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Only God Makes Things Grow
3: 5-9a

Only God makes things grow DIG: What point does Paul make in the use of the farm metaphor? How does Paul describe his and Apollos' role in the Corinthian church? Were they leaders of opposing "fan clubs" as they might be in the world? How were the Corinthians "missing the point?" Where did their allegiance need to be rooted? How are the planter and the waterer the same? How are they individually rewarded?

REFLECT: Paul makes it clear to the believers in Corinth that Yeshua is the foundation of the Church. What does that mean in today's world? What should be the driving force behind your ministry? Why is it tempting to evaluate your success based on external results? What happens when you give in to such temptation? What is your role in building God's church?

It is not the human laborers who produce the harvest, but the Lord of the harvest.

In a series of **three metaphors**, using images from agriculture to architecture, **Paul** proceeds to address three closely related issues. **He** takes up the imagery of **a servant** and places it in the familiar setting of the farm. Beginning with **a farm metaphor**, **he** takes up the question of how **the Corinthians** as a whole were to regard **their shepherds**. There is a transition here. The worldliness of **the Corinthians** is no longer spoken of and the names of **Paul** and **Apollos** give rise to the topic of how **ADONAI** sustains **His shepherds** and **His** Church. **The Corinthians** did not correctly understand that relationship.[84]

After all, Paul declared: **What is Apollos? What is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to trust. Indeed, it was the Lord who brought you to trust through one of us or through another (3:5). Servants** translates *diakonoi*, a term which originally meant *a table waiter*. It came to be used of lowly service generally, and in the B'rit Chadashah it is often used of the service that any believer would render to **YHVH**. In time it was applied to the ministry of a deacon,

but this is not an example of that use. The context here stresses *the lowly character of the service rendered* and ridicules the tendency to overestimate the importance of Messianic rabbis and ministers in the Gentile Church. They come and they go, but **ADONAI's** own work continues. Who would set **servants** on pedestals? The real work was done by **God Himself**.[85] It cannot be overstated that being a **servant** in the Body of **Messiah**, ran contrary not only to Hellenistic thinking, but also to the **Corinthian**-competition thinking.[86] It was as if **Paul** were saying, "No one builds a movement around a waiter or busboy, or erects monuments to them. **Apollos** and **I** are just waiters or busboys whom **the Lord** used as **servants** to bring you spiritual food. You do not please **us** by trying to honor **us**. Your honor, your glory, is misplaced. You are acting **worldly**, **fleshly**. Give your praise to **the One** who prepared the spiritual food we delivered." **The world** honors and tries to immortalize great men because men are the highest thing **it** knows. **The world** cannot see beyond **itself**.[87]

Paul and Apollos were not leaders of opposing "fan clubs" as **they** might be in **the world's** value system. **Paul** declared that **they** were merely **servants** of **God** who had no significance apart from **Messiah**. The reason **he** did not mention the **Peter** or **Messiah** "fan clubs" as **he** did in **1:12** should be obvious. Only **Paul** and **Apollos** had ministered in **Corinth**, and therefore the extended metaphor of the farm and farmhands could apply only to **them**. In fact, **Paul** could use this metaphor precisely because **he** and **Apollos** were not at the root of the problem. **He** could present **himself** and **Apollos** as models of the noncompetitive teamwork **he** wanted the **Corinthian** believers to copy.[88] **I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it. Yeshua** expressed the same idea **(John 4:34-38)**. The sower and the reaper not only work together, but one day they shall rejoice together and receive **their** own rewards. **But,** in the final analysis, **it was God who made it grow (3:6).**

This next verse could almost be a proverb: **So, neither the planter nor the waterer is anything.** Neither made **the plants grow**. It is **only God who makes things grow (3:7). He** is doing the real work. The verb **makes things grow** (Greek: *auxanon*) is imperfect, whereas those for **planting** and **watering** are aorist. The work of **Paul** and **Apollos** is viewed as being completed, but **God's** activity in **making things grow** continues on. Having established this important point, **Paul** proceeds to draw some important conclusions.[89]

The planter and waterer are the same (3:8a). Paul makes several points here. First, the labor of one without the other would be useless. They are interdependent and complementary, contributing to the same goal of producing a crop. Second, though both roles are essential to the task, the laborers are interchangeable. The value of the labor of one worker cannot be thought of as being more important than that of the other. Third, a rivalry between **a planter** and **a waterer** in working a field is absurd. The field is not a battlefield where workers vie with one another for supremacy. It is farmland to be brought under cultivation to produce fruit **(Matthew 21:43)**. And fourth, **ADONAI** is the life force who produces the harvest. **Planters** only scatter the seed supplied to **them** by **God (Second Corinthians 9:10)** and put it on the ground created by **Him**. **Waterers** only keep the soil moist for growth by using rainwater supplied by **God**.[90]

However, each will be rewarded according to his labor (3:8b). This is consistent with the parable of the workers in the field (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click II – The Rich Young Ruler: The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard**). **God** rewards on the basis of **labor**, not success or results. A missionary may work faithfully for 40 years and see only a handful of converts. Another may work far fewer years and see far more converts. **Jeremiah**

was one of **God's** most faithful and dedicated prophets, yet **he** saw little result of **his** ministry. **He** was ridiculed, persecuted, and generally rejected along with the message **he** preached. **Jonah**, on the other hand, was petty and unwilling, yet through **him**, **God** won the entire city of Nineveh in one brief campaign.[91] What we think of our ministry is unimportant; what **God** thinks of our ministry is all that counts.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such a gracious **father** who rewards **His** children, but not by the biggest dollar amount of gift that is given, but rather according to the person's heart of love **(Matthew 7:21-27)**. The biggest reward is to please **You** and hear **You** speak words of approval over what we have done with the gifts or talents that you have given to us. **His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a little, so I'll put you in charge of much. Enter into your master's joy" (Matthew 25:21** and **23)! You** praised the extremely poor Macedonian churches' example of giving, for their heart attitude of love for **You** – **they gave of themselves first to the Lord (Second Corinthians 8:5b).***

*It cost **You** so much to leave heaven's serene peace and joy for shame, sorrow and pain to be made inhuman likeness **(Philippians 2:6-11),** but **Yeshua** did it for the joy set before **Him**. **Focusing on Yeshua, Yeshua, the initiator and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame; and He has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).** May we follow **Yeshua's** example and rejoice in serving **You** for **the joy** of pleasing such an Awesome **God** and **Father**! In **Yeshua's** holy name and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Paul concludes by taking up the main points of the analogy, and drives **his** present concerns home with a terse, but pointed, saying: **For we are God's co-workers,** and **you are God's field** under cultivation **(3:8c-9a). Paul** and **Apollos** were workers together in a common cause and belong to **God**, and that **the Corinthians**, therefore, did not belong to either **Paul** or **Apollos** because **they**, too, belong to **God**. Everything is **God's** – **the Corinthian** church, its ministry, **Paul**, **Apollos** – everything. Therefore, it is absolutely unacceptable to say, **"I belong to Paul,"** or **"I belong to Apollos,"** since the only legitimate slogan would be "we all belong to **God**!"

Because the imagery presented here is so common in **Paul**, and because it so clearly reflects the teaching of **Yeshua** as well, one may be certain that **Paul** would

intend these words to go beyond their particular historical circumstances to apply to the universal Church at all times and in all settings. What *form* ministry finally takes, and on that we have been divided for centuries. But there can be no mistake as to its *nature* – **servanthood** – of the kind exhibited by **the Lord Himself** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Kh – Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet**). **He** gives us the supreme example.

Paul's teaching needs to be reviewed regularly. The universal Church, made up of Messianic **Jews** and **Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14)**, belongs to **Him** alone, and those who minister are **His servants**. **Paul's** intent here, of course, was to correct a misguided perception on the part of the **Corinthian** church who made way too much of its ministers. Our need to hear the same message probably reflects the same realities, although most would think of themselves as above the **Corinthian** attitude.

All too often those "in charge," be they Messianic rabbis, pastors, elder boards, deacons, deaconesses, or whatever, tend to think of the "church" as theirs. They pay lip-service to its being "**Messiah's** church, after all" . . . then proceed to operate on the basis of very pagan, secular structures, and regularly speak of "my" or "our" church. Nor does the church belong to "the people," especially those who have "attended all of their lives," or who have "supported it with great sums of money," as though that gave them special privileges.

The Messianic synagogue or church belongs to **Messiah**, and all other things – structures, attitudes, decisions, the nature of ministry – everything – should flow out of that realization. Moreover, those "in charge" must always remember who is *really* in charge. To be a **servant** does not mean kidnapping a leadership position; nor, on the other hand, does it mean to become everybody's "errand boy or girl." It has to do with attitude, perspective, not with one's place on the organizational chart. **Servant** leadership is required precisely because **servanthood** is the basis of all godly behavior, modeled after **the Servant King Himself**.[92]