

1 Corinthians 3:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

Analysis

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase (ἡύξανεν ὁ θεός, *ēuxanen ho theos*)—Paul introduces the agricultural metaphor that dominates verses 6-9. *Ephyteusa* (ἐφύτευσα, 'I planted') describes Paul's founding evangelism; *epotisen* (ἐπότισεν, 'watered') represents Apollos's follow-up teaching. Yet *ēuxanen* (imperfect tense: 'was giving growth') attributes all spiritual increase to God's continuous agency.

This three-part division—planter, waterer, life-giver—appears throughout Scripture. Isaiah 55:10-11 promises God's word will accomplish its purpose; Jesus describes himself as the true vine sustained by the Father's care (John 15:1). Human instrumentality is real but derivative; divine causality is ultimate and effectual. The Reformed doctrine of effectual calling rests here: preachers sow and water, but only God's Spirit regenerates dead hearts (John 3:8, 6:44). Any fruitfulness in ministry is grace from start to finish, leaving no room for ministerial pride or partisan loyalties based on human effectiveness.

Historical Context

Paul's metaphor drew on agrarian imagery universally understood in the ancient world. Yet it also reflected biblical precedent—Isaiah's vineyard (Isaiah 5), Jesus's parables of sowers and seeds (Mark 4). The Corinthians, living in a major commercial port, would have known agriculture secondhand; Paul's point was that whether planting or watering, human effort is meaningless without divine blessing.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of Christian service are you tempted to take credit for 'growth' that only God can give?
2. How does recognizing God as the sole source of spiritual increase free you from both pride in success and despair in apparent failure?
3. What does this verse teach about the necessity and limits of human effort in evangelism and discipleship?

Interlinear Text

ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς
I **have planted** **Apollos** **watered** **but** ^{G3588} **God**
G1473 G5452 G625 G4222 G235 G2316

ἥξανε·
gave the increase
G837

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 11:25 (Parallel theme): The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (References God): But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

1 Corinthians 9:1 (Parallel theme): Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?

Isaiah 61:11 (References God): For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Acts 11:18 (References God): When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Acts 19:1 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,