

FBC Service Sunday September 22, 2024, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 God's Co-Workers

Our text this morning speaks of an amazing partnership – being workers together with God!

Our text from 2nd Corinthians 6 verse 1, says *“We are God's partners.”*

The word **“we”** is a wonderful promise. It tells us you and I can link our human lives with Almighty God and His eternal purpose, and boldly declare, *“We are partners together with God.”*

Not only are we partners with God, but we're also co-workers with each other. *“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Stand firm in the Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.”* (Philippians 1:27, 1 Corinthians 3:6.)

“I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.”

Our lives are intertwined by a maze of human influences, past present and future, outside ourselves and beyond ourselves. We are always dependent on one another.

As we gather here for worship this morning, there is a co - operative experience. Each one of us brings a spirit into this service that spills over to others on the pew.

But the thrilling implication of this text is that God is asking us as co-workers with Him to plant and water. **Any spiritual harvest comes from a joint effort.** He needs not only our faith and worship, but also our active labour and support.

We are dependent on God and He gives the increase.

God can never make a great church out of a body of believers without the active covenant, commitment and willing sacrifice of the members of that church.

Ours indeed is a privileged partnership that in the fellowship of this church, planted so many years ago, we are fellow workers with each other and partners with God.

You gotta love that word “together.” Together, is a great word.

This means being able to work with others in harmony. To help them and let them help you. **Sounds easy doesn't it.** I say, tongue in cheek, surely Christians would never have a dust up.

To my shame as a young believer, it took years for me to learn this lesson the hard way, that ploughing ahead on your own, with a critical judgmental spirit on those who were not as narrow minded as me, was not the way to make friends or influence people.

That's why Paul exhorts the Corinthians to get along with each other because of the great danger of putting a stumbling block in front of folks that could prevent them from coming to Christ. **More Here!**

Even experienced pastors sometimes fall into this danger. They may be exceptional communicators of truth. They may be wonderful creative thinkers and have the very best theological training. But if they can't work in harmony with the ordinary folks in the congregation, that ministry is heading for disaster.

The same applies to the most gifted person in the church.

The Scripture here is clear cut – **We're to be Partners Together with God, in the fellowship of the church.**

Together is the call for us to submerge our individual egos and our lives, into a larger unity of the fellowship of the gospel with other Christians, not only in this church, but in our community.

We are co-workers together with God.

The early disciples were. Acts chapter 2 is an astonishing testimony as to how just how **“together”** they really were.

Acts 2:44 says that *“all the believers met together and shared everything they had.”* Pentecost was possible when they were all together, at one time, in one place, with one spirit, for one purpose.

It tells us that,

- (1) They grew in the faith together as co-workers with God.
- (2) They studied God's Word together. They had a hunger for sound Scripture teaching and preaching. Let this always be the identifying mark of our fellowship, now and in the future
- (3) They spent time together in fellowship.
- (4) They remembered the Lord's Death together in Communion. This was the very heart of their united worship, and it should be the heart and hub of ours.
- (5) They prayed together, recognizing the power and privilege and possibilities of prayer!
- (6) They shared together.
- (7) They rejoiced together as co-workers and partners with God.

God's call for us is a call to be together. He wants His family to share life in harmony and unity with one another. It's one of the most important and significant principles taught in the Bible

After World War 2, a group of German students volunteered to help rebuild an English cathedral that had been severely damaged by German bombs.

As work progressed, they became concerned about a large statue of Jesus, whose arms were outstretched, and beneath which was the inscription: **“Come unto Me.”**

They had particular difficulty trying to restore the hands, which had been completely destroyed. After much discussion, they decided to let the hands remain missing and changed the inscription to: **“Christ has no hands but ours.”** (John MacArthur Jr.)

The work of Jesus Christ in the world is in the hands of those who belong to Him. In that sense, He has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet.

The work of the Gospel message was not given to our politicians to proclaim.

The work of the Gospel message was not given to our teachers to proclaim.

The work of the Gospel message was not given to our service clubs to proclaim.

This message of the gospel was given to only one organization on the face of the earth - the church of Jesus Christ.

That is our message, our only message, and it's the foundational message of all who profess Jesus as Lord.

As partners with God, Paul issues a warning to some who were falling back into a legalistic Christian lifestyle. You can feel the pain in his heart as he warns those who have experienced salvation and the grace of God in the past, not to receive the grace of God in vain. **Verse 1.**

He adamantly declares that this type of lifestyle is vain, and that Christ will profit those individuals nothing.

Grace is more than a spiritual principle that can be learned and unlearned. Grace is a dynamic intervening work of God that is real and tangible. It's a true encounter between a supernatural God and frail humanity.

How do We Receive God's Grace in a Fruitful Way

He says, *"In a favourable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favourable time; behold now is the day of salvation."*

Here Paul quotes from Isaiah when he announced that God was bringing His people out of exile. Can you imagine the people being like, **"Wow, is that ever great news,"** but remaining in exile and not reacting to it? This would be an example of responding to God's grace in vain.

Now you might be asking, "What am I supposed to do in order to receive God's grace in a fruitful way? The Bible is quite clear. **Our part in receiving God's grace through Christ involves:**

- repenting of our sins,
- receiving and accepting God's grace and forgiveness
- entering into this new relationship with God, reading His Word, praying, using our spiritual gifts in the church.

Verse 3 has always been a challenge to me. It challenges us to the very core of our being. *"We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry."*

It's an interesting thing to talk about stumbling blocks.

The gospel can be a stumbling block on its own.

Here Paul states that he and his co-workers place no stumbling block in anyone's path.

What this means is that, even though the gospel message can be hard to grasp for those who don't want to understand, Paul did not add anything to the message to make it even harder to comprehend.

It's so easy isn't it in the church, to use complex words and phrases that make a non-Christian's eyes glaze over. Call it church speak if you will.

We talked at length about this in our Outreach committee meeting a few weeks ago.

How do we present the Gospel faithfully in simple terms to children at our VBS camps and churches?

Think of the explosion of technology terms. Have you found yourself confused by the complexity of all the acronyms and technical terms? You've got your LCD's, LED's, OLED's and quantum dots in TV's alone. Internet. AI. S. Media, SSD Drives. Robotics, Quantum Computing. Front End Development.

Now, those technical terms serve their purpose, but when you use that jargon on the average person, you as might as well be speaking ancient Greek.

It's not any different in faith.

You may have heard people talking about faith or God with strange terms. They might say things like, doxology, justification, sanctification, epistemology, or eschatology just to name a few.

To the non-Christian, these and other terms can be a barrier to coming to Christ, but Paul never used such highfalutin terms. He never let his words become a barrier to Christ, nor did he allow anything else.

He did so, so that his ministry wouldn't be discredited.

Paul made it so much not about him and that much more about Christ, that he removed all the barriers to Jesus.

But let's focus this text on our own lives.

It's a very important thing that we have an awareness of how others see us, that we're careful not to allow anything in our lives turn someone off from becoming a Christian or walking away.

Paul lived continually with that objective in view, so he writes, *"we live in such a way that no fault will be found with our ministry."*

Now people did find fault with him, and plenty of it. As we saw over the last few weeks, he was accused of being a deceiver, of being a phony, a false apostle, of being filled with ambition, pride, and sarcasm.

The point he's making here is that none of them stuck, because his own conscience cleared him. He knew in his heart that these were false accusations, that he'd done nothing to put an obstacle in some one's way that would hinder them coming to Christ, or others to question if their faith was real.

This is a tremendously noteworthy thing about the Apostle Paul. There's a passage in First Thessalonians that is somewhat similar to this: **Take a listen!** 1 Thessalonians 2:3-8

"So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery."

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts.

Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.

As apostles of Christ, we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives too."

As the great apostle travelled about from place to place, the first thing he took care to see was that there was no offense allowed to remain in his life that would cause someone to stumble.

In the previous chapter Paul talked about being a good ambassador, and here we see this idea emerge again. A good ambassador doesn't get in the way but rather represents their cause fairly.

You have likely encountered one of the most common objections to Christianity – a person who calls themselves a Christian and acts as a poor ambassador for Jesus.

We put up stumbling blocks when we don't act according to Jesus' example.

If people see our lives as Christians and don't think that it's any different, and say, why bother? **That is a stumbling block.**

One of the saddest things about our day is the number of prominent Christian leaders who have allowed offensive obstacles to come into their lives that have wrecked their reputation as Christians and set them aside from gospel ministry.

There are so many televangelists and mega-church pastors that live such luxurious lives, showing great wealth and looking down on others. **Their words creep you out and drive many people away from Jesus.** They are not good ambassadors for Christ.

As we see and hear about these prominent people, we have to remember that people who know we are Christians, are looking at us all the time to see how we behave.

Paul lived in this continual awareness that he was being examined by men and women, as though he were on stage and everybody was watching him. **Therefore, he's very careful to see there's no fault found in his ministry.**

He insists that he does everything he can to avoid being a stumbling block.

Here at First Baptist may that always be the cry of our heart. That as partners and co-workers with God the Lord will enable us to be steppingstones rather than stumbling blocks?

That we will be faithful ambassadors willing to give of our time, talents and income.

The forefathers of FBC founded this congregation over 150 years ago so that as partners with God, this church would always be a welcoming place for saint and sinner alike.

That as partners with God, this church would always be a place where the Scriptures are read, and in their reading the voice of Jesus is heard.

That as partners with God, this church would always be a place where you are confronted by the challenge and promise of the Gospel, and your relationship with God.

That as partners with God, this church would always be a place where the message is unashamedly evangelistic.

That as partners with God, this church would proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour, and urge everyone to repent of their sins, believe on Christ, and make a personal commitment of their lives to Him.

Close: God wants us to be light and salt. He wants us to grow and mature as believers. He wants us to work as a team to achieve his purposes. **Successful Christian ministry has always been a team effort.**

We're not a perfect team but we have to work with a team.

Teamwork can achieve great results.

E.G. Have you ever watched a horse pulling contest at one of our county fairs? It's amazing to watch those heavy horses.

I heard of a horse-pulling contest at a county fair, where the first-place horse moved a sled weighing 2000 kg. The runner-up pulled 1800 kg.

The owners of the two horses wondered how much the animals could pull if they worked together. So they hitched them up and loaded the sled.

To everyone's surprise, the horses were able to pull 5450 kg, that's 1650 kg more than if they had gone alone!

Jesus used all kinds of people with different backgrounds in his team to reach the world.

He used a tax collector, physician, fishermen, women, and children. He also used the wealthy, poor, master, slave, passive people, dynamic people in his team.

And he can use us here at First Baptist.

So here's the challenge today: Observe the mission field that God has given us.

How can we serve God best in our community?" Is there more we can do? Don't limit yourself to big things; look also for little ways where you can show faithfulness. **All of us can give and pray!**

Look for ways to plant a seed of grace. Look for ways to honour the Lord. And once you have identified what you can do: Take a step of faith, trust His wisdom and grace, and then get to work as God's partners and fellow workers.

"Stand firm in the Spirit, striving together as partners with God for the faith of the gospel." **Philippians 1:27**