to the American Revolution as the "Presbyterian Revolt." Several of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Presbyterian including the Reverend John Witherspoon – the only member of the clergy to sign.

By 1789 there were over 400 growing congregations. On May 21st of that year a meeting was called in Philadelphia to help organize the growth and ensure faithfulness to the Gospel. The ministers who gathered were brimming with pride over their successes. In just such an atmosphere, an elderly, gray-haired man with poor vision climbed into the pulpit. It was the Reverend John Witherspoon – The same Scottish-American minister who, thirteen years earlier and two blocks down the street, had affixed his signature to a document that gave birth to a new nation. Witherspoon called the meeting to order and then quoted from the King James Bible:

"So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor 3:7 KJV).

This was just the word that Assembly needed to hear. It brought them down to earth and reminded them that it was not their skills nor their labors nor their financial donations that gave life to a church. God can and does use such things, but the real life of a church and the real life of each and every believer comes from God alone.

The generosity of our spiritual ancestors contributed to the establishment of First Presbyterian Church and the house of worship in which we now gather. Over the years and even to the present day, many persons have contributed their time, talent, and treasure to support the ministry and mission of this church. Many have labored to make sure seeds are planted and watered. But let us be clear as to who is ultimately responsible for the spiritual growth and nurture of the souls who have come to this place. For the outgrowth of generosity is not meant to be pride or stubbornness but a humble and grateful spirit that seeks to glorify God and enjoy God forever.