

1 Corinthians 3:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Analysis

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth—Paul draws the radical conclusion from verse 6: human laborers are nothing (οὐδέν ἐστιν, *ouden estin*). This is not false humility but theological precision. **But God that giveth the increase** (ἀλλ' ὁ αὐξάνων θεός, *all' ho auxanōn theos*)—the present participle emphasizes God's ongoing, active causation of growth. He alone is 'something,' the sole source of life and fruitfulness.

This assertion demolishes all ministerial pride and partisan devotion to leaders. Planting and watering are necessary activities, but they possess no inherent power to generate life. Only God quickens dead souls (Ephesians 2:1), opens blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:6), and grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). The preacher's role is indispensable as instrument but utterly impotent as cause. This theology protects against two errors: despising faithful ministers (they are God's chosen means) and idolizing gifted ministers (they are merely means, not causes). Paul's 'nothing' echoes Jesus: 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:5).

Historical Context

In a culture that glorified rhetorical power and personal charisma (the sophist tradition), Paul's assertion that planters and waterers are 'nothing' was countercultural and offensive. Greek and Roman society honored great orators as culture-shapers; Paul insists preachers are disposable instruments whose only value derives from God's sovereign use of them.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's 'nothing' verdict on human ministers challenge contemporary celebrity pastor culture?
2. In what ways are you tempted to evaluate ministry by human skill (eloquence, charisma) rather than divine blessing?
3. What freedom comes from recognizing you are 'nothing' in yourself but may be used by the God who 'gives the increase'?

Interlinear Text

ὥστε	οὔτε	ὁ	φυτεύων	ἐστίν	τι	οὔτε	ὁ
So	neither	G3588	he that planteth	is	any thing	neither	G3588
G5620	G3777		G5452	G2076	G5100	G3777	
ποτίζων	ἀλλ'	ὁ	αὐξάνων	θεός			
he that watereth	but	G3588	that giveth the increase	God			
G4222	G235		G837	G2316			

Additional Cross-References

John 15:5 (Parallel theme): I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Galatians 6:3 (Parallel theme): For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Psalms 115:1 (Parallel theme): Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (Parallel theme): And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org