

# ANSWER SIX: SEEING WHO MINISTERS REALLY ARE 1 CORINTHIANS 03:05–09

## *Introduction*

The Corinthian church was severely divided. The division focused primarily upon the former preachers of the church: Peter, Paul, and Apollos. The ministers themselves were not involved; it was the carnal believers in the church causing the problem. Some liked Peter and his preaching better and felt he was doing more for the Lord; others felt the same about Paul and Apollos.

The issue of which preacher was best and is best for a church is always a critical issue. The reason is simply understood: every believer has his *favourite minister*, the minister who led him to the Lord or to a deeper commitment, or ministered to him and his family, or who really spoke to his heart when he preached. A minister who becomes deeply involved in a person's life is bound to mean a great deal to that person. This needs to be understood; however, something else needs to be understood as well. Believers must not...

- pit one minister against another.
- exalt one minister over another.
- focus upon one minister's gifts and ignore the gifts of others.
- talk about and emphasize one minister over another.
- favour one minister over another.
- form a clique around a minister.

This had happened to the Corinthian church. Apparently they were trying to determine what kind of minister was best for them and their church. The discussions had flowed over into the homes and social gatherings, and the opinions had become so strong that cliques were actually forming and arguing against each other.

This passage gives the sixth answer to division within a church: seeing who ministers really are. This is a forceful message, a message that must be understood by both the church and its believers.

- I. Ministers are servants (v. 5).
  - II. Ministers are nothing in comparison to God (vv. 6-7).
  - III. Ministers are one — equal in God's eyes (v. 8).
  - IV. Ministers are co-workers with God (v. 9).
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## **I. 1 Corinthians 03: 05 Ministers, Servants of God**

Ministers of God are servants. The word “servants” (*diakonoi*) means a minister, an attendant or a waiter on tables. The stress is upon the lowly status of the service. Ministers are not *lords* over God’s flock and church; they are the lowly servants. They are the servants of God and the servants of God’s people. Two points of servanthood are stressed.

1. Ministers are only instruments of God. They are only the servants “through whom you came to believe.” To repeat, ministers are not the *lord* of people’s lives. They are not the ones whom believers are to praise nor upon whom believers are to be focused. God is to be the focus of attention, word and loyalty. No minister created the message of the gospel; God did. No minister saves the believer; God does. No minister leads a person to believe; God does. The minister of God is only the Lord’s instrument and servant, not the Lord.

**John 13:14** *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*

**John 21:16** *Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

**Rom 1:9** *God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you.*

**1 Tim 1:12** *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

**2 Tim 1:11** *And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

2. Ministers can help people *only* as God gifts them. The gifts of the ministry are not natural abilities and endowments. The gifts to proclaim the gospel and to minister to people are not of the preacher. They are spiritual gifts *given only by God*, and the minister *can only serve effectively* when God gives him the gifts of His Spirit. Therefore, the man, the minister himself as a person, has nothing in which the people can glory. The gifts are of God and of God alone; therefore, the people are to focus their thoughts and praise upon God alone. (See *Spiritual Gifts*, Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-11; Eph. 4:11.)

**Mat 25:15** *“To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”*

**Rom 12:6** *We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*

**1 Cor 4:7** *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

**1 Cor 12:4** *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

*Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.*

## **II. 1 Corinthians 03:06–07 Honour God, not Ministers**

Ministers of God are nothing in comparison to God (v.7). What does such a strong statement mean? Simply this: no minister has any cause for glory or praise or honour or recognition. There is no room, no reason for a minister to feel pride and self-satisfaction; no reason for a person or a people to idolize and follow a minister; no reason for a people to make a minister the cause of favouritism or of strife and division. Respect the minister, yes. Love him, yes. Esteem him ever so highly, yes; for the minister has an impossible task, the most difficult task upon earth. Consider any profession. If a man had to *speak at a conference* before one or two hundred of his professional peers, how much time would he take out of his weekly work schedule to prepare for his speaking engagement? What if he had to speak to the same group two times — three times — *all in the same week*? Just imagine! How much time would he have to take out of his regular duties to prepare? And not only that. What if the professional had to look after, care for, and minister to everyone of his professional peers of the conference — personally minister every time...

- one of them got sick and went to the hospital.
- one of their family members was hospitalized.
- a serious problem arose.
- counselling was needed.
- a major committee met.

And on top of this, the professional had to manage the conference, its committees, schedules, finances, building programs, whatever came up. And still more. He had to constantly be out visiting and enlisting new people to attend and join the conference.

Again, respect the minister of God. Love and care for him, for his call and task are impossible. But he is not to be idolized and followed as though he is the founder of your faith. A picture from farming shows exactly what our attitude toward ministers is to be. One minister of God planted the seed of God's Word in our lives. Another minister comes along and waters the seed. All the ministers that cross our paths contribute to our lives. They contribute either the seed of the gospel or the water of the Word. But note: it is God who gives the increase. No minister can make the seed grow. When dealing with growth, there is only one thing that makes anything grow:

=> energy            => force            => power

Growth is not caused by a man's hands. Spiritual growth is activated by God's energy, force and power alone.

=> The minister who plants is nothing (v. 7).

=> The minister who waters is nothing (v. 7).

=> God who gives the increase is all (v. 7).

Therefore, glorify and talk about God. Praise God and lift His name up, not the name of a minister. Whatever gifts the minister has are of God; and whatever planting and watering the minister did was by God's call and strength; and whatever growth was experienced was due to God. God alone is worthy to be followed; therefore, follow God, not a minister. Respect him and care for him and highly esteem him, for he labours abundantly for your sake. But honour and praise and follow God.

***Rom 15:5-6** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

***1 Cor 6:20** You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

***2 Th 1:11-12** With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

***Psa 29:2** Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.*

***Psa 34:3** Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.*

***Psa 57:5** Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.*

***Psa 107:32** Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.*

***Psa 145:5** They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*

***Isa 25:1** O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.*

### **III. 1 Corinthians 03:08 Ministers are One and Equal**

Ministers are one; they are equal in God's eyes. And they are to be seen *as one* and *equal* in the eyes of the church and its believers. Note two significant points.

1. Both the sower and the edifier, both he who plants and he who waters, are *emphatically said to be one*. All ministers are called...
  - by the same Lord.
  - to the same office: the office of minister.

- to the same work: to serve God's church.
- to stand accountable before God and before God alone.

There is a spiritual unity between ministers. The work of the one who plants cannot be done without the work of the one who waters. Both are absolutely essential. They are not rivals, working against each other. They are planters and waterers, planting and watering lives for God. God called and uses them as He wills and He places them where He wants. If the church and its believers exalt or pit one minister against another, they are going against God's purpose for His gospel and the church.

**Rom 12:5** *So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

**Eph 4:1-6** *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

**Eph 4:11-13** *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

2. Each minister of God is personally responsible to God. Each man is to be rewarded for what he does, not for what another minister does. A man uses his own gifts; he does not try to use someone else's gifts nor to be like someone else. God gave him specific gifts for special purposes, so he diligently labours to use his gifts as *God desires*. In fact, the minister is to be rewarded for how well he uses his gifts. Therefore, trying to be like another minister is not his task. His task is to be who God called him to be and to do as God gifts him to do.

Note: the minister shall be judged for his labour, not for what men may term *success*.

**Mat 25:22-23** *“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”*

**1 Pet 4:11** *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

#### **IV. 1 Corinthians 03:09 Ministers, Co-workers with God**

Ministers are co-workers with God. Three striking points are declared in this verse.

1. God is the source of all in the church. This is seen in the Greek text. God's name comes first in this verse three different times:

=> "For we are God's fellow workers."

=> "You are God's field."

=> "You are God's building."

All is of God: God is all in all. He is the Source of all that concerns the church: the source of both its ministers and its people. Neither the ministers nor the people are to be exalted or praised above one another. God alone is worthy of our attention and thought, our glory and honour, our worship and praise, our service and ministry.

2. Ministers are co-workers, and they work together with God. They work with God, carrying out His will and doing what He wants done. Their concern is not what men think and want. Their mission is to serve right along by the side of God Himself.

**Mat 9:37-38** *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

**John 4:35-36** *"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. 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."*

**Mark 16:20** *Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

**Acts 20:24** *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

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

**2 Cor 6:1** *As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.*

**1 Th 2:8** *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

**Thought 1.** Note that a *labourer* who does not labour is a paradox. A farmer who does not labour does not receive the reward at harvest time. There is nothing to receive.

**1 Cor 15:58** *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

**2 Tim 4:5** *But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

**Luke 12:48** *“But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”*

3. The church is God’s field and building. The church is to bear fruit, and it is to make new additions to its structure. A field does not exist to lie unused. It exists to bear a harvest. The same is true of a building that is supposed to have additions added to it. The building will not have additions — not the kind of additions it should have — if it becomes unsafe for the contractor (minister) to work within its walls.

The church as a field must let the one who plants and the one who waters do their work or else...

- the field of the church lies useless to God.
- the building of the church lies unused for God.

**Thought 1.** Both ministers and believers are workers together with God. All have a part in God’s church and the crying need is for all to cooperate in building together.

**Mat 7:24-25** *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”*

**1 Cor 3:11** *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

**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, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

**1 Tim 6:19** *In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

**2 Tim 2:19** *Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”*

**1 Pet 2:6** *For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ■*