

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
July 2021**

(added progressively for each Sunday)

(see following pages)

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

The Gospel, Its Simplicity, Profundity & Implications

per S Olyott

1 Corinthians 2:

⁴The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

(Revision of previous 2 weeks) We began two weeks ago with the Title: The Gospel, Its Simplicity, ..., and we, considered the first 5 verses of the second chapter.

Paul refers to the example he set when he first came to Corinth. He simply proclaimed – as a herald – who Jesus Christ is and what God has done through Him. No ‘dressed up’ language and spectacular oratory! He used this approach so that it could be demonstrated that it was God’s Spirit and power, only, that would cause the message to be effective. ⁵ *that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

On the second week the title was expanded to: The Gospel, Its Simplicity, Profundity, ..., and dealt with verses 6-13 of Chapter 2. And yes, Profundity is the opposite of Simplicity!

When we say that the proclamation of the Gospel is to done simply, this is not to say it is simple. It is the wisdom of God! The message of the Gospel is profound. But is recognised only by those who are made capable to appreciate it through the Spirit conferring a new nature through the ‘new birth’. God’s wisdom is essentially spiritual and is only discerned by those who have been received into the spiritual dimension occupied by God’s chosen – true Christians.

Jesus said: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he **cannot see the kingdom of God.**” ... “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ... (John 3:3-8).*

- Implications: we now consider the last three verses of this the second chapter of Paul’s first surviving letter to the local church at Corinth. If the preceding two week’s consideration of the passage has been effective it will help to explain some important things to us.

Here is a man who is very ‘noble’: has tremendous attainments. You may talk to him about the Gospel and he refuses it. He rejects it and even goes so far as to say that it is ‘foolish, daft¹ and you’re crackers into the bargain! That’s how unconverted men talk. Now why do they talk like that? Because they don’t have

¹ *Adjective*

informal•British

silly; foolish.

"don't ask such daft questions"

Similar: absurd, preposterous, ridiculous, ludicrous, farcical, laughable

the necessary faculties to 'see' into the spiritual world. They just can't take in spiritual things. Because spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Unless you have 'spiritual eyes' you can't 'see' spiritual things.

Imaging an island: (In fact they was once such a story told²) where everybody is blind. Arriving at the island is a man who has eyes to see. He describes the things that he sees to the inhabitants. But they don't know what he is talking about. They can't understand what he's saying. After a while they start to get annoyed! He describes what he sees. For example the sunset: they think he's talking 'through the top' of his hat! They never see such things, after all. All they know is that you can feel the warmth of the sun, but as for the rest: "What does it all mean? What's this 'light' he talks about? What's this he calls 'red'? There may be such words in their vocabulary, but they have no personal knowledge of what it is.

So they get annoyed and turn on him. That's the way it is in the spiritual dimension. We talk about Christ and His preciousness and the peace of conscience that we enjoy and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. We talk about the glories of the Gospel and how we are certain of the existence of God and our going to be with Him in heaven. We talk about fellowship and the comfort that comes to us through each other's love and mutual affection. The 'world' hears our words. It understands what our words are saying. But it thinks it all foolish, because the world can't 'see' it for itself.

That is the reason that 'men' don't come to Christ. There is a 'movement' which teaches that the ordinary man, if properly approached, is ready to commit his life to Christ. If properly approached! It teaches that in the USA a man if properly approached is likely to commit his life to Christ in 35 minutes. However in Britain the average expected is two or three hours. This 'movement' believes therefore that the reason men and woman don't come to Christ is because they haven't been properly approached. If they were properly approached – the proper persuasion was used – then they would come. Lots of evangelism proceeds on this principle – even if not a part of this so called 'movement'. "People are only too ready to respond to the Gospel, but you must approach them properly. If you approach them properly: then they will come."

That's man made religion! In God's mercy some have been saved when involved in this method, but as clearly described in Scripture it is a man made method and succeeds only when God, as is always His to do, 'has chosen' and it is in spite of – rather than because of – the method used.

The ordinary man and woman is not ready to come to Christ. And the reason he is not ready to come to Christ, is because he is 'blind'! Philosophy has no surgical tools to open his eyes. Nor has intellectualism any such tools. Nothing can open his sinfully blind eyes except the Word of the Gospel, made effectual by the Holy Spirit. Therefore it is only the Gospel working with the Spirit that can open the 'eyes'. So use the uncluttered Gospel. This 'surgery' is performed with

the Gospel as it's tool, but only in the 'hands' and with the divine skill of the Spirit of God. In that sense we provide access to the Gospel for it to be applied how and when God decides. By this means it is made effectual in the individually chosen person's experience.

It is this principle that Paul and all the Apostles have been 'inspired', by that same Holy Spirit, to firmly place, in Holy Scripture. Which is why it was said that we must give ourselves to prayer – that is we pray for the work of the Spirit – and the ministry of the Word. (Acts 6:4) The Word and the Spirit together, will do all the necessary work.

That's in effect what verse 14 is saying: ¹⁴ *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

But what about verse 15? ¹⁵ *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.* Let's put it this way: we have our normal sight and we go off to an art gallery. We may talk about the paintings: Their qualities and the talents of the artists, their intentions and their motives. Because we can see, we're in a position to do that.

But the unconverted man is 'blind' when he comes to spiritual things of God. If a physically blind man were taken to an art gallery, his opinion wouldn't count for anything. And his opinion of your opinion would be irrelevant. He's not in a position to judge either the art or you.

In the same way 'spiritual man judges all things, but he, himself is judged by no man'. The opinions of unconverted people, concerning the Gospel and the Christian Church do not matter a 'straw'³. We should never be sensitive to them, because unconverted men and women, are just not qualified to speak about spiritual things of God. It doesn't matter a straw what the world thinks of the Christian church! We are not justly, judged by anybody. But we are in a position to judge all these things. Our concern is only to please Him who is the everlasting Spirit and the Great God of Scripture.

Now the last verse: ¹⁶ *"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

The natural man doesn't know God's mind. How can he? The Spirit of God, who knows the mind of God hasn't worked in his experience. He doesn't know God's mind. He can't think God's thoughts.

But we have the mind of Christ. We see the very things that Christ sees. We don't see them perfectly, because there's still indwelling sin in us. But we see them really, nonetheless. We have the mind of Christ. We're like ambassadors, speaking on behalf of the King. Such ambassadors are in full possession of their master's mind. "I know what my Master's mind is on this issue. I'm in on the

3 a. Something of minimal value or importance.

b. The least valuable bit; a jot: *I don't care a straw what you think.*

c. Something with too little substance to provide support in a crisis: *Near the end we were grasping at straws.*

secret. What other people don't know about: I know!"

We now can see why this chapter is of immense importance.

There's a lot of talk about 'apologetics'. In other words a lot of people think that by using the right arguments we can persuade people that the Gospel's true. You can't. You can persuade them that it might be worth listening to. But you can't persuade them that it's true. By using the right arguments you'll never bring anyone to faith. You can persuade them that you are worth listening to. But ultimately, if they come to faith. It will be through the Word of the Gospel, which the Spirit of God has taken into them.

Put it another way: The Gospel doesn't have a wooden leg. The Gospel has two legs and can stand on it's own two feet. It doesn't have to be supported by anything else. It can proceed, advance and win, men and women, bringing them into the knowledge of Christ without any other aid. The two legs are: the Word and the Spirit.

The ecumenical movement has been active – some may say disastrously, so – during the latter half of the Twentieth Century. The idea was that if someone professes that he is a Christian, we must accept him as such and talk with him about the future of the Church and it's possible unity. Paul's teaching here rejects that completely, because he tells us that an unregenerated man – whose not been 'born again' – is not in a position to talk about anything that is Spiritual. We've got nothing to say to an unregerated man, except that he needs to be born again. We have no message for him except the message of the Gospel. We can't talk to an unconverted man about the future of the churches, or the Gospel or anything else.

It's folly to accept a person on confession of their faith. The New Testament warns us about doing just that! (Take Matthew 7:21 for example.) It is necessary to see in the life that he lives, that he shows the 'marks' of the 'new birth'. If he does show this then we can gladly talk with him, about the things of Christ and the welfare of the Church. If he doesn't our responsibility before God is to keep presenting the Gospel to him. Until he either dies or submits to the working of the Spirit of God, thus accepting the claims of God through Christ Jesus.

What's needed is not more dialogue amongst the Churches, but more evangelism of men and women who have been deceived into thinking themselves to be 'born again' when they are not.

This chapter is important for other reasons.

Often, today, Christ is preached, but not like verse 2: ² *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

Olyott reports that he once heard a pastor preach: saying, "Christ was like a 'LSD trip', but a thousand time more powerful!" No way to preach Christ, the Saviour of the world – making it an emotional experience.

Or to preach Christ as a type of 'code word' to pass you through the difficult

years of adolescence. Or to support you in bereavement.

But the Christ preached without reference to the Cross, is not the Christ of Scripture. C H R I S T spells a word, that's all. If we preach Christ it is to be the Crucifixion and its implications and meaning. Otherwise we haven't preached the Gospel at all.

Further this chapter is important because it shows an example of the 'inspiration' specifically and uniquely given to the Apostles as being verbal. Verse 13: ¹³ *And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

That is, the communication by the Spirit is through words not feelings – as extreme Charismatics hope it to be, since they recognise 'experiences' as the normal mode of inspiration. They deny that the inspiration from God extends to the very words.

And verse 16 as well as verse 8 are important – ¹⁶ *“For who has understood the **mind of the Lord** so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the **Lord of glory**,* because these final three words establish that Christ is Yahway⁴ – they make it quite plain that to preach Christ is to preach Him in His entirety.

But the most important application of this chapter is again: in evangelism! The Gospel can succeed! We need to abandon our fear. Preach the Gospel, praying for the blessing of the Spirit on it. And it will succeed as God determines. Preach the Cross and the Christ of the Cross: praying the blessing of the Spirit on it and it will succeed. The Church is weak because it no longer believes that! For whenever the Church has believed that: It has gone ahead with the preaching of the Gospel and so will we as we believe and act according to this Chapter.

[2327]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

4 Unfortunately the “name God has given to Himself” at the time of the ‘burning bush’ seen by Moses has been wrongly translated from the four Hebrew letters in the original autograph as ‘Jehovah’ in early English translations. Jehovah has now been firmly embedded in English literature.

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Christian Growth & God's Grief at Its Lack

based on S Olyott

1 Corinthians 3:2b-3

² ... **And even now you are not yet ready,** ³ **for you are still of the flesh.**

As we continue our progress through Paul's letters to the local church at Corinth, it is appropriate to stay reminded that Paul's letters are from an Apostle, who has been personally commissioned to teach the Christian Church. What we read is, in effect, the teaching of Christ. Need we say more?

In review: This letter came to a large City/Port which was cosmopolitan, and mainly inhabited by pagan and immoral people. And by God's providence now comes to the much smaller city of Bunbury. And to our small, but striving Christian Church.

The early church at Corinth had some excellent teachers, for which Paul gives thanks to God, but there had developed serious defects in the life and practice of that church, which Paul needs to immediately correct.

By Chapter 3 of this letter he is addressing the problem that while it had been some time since the members there had experienced the 'new birth' by the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit – thus being saved Christians – they had not made progress in their Christian lives. Their faith was not maturing as it should. So our title today begins: Christian Growth ...

As we are guided to accept the teaching of these first four verses we should also note the parallel teaching of Paul in other letters and also of other Apostles – on the essential need for 'born again' Christians to grow and develop their Christian lives. In fact the same analogy – that of the newborn baby needing to mature to effective adulthood – is used to demonstrate the need for newly converted Christians to grow.⁵

How, in deed, did you become a 'born again' Christian? In the first place there was a 'conception'. In the mind of God – before eternity – he chose you; then you were born physically; there was a period of 'gestation' when the spiritual you was being prepared

5 Ephesians 4:15. ¹⁵ ... we are to grow up **in every way** into him who is the head, into Christ, ...

And: 1 Peter 2:2. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may **grow up into salvation**—

While in his second letter Peter says: *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* Which is his closing summary of that letter. (2 Peter 3:18)

Note the comment in the Reformation Study Bible on verse 18: "**3:18 grow in ... knowledge.** This knowledge is the ever-deepening experience of Christ and understanding of His truth that should characterise the entire course of the believer's life."

Also by the writer of Hebrews – Paul? ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:12-14)

– now in looking back you see how God was doing this in your secular life; the time came when the Spirit, using the Word, – the Gospel – changed you into a spiritual being, able to discern spiritual things; you were then able and willing to put all your trust in the Christ that the Word and the Spirit had drawn you to; you were ‘born again’. But only as a ‘babe in Christ’!

As we return to the physical analogy, we may be aware of such events as this: The physical birth of a baby brings with it great joy, not only to the immediate family, but especially in a small rural community, for example. But now and then while the baby appears at first to be healthy, it can happen that this babe does not progress. It grows in size, but remains a baby mentally. This, as it develops is no longer a cause of rejoicing. It is in particular a great sorrow to the parents. It also inevitably causes great disruption in the life and experience of all in close association with the family.

Paul draws the parallel, with the new ‘born again’ Christian who doesn’t mature as required and expected.

Yet there is nothing amiss with beginning the Christian life as a ‘babe in Christ’. Paul in verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 3, acknowledges that: when he first came to them they initially became *infants in Christ*. Not yet fully functioning spiritual people! As a consequence he fed them *with milk, not solid food*, for they were not yet ready for it. ‘So far so good’!

But in the second part of verse 2. (Where the Greek is emphatic.) He complains that even now – even now – they are not yet ready!

Note that today’s reading started with the word: “But”. Remember what came half a breath before:^{2:14} *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* ¹⁵ *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.* ¹⁶ *“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

Having described the ‘natural person’ in very much less than complementary terms, he goes on to describe what the ‘spiritual person’ is to become: able to judge *all things, but is himself to be judged by no one*. And ... having the mind of Christ!

“But”, he says in the very next breath at 3:3, “you are still too much ‘of the flesh’. You haven’t made the expected progress – to be proper-functioning spiritual people.”

Imaging Paul’s grief as he looks on many of the people he had seen born to be spiritual beings – Christians in the Corinthian Church – but where there had been no real, serious development in their Christian lives. Is it too big a stretch to consider that even the ‘heart of God’ is grieved? When His newborns never ‘grow up’. Just as the human father is devastated when his child is diagnosed and goes on to live a life of being extremely disabled. Never developing from being mentally – a baby.

We can ‘take to heart’ the counsel of Ephesians 4:30? ³⁰*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

There are those who are truly Christians. Who have been born into the spiritual life. Whose natures have been changed as is shown by a change in character. Who are spiritually awake. But there has been no serious development in their Christian lives! And so we find this morning that not only are they a grief to God, but they are a liability to the Christian Church.

So which of us are still babes? What are the characteristics of spiritual babyhood? There can be people who have been Christians for many years, but they even today are still immature and undeveloped in their Christian life.

- Verse 2 shows that a characteristic is that they can only take milk but not meat. They can only 'take' what is virtually predigested. Able to be taken without any effort or preparation by themselves. Something given to them. As a consequence they are very dependant on others, for their spiritual feeding. The first characteristic of a baby.
When they hear truth that takes a little effort to understand it, they don't even 'try to chew it'! They just 'leave it on the side of the plate', as it were.
(Of course, as we saw at the beginning, if someone is only recently converted, this characteristic is normal. It's when there is no change as time goes by that the problem is identified.)
- Hebrews 5:12-14; 6:3, shows us what is spiritual 'milk' in this analogy. The Apostle told the Hebrews exactly what the Corinthians were told. That they should have progressed from 'milk' to 'meat'! Instead of remaining in a situation where they, endlessly, needed others to teach them, they should be ready to teach others. Then we are told, as they were, what constitutes spiritual milk. At the beginning of Hebrews Chapter 6:¹ *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity*, Then he says, "Let us not go on endlessly rebuilding the foundations. Again and again! Then he mentions six things. They are six doctrines. (Notice that these doctrines are what is being referred to as 'milk'. Therefore spiritual meat is an advance on these basic doctrines.) Analysing the rest of verse 1 and then 2⁶ we find that these 'foundations' are: repentance; faith; baptism; the Church (laying on of hands); the resurrection – the future of the Christian; eternity and the judgement.⁷ Surprised? Have you got a complete and thorough knowledge and understanding of all of these?

These are the 'milk'. The basic fundamentals – *the elementary doctrine of Christ*. And if you are a new Christian that's great if you're at this point. But if you're a Christian of a few years and you haven't got beyond this! If you are still on 'milk', then that is a tragedy. In the physical context it breaks the heart of the parents; while in the spiritual context it grieves the Spirit. And as we proceed we will find that it impedes the progress of the Church as well.

- Now we return to 1 Corinthians 3 and to verse 3, to see a further characteristic of babyhood: ³ *for you are still of the flesh*. You're still childish – immature. The proof is in the rest of the verse: ³ ... *For while there is jealousy and strife among*

6 Hebrews 6:1-2: ¹ ... *not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, ² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.*

7 For an analysis of these six fundamental doctrines (or truths if you prefer) in three related pairs, see the Sermon for 16th September 2018 in the Sermon's archive of our website: [http://www.pcaatbunbury.org/media/text/Sep2018Archive\(Sermons\).pdf](http://www.pcaatbunbury.org/media/text/Sep2018Archive(Sermons).pdf)

you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

In the 'human way', we might well keep in mind the squabbling that a group of children exhibit at Christmas time when their presents are compared. Part of physical growing up is to moderate such obvious behaviour, because we recognise it as being 'childish'. Yet in the spiritual realm, Paul identifies the immaturity of squabbling over 'gifts' in the church.

In this letter we will find that a great priority of the Christian Life is to find what God has given each one. Then with the whole of one's power to develop those gifts. But not to be looking, endlessly, over one's shoulder, to see what God has given to others. "O Lord you've gifted him like that! Why not me?" "O Lord you've given her that ability! Why not me?" This is the language of children. Anybody who wants to be somebody else is a spiritual child. God made you – you! And He gave you your gifts. The fact that you want to have the gifts of somebody else, is one of the greatest proofs, that although you may well be 'born again'. Your Christian life is childish. Therefore tragic.

- Now to verse 4: *⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul", and another, "I follow Apollos", are you not being merely human?*

We live in a world of heroes. TV 'personalities'; those who excel at sports; 'pop stars', "Marvel Comic" heroes and 'Facebook' celebrities. Children love heroes! The comic book hero who gets into all sorts of conflict; may do things that are morally dubious; but always comes out of it all – unscathed and lives on to the next episode! Heroes.

Many Christians have heroes. If 'so and so' said it. It must be right! If 'so and so' wrote it. It must be sound. If 'so and so' did it it's an example to follow. They don't use their own judgement. They elect a few people to the post of hero and take what these people say and write and do as a pattern for their own living. While all the time they forget Paul saying, "Be imitators of me (only) in as much as I am of Christ!" (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1)

If you have a hero. Someone whose books you must read – but never question. Some preacher – whom you idolise – though you never 'weigh up' what he says – although Scripture commands it! (1 Cor 14:29) Some man of God whom you greatly respect so you do what ever he says without bringing it to the test of Scripture. Then you are not the keen Christian you think you are, but you are still a babe.

And if still a babe after many years: then a grief to God! And a liability to the Church.

- Now to Ephesians 4:14. More signs of spiritual immaturity. *¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.* Children are credulous. They readily believe anything. Often they are told ridiculous things. They are gullible – that's why they can so easily be sinned against. They believe so easily. In some ways – as Jesus observed – this can be for the good. But in other ways – not so! When they believe error that is told to them.

Or truth mixed with error. But the child cannot tell which is which. Hearing contrary opinions the child easily switches from one to the other.

People who don't have decided opinions which are Biblical based are like Children.

But before we leave the 4th Chapter of Ephesians, note the next verse:¹⁵ *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

Mature Christians should be able to faithfully speak truth. But as we speak it we must also care about the person to whom we are speaking. Not just to speak what is true, but to do good and bring benefit to the person we're speaking to. If not able yet to do this we are still childish.

So we have explored what the Bible tells us about immature Christians. But we emphasise again, that new Christians are not at fault. But where a Christian has made no progress from only able to accept spiritual 'milk' then this grieves the Holy Spirit and impedes the work of Christ in the Church.

We close then with a brief example of this impediment:

In the physical realm, a person is walking down the street but suffers a serious fall.

Who is capable to help him up? A baby!

When Christians 'fall' into error and begin to drift. Who can help them up? Immature Christians! What if the whole church is composed of babes? What then!

[2250]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

1 Corinthians 3:5-17

Principles of Christian Work. Part 1(a)

per S Olyott

1 Corinthians 3:7

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Today we begin to be guided in our Christian life by the Spirit inspired and preserved words of the Apostle Paul in verses 5-17 of the third chapter of his first surviving letter to the local church at Corinth. It can be described as one of the most easily understood passages of Scripture that we can find. It uses two illustrations: to those familiar with the rural scene – that of a field; and for city folk – that of a building. Two simple pictures: of planting, sowing and reaping in a field and laying down the foundation of a building, and building the house, which may be burnt. In these he lays down great principles of Christian work.

The reason he lays down these principles is this: Some people in that church thought that Paul was the greatest preacher and Christian teacher that they had ever encountered. He was ‘top of their league’! Others thought that Apollos was the greatest and he was top of their league. There were even other contenders for this title in the church.

Now, once you start thinking like that, there is something defective in your understanding of Christian work. When you start to put one faithful servant of Jesus Christ higher than another, equally faithful servant of Christ, there is something seriously wrong. Once you understand the great principles of Christian work you’ll never do that again! Paul’s answer to the problem is not to censure people for having such leagues at all, but to spell out the great principles of Christian work so that they will never fall into this error again.

So once again Paul is ‘putting the church right’. A church in a large city; a church which had given him much encouragement, but which had much wrong however.

Verses 5-9: The simple illustration of a field. While we may live in an urban area we’re not far from examples of horticulture – unlike those who live in ‘concrete jungles’ which house many millions of workers. Often we have our own ‘plot’ or even a ‘window box’ in which to cultivate our own herbs and flowers. Nor are we ignorant of ‘broad acre’ farming. Where the paddocks are prepared; planted; watered by God’s rain; the seed grows by His providential care; ripens by His sunshine; and then is ready for harvest.

Christian work is just like that, except that all the work is done by men. Verse 5. “Who are these great heroes that you so much admire?” Says Paul, “They are just workers in a field. There’s Paul and there’s Apollos. Both of them are ministers.” Where the Greek used means ‘servant’. “Both of them are just farm labourers! It’s

true that you ‘believed’ through them but any gifts that this labourer has got or that another has got. Are gifts given to them by God. They’re just farmers! I worked in the field. My job was to plant!”

Here he uses the *aorist* tense⁸ which means he came into the ‘field’ of Corinth one day and there he planted the field. That was his job, which the Master had given him. Apollos’ job was different. He came to the field one day and he watered (there the *aorist* tense is again). It’s not enough to just plant the seed into the ground, but if that seed is to germinate and take root and grow it’s got to be watered.

“Apollos came along after I preached,” says Paul, “I preached the Word, and then I left. Then Apollos came and he preached the Word and now he’s gone.” The field has been watered, but can Paul make the field grow? No. Can Apollos make the field grow? No, nor can he. It’s God who who makes the increase. Only God can make the harvest grow. (verse 6) Only God gives life to the seed. Only God causes the seed to put down root and to push up shoots. Only God. It is the work of God!

“Therefore,” he says in verse 7, “These great heroes of yours are not very important are they? After all what is Paul? Just a man who came into the field and planted. And what is Apollos? Just a man who came into the field with a watering can. To whom should the glory go for the harvest which has sprung up? To God! (verse 7) ⁷ So *neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth*. How foolish it is to rate one servant above another.”

“When both of them are essential. The work of the one would fall to the ground, if it were not for the work of the other! Which is what he says in verse 8: ⁸ *He who plants and he who waters are one, ...* There you are in the Corinthian church. You’ve set Paul against Apollos. What would be the point of someone planting if nobody came to water? And what would be the point of someone coming to water if nobody had planted? Both depend on each other. And they are equal. Both are just farm servants. Yet you have said that Paul is great and Apollos is nothing, or Apollos is great and Paul is nothing. You’ve made distinctions between the servants of God. Just because they had different jobs to do! And different gifts.”

“Quite wrong of you!” says the Apostle Paul. “Any difference in estimation, is something which will be determined at the ‘judgement seat’. At the judgement seat every man will receive his own reward according to his own labour. It’s not for you to say, ‘Apollos is above Paul or Paul is above Apollos’, because one day they will answer to the Master. And the only question which will be asked is how well they engaged in their labour? What quality have they sought to encourage in their work?”

“Yes,” says Paul in verse 9, “these two servants deserve the same dignity. We are fellow workers with God.” Paul: he plants, because God gives the increase. Apollos: he waters. His hope is that God will give the increase. They are fellow labourers together and they are fellow labourers with God. Paul’s labour would come to nothing without

Apollos, but Paul's labour would come to nothing without God! Apollos' labour would come to nothing without Paul. And Apollos' labour would come to nothing without God!

God does His work of causing His field to grow by human planting and watering. Both of the men involved are fellow labourers together with God. "How dare you then, put one faithful servant of Christ at the 'top of the league' and the other further down!" Is the Apostle's argument. "The fact that anything happened is due to God. You are God's field (husbandry – KJV)," verse 9.

You see there that Paul is touching on an area where the Christian Church has gone wrong, repeatedly, in history. This can be proven by any church you care to go to. Along comes a faithful servant of Christ and he's paid \$60 for his Sunday. Along come an equally faithful servant of Christ and he's paid \$100 or \$20. Equally faithful! Along comes a faithful servant of Christ, who happens to be well known, and everybody wants him in their home. Along comes another faithful servant of Christ which nobody has heard of: nobody invites him home.

One person has certain gifts which appeal to certain sectors: who is treated with great courtesy. Along comes a person, equally faithful to Christ but with totally different gifts and is sometimes ignored.

There's even in our minds today – no just in Corinth, then – whereby we distinguish between people who are equally faithful and we rate one above the other, simply because their gifts are different or there is something about them that appeals to us individually.

When all the time the Scripture is saying that one of them is no good without the other and *vice versa* and nothing would have been done without God. They are fellow labourers with God. If anything has happened, the glory has to be given to God, because wherever anything has happened the people concerned are God's field (husbandry).

So we have seen a simple illustration. It shows us a great deal about Christian work. Before the seed can grow there must be a sowing – how often that is forgotten in an age that craves 'instant results'. Our current age is the age of the 'short cut'. People want to go out to evangelise and for there to be a harvest straight away. While all the time the Scripture is patiently teaching us this illustration of sowing. The harvest is often months and months – while in Christian work, years and years – after the sowing. What about the reapers? There's no mention in this passage. It's sowers that are needed. People that will put the Word into any ground that they can get it. They will get the Word into anybody's ears, eyes, home. They will get the Word to wherever they can get it. Because they know from the parable of the sower, that while most of that seed will be lost. Some of it will grow!

There must be sowing. The Apostle Paul had contact with Christians, long before he was converted. The Ethiopian read the Scripture long before he was lead to Christ by Philip. Cornelius attended the Synagogue long before he came to faith in the Saviour. Lydia gathered in a prayer meeting long before Paul came along and explained the

Word of God. There are very few instances of Conversions, where there has not been much patient sowing of the Word of God beforehand.

But not only sowing, but watering. Sometimes we have a 'take it or leave it' attitude to Christian work. We might say, "That person's heard the Word, so now we'll get on with someone else." The Scripture says that besides the sowing – that's the initial contact with the Word, – there must be the watering. Give them the Word, and again, and again ... Where would we be, most of us, if we only heard the Word once? Most of us heard the Word, and then heard it, and then heard it. Some month in and month out; year in and year out! Some even 10, 20 or 30 years and more, before it became effectual – then it sprang to life. There had been those servants that sowed and a countless stream of servants who watered over the years: Sunday School teachers; writers of books; Christian friends with their conversation. The watering process went on and on, and on. Till at last, at last, at last ... the seed sprang to life!

The seed sprang to life, because no sower and no waterer; no Sunday School teacher; no open air preacher; no visitor; no pastor; no Bible Study leader, can make the seed spring to life. That is the prerogative of God alone!

Therefore we are brought right back to the Apostolic principles: We give ourselves to the ministry of the Word, because after all, the seed is sown and watered by men; and we give ourselves to prayer, because only God can make the seed grow. So as long as the church gives itself to the ministry of the Word and to prayer, the church will always have enough harvest to cope with.

What a great passage this is. It helps us recognise what a Christian worker is: a Christian worker is a person who carries the Word, sowing it wherever he can; waters the Word, which has already been sown, wherever he can; he's a man of prayer, who prays to God to give the increase; he's humble, because he knows that everything he does will come to nothing unless God blesses it; he's kingly, because he's a fellow labourer with God; he carries the Word but he acknowledges that only God can secure the results.

All the time he behaves as a labourer who in the end, will fit in with the words of verse eight: that he will have to give an account of himself to God. Who sent him into the field to sow. He will give an account to God as to how he sowed! He won't give an account to God as to which seeds sprang up and which didn't! That's God's prerogative. How well did he sow? Systematically? Or did he just throw the seed anywhere? Did he go about his job diligently or was he 'slap happy'?

The same with the waterer. Does he leave any of the seed unwatered? Does he give it too much (hardly possible) or too little (the big danger)? How well has he done his job? He's not answerable to God, as to which springs to life, and which doesn't. That's God's prerogative. Never ours! He will answer to God as to how well he watered.

The passage shows us that many people aren't Christians workers. Some go into the harvest field carrying the Word – minus. They have a truncated Gospel. A Gospel that has many of the essential pieces, cut out. Some people go into the harvest field with

the Word – plus. They feel that the Word alone will not grow, therefore they believe that you must adopt various other techniques to secure a harvest. Some people go into the harvest field without prayer. Forgetting that God alone makes the seed to grow. Some people go into the harvest field counting heads and gauging their success by how many plants spring up. Forgetting, again, that only God gives the increase. Some go into the harvest field forgetting that they are only labourers in a harvest. Displaying an arrogance and a desire for fame. Which is not worthy of a labourer. Some go into the harvest field thinking that they will give an account to God for what springs up. Forgetting that they will only give an account to God for how well they sowed and watered. It's not success that God will ever look at. He will judge if the work was well done or was it shoddy! Was it done with preparation; prayer; and 'stick ability'. God never asks us how many were saved.

We have in verses 5-9 a great, yet simple illustration leading us to recognise the true Christian worker: above all we must show patience in the Lord's Work, the results don't all come at once; teaching that we must have faith in God's Work, nothing will grow unless God makes it grow, therefore we stake everything on the power of God. If God doesn't exercise His power then it's all up with us as far as success is concerned.

Next week we will consider, the second illustration of a building – Verses 10-17.

[2471]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

Delivered Sunday 25th July, 2021

On the occasion of the Annual Congregational Meeting, the Moderator was present at the preceding Worship Service and delivered the Sermon.