

# 1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

## Part VI: Countering Carnal Divisions Over God's Servants By Aligning With God's Use Of Them (1 Corinthians 3:1-9)

### I. Introduction

- A. Functioning by means of the sin nature, what we term "carnality," is often a challenge in today's churches.
- B. 1 Corinthians was written to carnal believers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), and 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 shows how the believer can counter carnal divisions over God's servants by aligning with God's use of them (as follows):

### II. Countering Carnal Divisions Over God's Servants By Aligning With God's Use Of Them, 1 Cor. 3:1-9.

- A. Paul at 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 described the woeful carnal state of the Christians at Corinth (as follows):
  1. When he wrote to the carnal believers at Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), they were proudly aligning themselves behind a Paul or an Apollos or a Peter or Christ (1 Corinthians 3:4 with 1:12).
  2. This practice was producing jealousy and strife that led to divisions (1 Corinthians 3:3) so that Paul could not address them as spiritual people, but as carnal and babes in Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:1.
  3. Indeed, he had to feed them elementary truths, giving spiritual milk versus solid food fit for mature Christians since they were unable in their carnality and immaturity to handle mature truths, 1 Cor. 3:2.
- B. To counter these carnal divisions over God's servants, Paul informed his readers of God's use of them that completely removes any reason to follow one human personality over another in God's servants, 1 Cor. 3:5-9:
  1. The Apostle Paul explained that he and Apollos, regardless of their human attributes or lack thereof, were merely servants of God assigned to their respective tasks as God's servants to minister to the Corinthians so they could come to faith in Christ under the oversight and working of **GOD**, 1 Corinthians 3:5:
    - a. The word "ministers" (KJV) here is from the Greek term *diakonos*, meaning "servant in his activity" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 584; Richard C. Trench, Syns. of the N. T., 1973, p. 32).
    - b. The verb "gave" (KJV) is used in the sense of God's giving the assignments of service to Paul and to Apollos respectively, 1 Corinthians 3:5b NIV, ESV.
    - c. Paul and also Apollos were thus merely carrying out what assignments God had given each of them as God's servant so that **GOD** might bring the Corinthians to faith in Christ!
  2. Paul was used of God to do the planting of the seed of the Word while God used Apollos with his different set of gifting from the Lord to water that planted seed, with God producing the results, 1 Corinthians 3:6.
  3. Thus, neither the servant who planted nor the servant who watered what had been planted were anything, **but rather** (*alla*, a strong adversative, "but," Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 37-38) it was **GOD** Who gave the increase Who was to be extolled, 1 Cor. 3:7.
  4. Also, the servant who planted and the servant who watered were one in the sense of their mission toward seeing God use them to give an increase; they were **not** in **competition against one another**, for planting and watering are **complementary** farming actions, not competitive ones, 1 Corinthians 3:8. This fact removes all rationale for siding with either the planter or the waterer as a follower in a carnal division in a church since either one of them is only a **part** of the **larger program** by the **Farmer, GOD!**
  5. Paul added that he and Apollos were *sunergoi*, the plural of *sunergos*, meaning "fellow-workers, helpers" (Ibid., p. 795) instead of being competitors, and the Corinthian readers were the *georgion*, the "cultivated land, field" (Ibid., p. 156) of God, His *oikodome*, or "building" (Ibid., p. 561-562), 1 Corinthians 3:9.

***Lesson:*** Paul countered the carnal divisions over God's servants among the Corinthian believers by aligning them with the program of God whereby God's servants are **NOT** in competition **AGAINST** each other, but function as **COMPLEMENTS** of one another since **GOD** is the **MASTER** of **EACH** such **SERVANT** of **HIS**, and He uses them in different ways in different parts of His program to make disciples. Therefore, there exists no logical reason whatsoever to divide in the Church over which servant of God one should follow.

***Application:*** (1) When tempted to value one servant of God over another so as to divide into groups of followers of one or another, may we recall that each such servant is just that -- a servant, that the **REAL** Party to **FOLLOW** is the "Farmer," Who is **GOD**, and He uses such servants in various ways to accomplish His discipleship in us all! (2) As a servant of God, may we then neither hold too lofty a view of ourselves nor too lowly a view, but realize that we are each graciously made effective in ministry by God as part of the team of all of God's servants. (3) May each of us servants of God not compare ourselves with some other servant of God as to presumed effectiveness: if each of us has a different ministry function, there is no proper way to compare ourselves with any other servant of God!