

God's Math

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

There are two operative words in this text: the first is the word one; the second is the word own. The two roles of planting and watering when added up are one. It is what God does, no matter how many plant and how many water. God makes things grow. One plus one equals one—that is God's mathematics! Ten plus ten equals one; one hundred plus one hundred equals one: God, who makes things grow.

There are a number of points I want to explore in this text.

The first is teamwork. The Oxford English Dictionary defines team as “a set of people working together.” Why? They are one. This will mean that each member surrenders a high profile. For those who have an ego problem this is quite a task! You say, “Well, this won't apply to me; I don't have a problem with ego.” Don't you? Let me ask you a question: If you look at a group photograph you are in, whose face do you look for first?

So the operative word, one, leads to another word, surrender—of seven things:

1. Identity
2. Independence
3. Individuality
4. Inflexibility
5. Indifference
6. Inequality
7. Personal interest

Incidentally, it is not a question whether or not we will result in one, because God will see to that. What is sobering is how this oneness will happen. Either we will do it voluntarily and get a reward, or we do it involuntarily and suffer loss.

The second point in this verse is talent. The man who plants—is that your talent? The man who waters—is that your talent? Planting and watering are metaphors that refer to the kind of ministry that God gives to particular Christians. Now that does not mean that they have to be one or the other, for Paul was both. The point is that each Christian has a gift, and all of these combined together add up to one.

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