

# Sermon Notes

## *The Ministers & the Ministry*

1 Corinthians 3:5-17

March 15, 2015

### Introduction

Take a stroll down memory lane or a trip along the consideration highway with the topic, position, or person of the pastor. What are your memories? Who comes to mind? When considering the pastor, who is he and what did/does he do? Is the pastor important? Is the pastor dispensable? The Bible has quite a bit to say about ministers and the ministry they are to perform, and our passage contributes to this teaching. Here, we shall look at what Paul has to say about the place and position of the minister. This is presented in the form of a question: “Who then is Paul and who is Apollos?”

This passage is not only about ministers and their work in the ministry, it is also about the rest of the congregation—the church—those who are ministered unto. Today, we will focus on the minister & ministry, try to answer the question: *Who are they?* It’s not just that many ministers are confused about who they are and what they should be doing, it’s also that this passage is commonly misunderstood as well.

Part of the problem in Corinth had to do with the way they were viewing and taking sides with the ministers; whether they were Paul or Apollos or Cephas. They were lining up behind one or another and drawing lines and making waves. They were marked by envy and strife, and this revealed that they had not made much progress on the path of maturity—they were still acting like babies. Paul deals with this head on...

### “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos?” (3:5)

Paul will give a number of answers to this, and as he does so, we will see quite a bit about the nature of the ministry which the Lord has put in place. This is needed. The congregation needs to hear it...and ministers need to hear it as well.

Here are five answers to the question:

#### (1) *Not much.*

While this sounds like the view of those who despise the church, Paul does not mean what they mean. Paul refers—first!—to himself and Apollos as “ministers” or “servants” (διάκονος). This can be understood to refer to those who wait on tables. Paul even steps back to “before the table” and deals with the place where the food is grown. He refers to himself as a *planter* and Apollos as the one who *waters* the plants; and then, for the first of two times states that it is entirely up to the Lord if there is any growth. Paul is saying that he and Apollos—and all the work that they have done—is not really anything unless the Lord provides the growth. He is more specific about this in 3:7 when he says that he and Apollos are not really anything: So then, neither who plants is anything, nor he who waters...”

#### (2) *Unified.*

Paul is clear, and this needs to be heard: he and Apollos are on the same side; they are wearing the same uniform. “Now he who plants and he who waters are one...” (3:8). As fellow workers, they were both dependent upon the Lord for any and all of their work, and the Corinthians were required to stop playing sides. For any to play one minister over against another was childish.

#### (3) *Necessary.*

While the ministers are “not anything”, they are also necessary for the church; for the growth of the Corinthians. Paul reminded them that he and Apollos were those “through whom you believed” (3:5). They were the appointed instruments, means, or “tools” which the Lord used to bring them to faith. While Paul downplays the place of the minister, he does not dismiss it. The “necessary” aspect of the ministers and the ministry is also seen through the imagery that Paul uses to speak of the church. The church is both a field and a building (see 3:9, 10). For the field to be productive, it must be planted and watered. For a building to be present, there must be craftsmen.

#### (4) *God’s fellow workers.* (3:9)

#### (5) *Those whose works shall be judged* (3:11-15)..

Paul points to a “Day” when everything will be “declared” and “revealed” (3:13). Throughout the Bible, “days” are times of evaluation and judgment. Days are times of light; things are made clear. While this is true for each of us, it is here applied to the ministers and their work. This is so that the Lord gets all the glory. This is a sniper shot to the pride of ministers who tend to think that “all this” is because of their skill set, effectiveness, popularity, or praise. The work of the minister is completely dependent upon the Lord for any blessing. The minister is to press on in bringing the food to the tables, and trust the Lord for giving the increase.

### In Conclusion

