



So let's review for a moment what Paul has been doing in the book of 1 Corinthians. Now remember, Paul is writing this book from Ephesus and he's heard about what's been churning off the rumor mill. There were some rumblings going...

And some of those tremors had to do with Paul himself. Paul is too simple. He's not really interacting with the scholars and influencers we care about. Paul's a nice guy but he just doesn't provide us with the level of advanced instruction in wisdom that we'd like. Paul needs to be a little more eloquent like Apollos. He needs to interact with the philosophers more and give us something novel and new and something that really stimulates our imagination. The stuff Paul likes to focus on frankly embarrasses us sometimes.

And some agreed with these criticisms and started gathering around this teacher or that teacher. And jealousy and strife and division was the result. And Paul gets wind of this and says, "Listen I see that there are quarrels among you." And those quarrels have nothing to do with the quality of teaching. They are stemming from a messed

up understanding of wisdom and power.

You are building little personality cults around people who you think are powerful or wise by worldly standards.

And then he launches into this section that we've been in now for several weeks where he tries to get at the nature of true wisdom and true power by inverting wisdom and power as they know it. He helps us to see that power is found in surrender, strength is to be found in submission, wisdom is to be found in weakness.

Men are not the source of true power and wisdom. They can never be. Men are just cardboard signs that point to the true source.

So chapter 1 and 2 are all about disenchanting them from the wisdom of men and disillusioning them from the power of men.

But the question remains, if men do not belong in the roll of wisdom dispensers then what roll do they have? That is the subject addressed at the beginning of chapter 3. The way Paul answers this question is by way of analogy. Let's read the full section this morning so you can get the analogy in your head.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9, But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh.

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.  
So neither he who plants nor he who waters is  
anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who  
plants and he who waters are one, and each will  
receive his wages according to his labor.

So what roll does Paul have? What roll does Apollos have? They are gardening shovels. They are tools, that till and water and weed. They are merely instruments. They are rakes.

So we could reduce this passage to three principles of gardening tools.

# THREE PRINCIPLES OF GARDEN TOOLS

- The usefulness of a rake is not in its color

## **The Usefulness of a Rake is NOT in its Color**

Paul says, listen, you guys are assessing the quality of the preacher, or worse still, the worth of the preacher, based on your human, worldly standards.

This would be like trying to assess the quality of a rake based on its brand or what kind of packaging it came in or what sort of stickers it had on the handle or whether the steel shaft had glitter on it or not.

They were using all the wrong metrics to assess the worthiness of the minister. They are taking the values of the world and importing straight into the church.

Their measuring stick was human wisdom. And believe me, all these temptations are ours today. How does the world calculate success?

- profit margin and gross income
- number of people in the organization

- market share
- how high books climb on best seller list
- how many hits their videos get
- how many influential people they interact with.

Do you not hear people valuing or devaluing ministries based on these exact same metrics? Are you not being merely human? You are assessing the preacher and the ministry exactly the way the world does.

Now this is a criticism, but believe me, it's understandable. The world's measuring stick is the one we have been handed and it takes incredibly conscious effort to drop it. In fact, most of the time we are unconsciously using the world's measuring stick without even realizing it. I have been guilty of this kind of immaturity and even though I can't see it, I'm sure I'm still guilty of it.

So how can we fix something we are unconscious of. Here's a help? Every time, whether I see it in myself or whether I see it in others, there's this tell-tell sign. There's a tell-tell sign that we are worshiping the stickers and glitter on the rakes....here's what it is, when you see in yourself or in others a spirit of jealousy, strife and divisiveness. Look at verse 3.

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

In other words, if you have a spirit of jealousy and strife, realize that this came from using the wrong measuring stick. Jealousy only comes from using the wrong measuring stick and I want to show you why we can be definitive about that. Follow the reasoning here:

The word jealousy here can also be translated zeal. Paul said in Philippians 3:6 speaking of his credentials.

Philippians 3:6, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;  
as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

That's the same word and the idea is you are super passionate about your perspective, so much so that you will defend it, you will fight for it, you will protect it.

Now seeing this usage, perhaps you can begin to see how the word zealous and jealous can almost be interchangeable.

Think about it. If you are really zealous for something, you'll do anything to get it. You protect it, defend it, you love it. You feel almost a sense of responsibility to broadcast how valuable this thing is. You begin to criticize or downplay or subtly devalue other people's perspectives. That's zealous.

Conversely, when you are really zealous about something and you look over and someone has exactly what you are looking for and you can't get it, what's the response? Jealousy. It's just zeal without the possession of what you love.

Zeal is good. Jealousy for the right thing is good. It's the misplaced

zeal that poisons.

So in ministry misplaced zeal, is wanting really badly, passionately, zealously for the church to be powerful and wise in the eyes of the world.

For example, if you make a church about having an awesome band and you look over and the other church has more talented musicians what will you feel? If you make church about numbers and you look over and someone else is growing and you are shrinking what will you feel? Jealousy? Why. Because they have what you don't.

- If you can't rejoice at someone else's ministry succeeding
- If you can't rejoice and someone else's kids succeeding
- If you can't celebrate someone else's successes you have drunk the poison. Jealousy flowers when we care about things God doesn't.

A Christian can never be jealous in the sense we are talking about because we have unrestricted access to the one thing we ought to be most zealous for, Jesus Christ. If you want more, it's there for the taking. The object of desire is freely available at all times. There is no limit to it.

This is why it's a perfect indicator of misplaced zeal when we feel jealous. You can't possibly feel jealous of someone loving Jesus. Loving Jesus is infinitely available. If you want him, he's right there.

You see this is exactly what was going on in the case of the Corinthians. They were zealous/jealous about the wrong things. They loved the world and measured success in terms of the world. They were, as Paul says, merely human.

Are we merely human? Could Paul launch this criticism at us?

How do we test? Well ask yourself this. What do you point to as evidence for success in your own life or in the lives of your kids or in the ministries you are part of?

Is the measuring stick worldliness? Do you find yourself jealous because others have more of the world than you and want that? Better looking? More stylish? Better grades? Better schools? More money? Better jobs? Better houses or cars? Better social circles? More friends on Facebook?

Any time, any time, you have jealousy, it's a dead ringer. You're into rake handle colors. You're into brands. You're into glitter and party slogans. You're into the shape of watering buckets. You're measuring things God can't possibly care about. Any time you have a spirit of divisiveness. Any time there is strife, it's a dead indicator you care about something God doesn't.

## **THREE PRINCIPLES OF GARDEN TOOLS**

- The usefulness of a rake is not in it's color
- A rake cannot do the job of a watering bucket

So certainly it's foolish to judge the quality of rakes and watering buckets by the glitter and stickers. Another way we error is by trying to make rakes into watering buckets or watering buckets into rakes. Paul says, I was a rake. I planted. Apollos was a watering bucket. He watered. They were both needed. But often times what happens is that we so appreciate the planting ministry and we can see the importance of it, we forget that someone with a totally different set of gifts is just as needed as a waterer.

The physical shape of the first tool was needed but it's almost worthless to accomplish the equally needed task to which the second tool is perfectly suited.

Try plowing a field with a hose. Try watering a field with a plow.

But so often we try to demand that hoses become plows or plows become hoses. Martin Luther was a needed plow. But I'm just saying, I wouldn't want Martin Luther in charge of the nursery here. We need all the gardening tools.

And you know what the most common error is? If you are a rake, what do you want everyone to become? A rake. If you are a hose what do you want everyone to become? A hose.

You look in the mirror and think, this is the sharpest most important tool in the shed. Let me just remind us that nobody in this room is above this. If you find yourself human then you are prone to trying to force people to become like you.

I think one of the most common ways this expresses itself is actually in worship. There's a temptation here to first of all measure by things God doesn't care about and secondly to make other people become

like you. And strife can so quickly creep in.

- We've sung this song too much. Not enough diversity. ;I'm not familiar with any of these songs. Too much diversity.
- This is one of those 7/11 songs, same 7 words sung 11 times. Feels too fluffy, not enough content. ; I don't like songs that have so many words in them.
- We spend too much attention trying to get things just right. Feels too professional. Nor professional enough.
- I like hymns; I like contemporary
- Why don't we have more electric guitar; why do we have it all?
- Volume is too loud; Volume is too soft.
- Transitions are too wordy. Transitions aren't wordy enough.
- Too many songs. Too few songs.

I hear all of these things. Where do all these differences come from? Very often, they come from differences in gifts that we need to be challenged to appreciate.

Healthy worship is always going to be the coming together of the giftedness of the entire body.

- Some will encourage more emotive and expressive.
- Some will encourage modes of praise, others modes of humility and confession, others directing our attention to the character of God in awe and worship, others celebration.
- Others will encourage cognitive engagement.
- Others will encourage emotional engagement.
- Others still will encourage our connection to the past.
- Others will encourage singing fresh songs that engage our culture where it's at.

Paul says, one plants and another waters. He who plants and he who waters are one. What does Paul mean when he says they are one? This is not a call for universal tolerance of anything anyone

wants to do. It is a call to realize that we individually can never be complete. He means that these different tools in the garden function differently but both are essential, both are united in the singular goal of providing the right conditions for that seed to grow.

If you just planted but never watered the seed would dry up; but similarly if you just watered but never planted the result would be the same - the seed would dry up.

We are all individually like cars that are out of alignment and we pull consistently in a direction that needs to be corrected by other giftedness in the body.

Translate this to leaders in the church.

- Some of the rakes in God's church are really gifted at study and reasoning. They can make things so clear. They can dig so deep into the languages. These are the seminary professors and the scholars and the linguists. And we need that. But honestly, sometimes these guys are crusty and super boring.
- And so you need a different shaped rake to translate this. People who can take this truth and inspire you with it. But maybe these people are not good at outreach.
- Now instead of a rake you need a watering pail, a guy whose heartbeat is hitting the streets and interacting with those who would never in a million years darken the door of a church.
- But he might not be as good with counseling so you need a guy to personalize the gospel help to the individual
- But he's not as good at missions. And the missions guy isn't good with kids.

So you have a plow, a rake, a watering bucket, a fertilizer spreader. But we are united toward the same goal. Please appreciate that.

It's easy to look at any strength in a ministry and use that strength by which you criticize every other ministry. A lot of time this happens if you've been in a church for decades and you get really sick of the weakness of that particular church. And then you look at another ministry who actually excels in the area you are weak. It's easy to criticize.

I remember talking with a friend who was considering changing churches. And I literally laughed out loud when he told me the reason why. He said, "Yeah, all our church ever talks about is outreach. But what about the families and personal growth?" And I thought that's so funny. We are probably the opposite of that. We put a lot of attention on families and personal growth and we are weak in outreach.

Every ministry that is strong in one area is going to have its corresponding weakness. And that is not a criticism; it's a function of design. Can't we appreciate the fact that a rake can't be a watering pail? A hose doesn't make a good plow. It's not made to be. It has the wrong shape. We need Martin Luther's, Bonheifers, Joni Erickson Tattas, Eric Littles all contributing their piece. Why not rather say we need one another and rejoice that another's strength is correcting our weakness rather than jealousy, factions and division.

## **Paul's Point - I can't address you a spiritual people**

So Paul's point is clear. Let's step back and summarize what Paul is saying in these first two points: #1 insisting that every garden implement needs to be the same shape, or #2 judging the worth of the gardening tool based on glitter and stickers prevents us from

being able to be fed by solid food. Paul says, "Your mental framework is preventing you from being addressed in any sort of meaningful way."

That's why Paul says, "I could not address you as spiritual people." I want to measure the wisdom of God together. I want to show you just how amazing he is. I want to gaze at him together in awe. But how can we together measure the wisdom of God when you're measuring all the wrong things. It's like a teacher assessing how well a student knows his geometry by looking at what sort of clothing brands he wore to school, how he did his hair and how well he can dribble a basketball. What does that have to do with geometry? We aren't even speaking the same language here my friend.

And so because they were infatuated with glitter, Paul says, "I had to feed you milk. What is the milk he's referencing. "You might think, since we've been talking about it so much, that the milk represents the wisdom of the world and meat represents the wisdom of God. But it can't mean that. If milk = wisdom of the world then that would mean that Paul preached the wisdom of the world to infants in Christ and the wisdom of God to advanced Christians. That makes no sense.

So what is this spiritual milk that Paul was forced to feed to immature Christians who were enamored with worldly wisdom and worldly power? Spiritual milk would be those very few things you can appeal to a believer who is under the influence of the flesh.

Let me try for just a moment to explain how this might work.

When we are under the influence of sin, we can still be taught, but the scope of what we can be taught is so minimal. So little of it really

sinks in.

For example, our theme for the year is Treasuring Christ. We have preached several sermons on that his year and the point is always the same: Jesus is an everlasting source of joy that we want to treasure.

This statement to a Christian whose is in love with the world, means very little. It's just milk to him.

- It certainly contains food for angels.
- The truth expressed in these propositions may be expanded indefinitely.
- You couldn't plumb the depths.
- It would nourish the martyr in prison.
- It will infuse the sick woman on her deathbed with true hope.

But until a believer can release his grip on the world, he will never be able to appreciate those words. He can understand the words, but it doesn't feed him.

Have you ever tried to talk to someone about something you love (hunting, or your specialized career, or a hobby like painting or music), but you can tell that they have no experience with it. They don't have any of the categories. So you are reduced to talking about it in such a simplistic way. That's what Paul is saying. Oh, I just want to talk to you more meaningfully but you are just stuck thinking like the world. You are still worldly. That is, you are under the influence of the corrupt nature.

Paul says, "Even now I can't address you the way I want to." It's worth asking, is your spiritual dryness because you value the wrong things? Are you just unable to see anything very compelling in the

Scriptures because you can only measure the Scriptures through the measuring stick the world gave you?

Listen, the Scriptures don't have glitter and stickers. So if that's what you're looking for you'll be disappointed 100 percent of the time.

## **Destined for the Shed**

So we've learned that the usefulness of a rake is not in it's color, that a rake cannot do the job of a watering bucket.

Now there's a third principle we learn in this passage.

This point is so important. Paul says.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.  
So neither he who plants nor he who waters is  
anything, but only God who gives the growth.

The POWER of gardening, the source of energy, the living potential is not in the rake. They don't have any power to grow food. The miracle of growth lies entirely outside of the hand of the gardener who holds the rake. The rake puts the seed in the ground and it's job

is over.

## THREE PRINCIPLES OF GARDEN TOOLS

- The usefulness of a rake is not in it's color
- A rake cannot do the job of a watering bucket
- Rakes and watering buckets end up in sheds

Once the seed has been planted, it the tools go back into the garden shed and sit there doing nothing and the growth happens.

Now to be sure, a rake is useful in the process. A gardener reaches for a rake when he has a need for what the rake was designed to do. You don't think of a rake as really all that essential to life until you are asked to spread out 15 yards of top soil. Then all of the sudden that rake becomes your best friend. And then the second your done with that job, you put the rake away and you forget about it.

That's how Paul thinks of himself. Of course rakes are useful. The rakes job is to help create the conditions for growth - conditions for the miracle to occur.

But the cause of growth is far beyond the conditions. We have the saying, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. Similarly you can plant a seed in the ground and water it, but you

can't make it grow. That process is outside your control.

And this is so important for us to keep in mind. We all have shepherding influence. Our job is to create the conditions for growth. Our job is to create greenhouses.

If you are a parent, then your job should be to make that home a greenhouse. Even if you are not a parent, wherever you go, you should be that greenhouse creator so that the seeds of the gospel might grow in those around you.

That's the job of tools to create the conditions. So there's a certain set of responsibility that goes along with being a tool, right? If my kids are not responding well, perhaps the environment isn't right. It's a fair question.

But there's also a certain set of freedoms that go along with being a tool. A shovel can plant a seed but a shovel can't make a seed grow. A shovel also can't water a seed.

Who causes the growth? God. Please put your hope and trust here. God is the one who does that thing you care about - growth. So put your trust there. It's not your job. Pray to the one whose job it is.

Now I know what you are thinking, because I'm thinking it too, "Am I being a good enough shovel? Am I being a good rake?" Have I created the right environment, the perfect greenhouse for my kids to grow?"

Well, let me answer that question for you. No, you're not a good rake. Your greenhouse is terrible just like mine is. This is the miracle of it. When our splintery, lame rakes and drafty greenhouses

happen to provide conditions for growth, God uses it. And when they don't, do you think this thwarts God's plan? Do you think he says, "I wished I could have saved your child but you never planted the seed so I could not make it grow." By no means.

Of course our methods are imperfect. Some rakes are super ugly. Some rakes have broken handles with splinters and aren't as easy to use. Sure some rakes make the job easier and some make it harder. But at the end of the day it's just a binary question. Did the seed make it into the ground. If the seed made it in, then it literally doesn't matter one bit what that rake looked like, what brand it was, what kind of wood the handle was made of. It did the job and now it's job is over.

And you might say, "Well, I don't even know if the seed made it into the ground."

In case you haven't noticed, look around at God's creation. God is pretty good at growing plants without our greenhouses and often in spite of our greenhouses. I've had plenty of experiences where my dumb greenhouse cooked the plant I was trying to grow and the volunteer seed from last year grows up without a single ounce of effort on my part.

Again, Paul is nothing. Apollos is nothing. God causes the growth. Let that free you to do your absolute best and then release the rest to God. Just let God lay you back into the shed so you can pray in that closet.

Often times when we are really eager for growth we end up doing more harm than good. I remember when I was young gardening with my dad and being so eager to see that bean plant sprout. And after

three days nothing happened so I dug down to see what was going on and sure enough it was growing. I saw that it had sprouted and was shooting down roots and a stem was coming up but my meddling with it ended up killing it.

And Paul says, the best place for rakes after the seed has been planted is in the shed. Their life cycle comes to a close.

My parent own a piece of property in Garden Valley that has an old farmstead on it. And the farmer who lived there 100 years ago planted some apple trees and now they are these beautiful giant, old gnarly trees. And every year we pull down hundreds of apples and make apple pies and can apple sauce and it is one of the great delights in our family. We look forward to it every year.

Now in one corner of the property there is a little red shed. And it's filled with mice and cobwebs and I think my kids nightmares live in that shed. If you open it up and let the light go in, it's like a scene from a movie, the light slices in through the stagnant air, everything in the shed is covered in dust. But in the corner of that shed are some of the original garden implaments, splintered, rusted. And I'm sure some of those tools were used to actually plant those trees.

And here's what's crazy. Those rakes and shovels and plows and the farmer who did all that work has all been forgotten. I don't even know his name. I know nothing about him.

But the seed that he planted grew to a tree that now feeds my family. The energy from those apples gets converted into fuel that powers my kids up and down the basketball court and grows them up into men. The shovel is turning into dirt and the life of the tree continues on.

Now what do we praise here? Do we praise the shovel? Do we worship the farmer? My family has not once thought to praise and worship the farmer or the rusty shovel. We have thanked God for the fruit he produced in the tree. We praise God who gives us life and deliciousness in the tree.

When Paul says, he is nothing, he means it. God is he one to be praised. Garden tools have such a short life cycle. The gardener can die and the tools can be tossed into the garbage truck and crunched down to a ball of trash and nothing changes. The plants don't care about the gardener or the shovels. The process of life carries on totally apart from the farmer and his tools.

You can almost hear the rake scraping for some significance, "Well, if it weren't for me the seed would have never been planted." Listen, the seed can be planted by a rake or by a guy tossing an apple out of a car and a deer squashing it into the ground. It can be fertilized by a bag carefully applied by a gardener or by a bear coming and eating the apples and leaving behind his own steamy organic version.

We are nothing. We are tools. The point is God wants his rakes to not think more highly of themselves than they ought. We are all rakes. We are all responsible to plant seeds of truth in our children, in our coworkers, in our family members. And it's important work. Don't minimize it. Seeds that stay on the surface get plucked away by the birds.

But just remember your place in the process. Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

## **Prayer and Response**

## DO YOU WANT TO PRAY?

- Thank the Lord for a blessing
- Pray for your children
- Pray that God helps you apply the sermon
- Confess a sin?
- Pray that God would meet a need?