



## Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011

**Sermon:** Rev Dr André J Groenewald

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Paul is writing to a divided congregation in Corinth. In his letter to the Corinthian church he makes a distinction between people of the flesh – meaning the world, and people of the Spirit. He says to the Corinthian Christians that they act like people of the flesh and not like people who have received God's Spirit.

Ancient writers often compared the unskilled in knowledge to babes who had to start out with the basics, with milk. Paul intends the image to evoke all that it can; he portrays himself as mother or wet nurse. Teachers always expected students to start with basics but also expected them to progress past basics. He expected them to be past the stage of "babies in faith" to be much more spiritual. But they are not.

He then gives his reasons why he thinks they are still "people of the flesh". They follow the Greek culture by portraying their heroes or leaders as gods. They are arguing about who is more important: Paul or Apollos. Now Paul is saying to them: "If you follow humans, then you are not divine; and you are not following the Spirit of God. And when you worship God's servant more than God, then you are people of the flesh and not the people who are filled by God's Spirit.

It is all about God sending his servants. Some have the skills to plant the seeds, others to water them and look after them but in the end it is God who lets them grow. And in the end everything must be done to the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Everything must be done in a community spirit of fellowship in the field of God.

But who was this Apollos? He was a Jewish Christian from Alexandria who appears also in the narrative of Acts chapter 18 verse 24 to 19 verse 1. According to Acts, he possessed great skills in Greek rhetoric and had already learned much about Jesus when he arrived in Ephesus and began speaking in the synagogue. His abilities soon brought him to the attention of the Christians, Priscilla and Aquila, who gave him further instruction in the Christian faith. Apollos then left Ephesus to go to Corinth. According to one ancient text (the Codex Bezae), he was received with enthusiasm in Corinth. While in Corinth, he became acquainted with Paul. When divisions arose in the church at Corinth, Apollos was admired by some Christians as a greater authority than Paul, perhaps because of his reputation as an orator.

Apollos apparently did not encourage this sentiment: after going back to Ephesus, he resisted Paul's invitation to pay another visit to Corinth. Brief mention of Apollos is made again in Titus 3:13.

It seems clear that Apollos like Paul did not bother about the quarrels of the divided congregation!

The message: God sends his “servants” to lead his flock. He is the Sender and they are the messengers. The flock must worship God and respect the authority of the messengers when they speak from HIS word. But they are not gods or heroes. They are messengers!

## **Sermon**

The text verses for the sermon are: *“<sup>8</sup> The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”*

Paul made a big difference between the Christians of the “flesh” and those of the Spirit. The Christians of the flesh worry about non sense (two words) - things that do not matter at all like leadership struggles and power games inside the church. The Christians of the Spirit are people who are focussed on the things that really matter like the purpose and nature of the church, people who know that the church belongs to the Triune God and that He equips and leads the church into the future.

Sometimes we journey between the two stages of being “fleshly” or worldly and spiritually. Sometimes we can be so worldly when it comes to our faith. We can so easily be lured in to believe that the church is all about us and our ideas. We can even think that we are the people that give others faith and hope while the opposite is really true. It is not about us or our ideas. The church – you and me is daily directed and lead by God. It is only God through his Spirit that provides us with faith to trust Him in all circumstances. Yes sometimes God works miracles even despite our existence, despite all our efforts!

Our reading warns us to be careful and cautious. It is not the church or its leaders that make faith “grow” or let it “mature”. It is God who is responsible for creating the fields for us to work and serve in. It is God who makes it possible for us as His messengers to work in His field or building site, the world.

Have you ever been to a building site before?

Well, it is not the best sight to see. Rubble, cement and building equipment are everywhere. But amidst the chaos you can see the progress of new houses and buildings being built. You can feel the excitement as one after another building is completed. You experience the value of a good team of skilled workers working together for one common cause namely to finish the building project. I guess that is exactly what Paul was talking about.

We are also busy living our lives on a big “building site, namely the world”. Amidst the chaos and uncertainty, God’s miracles happen each moment of everyday around us before us and in us. We can see the progress and change in people’s lives made possible by God’s Spirit. We can see the miracles of people who discover the faith,

hope and love of God. We can also see people willing to help make this world a better place.

As followers of Christ we must be like the builders working together for the one common cause, namely the enhancement of God's kingdom. We must encourage one another with the grace of God. We must act with compassion towards others who feel like the rubble of the building site or in other words the world. Every one of us has a task to fulfil:

You can be the cement mixer, meaning that you are the one that brings people of faith together, making them feel welcome and accepted,

You can be the bricklayer, meaning you can be the one who help others to build their faith and trust in the Lord,

You can be the electrician, meaning you can with your enthusiasm encourage other Christians to let the Light of Christ shine everywhere,

You can be the plumber, meaning you can help other people with their basic needs;

You can be the carpenter, meaning you can help other people to have doors open to the world,

You can be the fitter of the roof, meaning you can provide other people with a shelter in times of struggle, strife and difficulties,

You can be the cleaner, meaning that you clear the rubble from other people's difficulties,

You can be the manager, listening to the needs of other people,

You can be the investor, helping others through your contribution to see the loving hand of God,

You can be the architect, planning new opportunities for other people of faith to equip themselves to be the Light of the world.

If you are feeling like rubble or just raw material, allow God to change you into a new building where you are an example of His creativeness and love. If you are feeling you are not important in His eyes, remember that is not true because He called you this morning to this church!

Amen.