

1Corinthians 3:8-9 "Fulfilling God's Purpose For You"

As we come to our text this morning we must keep in mind that Paul is trying to put into perspective the relationship these Corinthian believers have with one another as well as God.

And apparently they have it all messed up. This doesn't disqualify them from the kingdom of God, it just hampers their ability to faithfully represent their Lord and Savior and could conceivably hamper the message they need to be giving to the world about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When the unity of the body of Christ is a unity in the Spirit, according to the truth of God's word, then things get accomplished according to God's will. Each member in the body is using his or her gifts in that local church to edify one another. Each member is loving the other in the truth and each member is there to encourage and build up.

If a member in that local body is not connected in a real way, then neither they nor the rest of the body can be blessed by the other and encouraged to use their gifts in that local setting. It's not enough to just show up periodically and still consider yourself an integral part of the body which can be used by God as a well-oiled machine, if you will, which can then stand the test of trials.

This is what the writer of Hebrews intimates as he shows that the body is just that, a body which is connected. It is a body which works together, not disjointed or going off in its own direction, doing its own thing without regard for the rest of the body.

HEB 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

We can't spur one another on toward love and good deeds and we can't encourage one another if we're not connected in a vital way that allows each of us to share in the fellowship we have in Christ.

Part of that can certainly be accomplished by phone or letter or other means we have available to us, but it is never a substitute for actually being in the presence of each other.

Paul felt this way on a variety of occasions when dealing with the saints around the world. He would often write to them to

encourage them or he would send other brothers and sisters in Christ to them to lift their spirits, but he knew that close personal contact was the best way to show his love for them. We see this when he wrote to the Thessalonians.

1TH 3:9-10 "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."

The very letter Paul writes to them is a way in which he attempts to supply what was lacking in their faith, but he knows that being right there with them will be so much more effective.

This is why we meet together. It's not simply to come out because we haven't got anything better to do. I suspect there are times in each of our lives when we do have better things to do, at least that's what we think at the time. But if we are ever to move forward in our own relationships with Christ, we must never think we can do it on our own or outside of the local body in which Christ places us.

And this is why we must be devoted to making sure our local body is strong and effective and always moving Christ-ward as we are built up in our most holy faith. Not just our financial resources, but our time and lives must be put into the equation of how Christ's church grows and becomes strong to His glory as His kingdom is advanced.

And that can't be done if we're placing people or places or things above Christ, because that will affect the true unity our Lord is looking for. This is what this letter is about. But it's not just about the unity, but also how we must use that unity to do the work Christ has called us to.

But even the work is not to be placed above Christ. And that means that individual laborers in the work are not to be placed above Christ. This is why Paul wrote, "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." (1CO 3:7).

The thing Paul is emphasizing here is that ultimately the kingdom of God is about God. Yes, we do fit into that kingdom, but had it not been for God and His desire for us to be there with Him, you and I wouldn't be here this morning discussing it.

And yet, Paul balances this out with how God does concern Himself with each individual in His kingdom. Each person in the body of Christ is meant to make a difference. None of us can say, "I don't count", or, "my gifts aren't that important."

1CO 12:14-18 "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

And yet, how often the different parts of the body decide for themselves that they don't need to be connected, or working in that local body to make sure that each member is being edified and built up with the gifts God has given them.

As I said, each part is important and even in our text we see this as Paul encourages believers that every single Christian will receive rewards from God for the work they have done as unto the Lord.

1CO 3:8 "The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor."

"The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose..." Other translations put it, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one..."

In other words, in the eyes of God, they are seen as doing one work, which is sharing the gospel and then tending to those who come to faith. It's kind of like someone who works at the General Motors plant in Detroit. On the assembly line there are many different people doing many different functions, from putting motors in cars to installing the carpet in the interior.

But, in the eyes of the executives at General motors he who installs carpet and he who installs motors are one, or have one purpose; producing an automobile.

And yet, despite the fact that each person in the body of Christ is doing the work to promote the kingdom of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ and His written word, we also have the assurance

that God notices every single individual member and the work he does.

Verse 8..... "and each will be rewarded according to his own labor."

By the way, this is not just a N.T. concept. The saints of old, those saints who trusted God and His promise of a redeemer in the O.T., also understood this to some degree. David speaks of it.

PSA 62:11-12 "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, 12 and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."

What does this mean? Should I get a checklist and start taking notes as to the things I do for God and then tally those things expecting that I should be rewarded?

No. If that's our motivation then the rewards become the most important thing in our lives rather than Christ being the most important. If He is the most important, and our love for Him is supreme, our works will come naturally out of gratitude and thanks and our rewards will simply be icing on the cake.

But we should keep in mind as John MacArthur points out, "God rewards on the basis of labor not on results." And the reason this is so important is because there are many laborers in the kingdom of God who think that if they don't cause the salvation of someone, or if they don't cause another believer to love Christ above all, they have somehow failed and they give up the labor.

No, the results are ultimately up to God as we saw last week.

1CO 3:6-7 "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

When you look at the ministry of Paul, for example, there are many occasions where for all intents and purposes, it seems he has failed in his attempt to bring people to Christ. How many times did he share the gospel and someone wanted to stone him or beat him up?

How many times did he go into a city and first went to the Jews in the Synagogue and they rejected the good news of Jesus Christ? Was that being a successful witness for Christ? Absolutely! Paul labored for the Lord and was willing to go anywhere and do

anything to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. He planted the word and he watered that word, but he couldn't cause the growth.

Look at the ministry of Jeremiah. God called Jeremiah to proclaim the truth to Judah that they would be judged by God for their unfaithfulness. How would you like a ministry like that? In fact, he is often known as the weeping prophet.

He was called by God as a young man, around the age of 20. Shortly thereafter, he is ostracized by the nation and spends the rest of his life fleeing from danger, not being listened to as he proclaims God's word, and on several occasions he wanted to resign. But he stayed faithful to God to the end.

Some might judge his ministry and conclude that he was not very successful because nobody listened and heeded his words. But according to God he was very successful because his success was based on his faithfulness to God not on the results.

Now, it's not as though Jeremiah didn't want to see the kind of results that every minister of Christ wants to see, and that is people heeding your words and people coming to faith in Christ. But, it is ultimately up to God to do with His word as He desires and yet we know that His word does not return void.

If we are faithful to do the work, then in God's economy that work is worthy of rewards despite the results. And God is the One giving such rewards. But even if a minister of Christ, and in that we must include every believer who is laboring for the Lord, is found to be successful in the eyes of the world because of the results we see, that person is not to be placed above another faithful servant who sees little results.

There's the tendency to think that the one with all the results is doing it right while the one who has little results is doing it wrong. Again, we would have to eliminate an awful lot of faithful ministers for the Lord like Jeremiah or Moses, who saw most of the original members of Israel who came out of Egypt, die in the desert because of their unbelief.

Even Paul, to some degree, is in that category. How would you like to put on your resume that most of your preaching resulted in riots, people wanting to stone you or beat you with canes?

How would you like to sit across from a church board looking for a Pastor and have them read back to you that it has been recorded

that you don't consider yourself a very good candidate for the ministry?

"Yes, Paul, may we call you Paul? Paul we've got a copy of a letter that you wrote to the church in Corinth and there are some disturbing things here that we would have to resolve before we consider you as our Pastor."

1CO 2:1, 3-4 "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God." 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, ..."

"Did you actually write these things?" "Well, yes, but....". "We're sorry Paul, but we're really looking for someone who's a little more confident, a little more eloquent, someone who would not consider themselves weak, fearful and who trembles at the thought of leading God's people."

There were many in Paul's day who considered him less than a good candidate of being an apostle for Jesus Christ. And when writing to these very Corinthians he felt the need to defend his position.

1CO 9:1-3 "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? 2 Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me."

However, Paul was not judged by God for the way in which people perceived his ministry or the results of his ministry. Paul was judged by God for his faithfulness to the work God had given him, and so are we.

And so, "the man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor." (1CO 3:8)

And so, we must be encouraged to continue to labor in the field in which God has placed us realizing that "rewards are the result of faithfulness. They are not the reason for and goal of the servant's labor." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

God alone, who created the heart of every person, is the only One who can recreate that heart to seek and love Him and to turn from

seeking self and a life without God, to seeking Him and receiving Him by faith as they follow Christ.

To be born from above is to be born from God. And we can't make that happen, we can only plant that seed and water it. It is God who causes the growth. But what a privilege to be a servant of God Most High.

1CO 3:9 "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

In the context here Paul is saying that he, along with Apollos and others, is working for God for the sake of these Corinthian believers. But the implication is clear. We are all fellow workers for God; not that we are on an equal level with God, but that we are working for the same cause; the souls of people.

The problem with many Christians in the church-at-large today is that they don't like that four letter word, work. And yet, even the metaphor Paul uses here in our text suggests that without work the field won't be plowed and the building won't go up.

But notice who the field and the building is in this case.

Verse 9 "you are God's field, God's building."

Paul is saying that he has been called as a laborer or servant to the very people who may have questioned his apostleship. But the reason he labors is because the One who assigned him the task is none other than God. And he labors as one who is like a farmer or construction worker.

In what sense though is the church at Corinth like a field or a building? Well, again we want to get God's perspective on this as we go to His word. Where else in the word of God do we see these same images applying to the church?

MAT 16:18 "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it."

Here the imagery is that Christ is the One doing the ultimate building, with Himself being the foundation which cannot be shaken. We see this as well when Paul was writing to the Ephesian church.

EPH 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Here we begin to see the purpose of this building. It is a living building which comes together to be a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

In other words, God not only is the One responsible to build this building, but He lives in it and gives it life. This building is you and me in Christ. We are being built and joined together to rise and become a holy temple in the Lord.

The Lord's purpose is to put this building on display and show the world how He can build something with eternal value. In fact, the purpose is to show the contrast of the world with its buildings and its accomplishments, which are destined to burn, with how a living building in which the Holy Spirit dwells is a building which cannot perish because Christ is its cornerstone.

But again, we must be careful not to think that the building, or the body of Christ, itself is the thing which takes precedence. Rather, what should be lifted up is the One who has formed the building and sustains it with His life and that is Christ Himself.

This in no way denigrates this living building, the redeemed of Christ we call the church, it simply places everyone in their proper place and role. Why would anyone worship or elevate the building when all the credit goes to the builder?

In the same way, we should never give the world the impression that the church is somehow the primary focus, when it is the One who has built the church with His very life as He went to the cross. The nails which went into His hands and feet are the very nails which helped to make up this building and hold it together.

The blood that was poured from Christ is the blood that seeps into the crevices of every part of this building. And Christ's life given for us is the life that cannot be fully appreciated until we begin to see that for the seed to grow it must first die. But when God causes it to have life, what a great seed it becomes as it grows into not just a building, but a kingdom through the resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

The imagery of a field and a building is meant to give us a sense of the life that dwells in both. Crops are produced in a field. People

dwell in buildings. And what our Lord is trying to convey to these Corinthian believers is that they are part of an on-going work by God Himself.

Yes, His agents include people like Paul and people like you and me. But, to the extent that we are His servants the real objective is to bring glory to the One creating life and sustaining life in this field and in this building.

This is exactly what Jesus tells us in the gospel of John.

JOH 15:1-5 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Jesus makes it clear that we are the fruit of His labor of redemption on our behalf. To be connected to Christ is to have life and that life will bear fruit. But that life is meant to bear fruit within the context of the building in which He places that fruit, which is the body of Christ.

This is why we are connected to the body. This is why it's so important not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, not just being with each other on a Sunday morning, as important as that may be, but being connected and involved in each other's lives to help each other grow up in this field to produce the kind of fruit only Christ can produce, He being the vine and we being the branches.

To be part of this field or this living building is not just a status symbol. It is the very reason we exist. No longer can we consider just pleasing ourselves because with life comes responsibility. Paul understood this responsibility and went to places like Corinth because he knew that Christ wanted to bring life there too.

And now, Christ desires to bring life here to Port Charlotte and the surrounding areas through a little building and a little field called Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte. Does this mean that He can't and won't do it through other churches in the area? Of course not. And

we should pray that He does. But we are not part of those local bodies, though we are connected in the Spirit.

Christ has made us a unique family which is part of the bigger family of God in Christ. But each local family is given privileges and the unique role of reaching different people with the same message of hope found in Christ.

But it's as we consider the life we have in Christ that we begin to see the Lord at work in our midst. And with thankful hearts we look to the Lord and ask, how can we serve you today Lord? How can we minister to each other today and those around us who are hurting or who don't know you?

Paul puts it into perspective when he writes, "so then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (COL 2:6-7)

It's our thankfulness for this life in Christ which our Lord is looking for. And this thankfulness is demonstrated in the fruit of the Spirit which is the fruit of the field God has made us. It is thankfulness in the abilities we have as a house which is alive and sings forth the praises of God who is building us up into a mighty kingdom for His glory.

HEB 3:6 "Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

1PE 2:4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone -rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

This is the house that Christ built and is continuing to build as we love Him and serve Him with thankful hearts realizing that we have a purpose, not just to look pretty as this house sits on the corner gathering dust, but to be a house which is active and alive and seeking to rest on the ground of people's hearts with the life we have in Christ.

We are the field of Christ with the fruit of His Spirit, but we must never forget that there is another field we are to look to and that's the one our Lord is bringing life to.

JOH 4:35-37 "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true."

May we be sowing and reaping to the glory of God. And may we be found faithful servants remembering that our reward is in the labor, and may God be found true and faithful to bring the results to His glory. Amen.