

# Markers of a Missional Person

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Date: 08 November 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please be seated. Let me encourage you, if you have a few Bible in front of you, to keep it open to this very rich passage, 2 Corinthians 6, verses 1 to 10, which I've enjoyed thoroughly studying over the last few weeks.

One of the many interesting things about my wife and I is that we both had fathers who used to say pretty much the same thing when we were going out on Friday nights. I was usually going to youth group, I'm not sure what sort of things we could get up to at youth group anyway, but he would always say, my father would always say, remember, in Scottish voice, remember who you are, son, remember who you are and whom you serve.

And apparently Tammy's dad would always say, remember who you are. One of the greatest struggles, I think, of contemporary 21st century human persons is to maintain a sense of identity, to know who we really are.

To know who we really are in the midst of a society with great family breakdown, in the midst of an overpopulated world with less and less of the personal touch, and more and more absorption into what the masses think and feel as expressed in the pervasive social media to which we expose ourselves.

Exemplified by the fact that, on average, young adults apparently spend 8 to 10 hours a day on social media. Hard to keep a sense of identity in the midst of all that to know who you are. And of course our identity then determines our behavior.

[ 1 : 43 ] One of the recurring messages of the New Testament is to know who you are. As God sees you, and as God knows you.

The God who knows the number of stars, and yet apparently knows each of our names. He knows our identity. This passage is no exception.

I want to suggest that our passage tonight centers on two major identity markers in Paul's life. He seems to reflect, Paul does, a secure identity even though he's under severe attack, being put down by the super-apostles who are troubling the church at Corinth.

Paul seems to cling in the midst of great criticism to his identity in Christ, which is encapsulated by the first great identity marker of our passage tonight, which is the words, reflected in the words, as God's fellow worker.

This, I think, is actually the most dominant identity marker of the passage. It gives character to everything else in the passage. The second is in verse 3, servants of God.

[ 2 : 56 ] There are actually three. I've not been asked to deal with verses 11 to 13, but I think there's a third identity marker in verses 11 to 13, he's a father. So, these are the three great identity markers in this passage that establish for us who Paul thought he was, and each of them calls us to be who we are in Christ.

That is, people who are workers together with God, people who are servants of God, and people who are also called to be spiritual mothers and fathers. In fact, I think the word servants of God qualifies the first.

Co-workers of God is an amazing reality, that we could actually be co-workers together with God. But servants of God qualifies it by saying there's no doubt about who's in charge in this participation we have in God's work.

We serve him. It's all about him, really. He takes the initiative. In many ways, these two great markers could be ascribed to these two words.

Paul knows the dignity of who he is as a co-worker with God, and as a result of that, Paul demonstrates incredible devotion to God as a servant of God.

[ 4 : 09 ] Now, as we probe this first great marker, workers together with him, we need to go back into the context to try to understand this term, because it seems to come out of the blue. Paul says, I'm a co-worker with God.

Now, that could sound like somebody who's delusional. But the context explains precisely what's going on here. A few weeks ago, when the bishop was here, he dealt with a passage just before my passage, and he said, I won't deal with this in detail.

I'll leave that to the person who follows me. Well, this gives me a great opportunity to talk about the very first words in this passage. We can't understand them without the preceding context. I want to look at those with you. The preceding context, I think, is one of the rich highlights, maybe, of the whole of divine revelation.

It's an expression of God's reconciliation of alienated humanity to himself. It's an expression of the gospel. Three things about it, very briefly, just to summarize a whole raft of great Christian theology. Number one, reconciliation was initiated by God. This wasn't a 50-50 thing where God did his part and then we do our part. Paul says, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

[ 5 : 18 ] God takes the initiative in Christ by bringing the world to himself. Secondly, it was transacted in a Trinitarian manner.

Let me explain. Paul says, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. There is no way to understand what happened on the cross of Christ where God reconciled us without awareness of the Trinitarian nature of God.

A God who is one in essence and one in communion but differentiated into three persons of irreducible identity. Differentiated by their relations to one another and by their actions in history. The son in particular is highlighted here who is not the father and yet equal with the father and yet on the cross somehow the son enters into, takes upon human sin because he's become one with humanity and before the father and before the spirit he enacts the amazing work of reconciliation. The amazing work of atonement for us. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. I cannot fully fathom all that went on on the cross where Christ our sin bearer cries out my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[ 6 : 37 ] But somehow on the cross the triune God took care of sin in the presence of the father with the son bearing away our sin and it's an it's an amazing miracle.

Miroslav Wolf and his great book Exclusion and Embrace describes this event and perhaps the best language I've ever heard to describe what happened on the cross. On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons opens up for the enemy.

In the agony of the passion the movement stops for just a brief moment and a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in. We the others, we the enemies are embraced by the divine person who loves us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore makes space for us within their own eternal embrace.

This is the wonder of the Christian gospel. It's the great exchange that the bishop spoke about a couple of weeks ago. A great exchange happens on the cross in two senses.

Number one, legally or forensically, our sin becomes Christ's and his righteousness becomes ours. But secondly, filially or family wise, enemies now become the friends of God.

[ 7 : 56 ] They become the sons and daughters of the living God. And here's the most amazing thing about this passage that begins to give us insight in what Paul means when he says we are co-workers together with God. It's just this reality that God not only makes us friends in chapter 5.

Here's the most amazing thing. In that same chapter, believing people who receive this righteousness actually become the friends of God who actually participate in the transmission of this reconciliation.

That's why Paul can say I'm a co-worker with God. Reconciliation has been provided by God through the atoning work of Christ on the cross. And it's been given to us who receive it. And now we are meant to flow with that reconciliation to the world.

We become one with Christ when we come to Christ in salvation. And we are now, as a result of that, Paul says, Christ's ambassadors. We're his embassy. We represent him.

We represent his character. And Paul says as though God were making his appeal through us. And this is what we say as we live out our calling as instruments of the reconciliation of God. We say things like this.

[ 9 : 00 ] We implore you, people of the world, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. This is a remarkable reality that God uses human beings and a church like ours to be not just the recipients of reconciliation, but those who transmit it to the world.

We become missional people. The word mission is not just for missionaries who go overseas. It's for every child of God. It's for this church because all of us are like Paul. We can say we are God's co-workers.

This is an identity marker for us because God is on mission and we have come to know God. We too are on mission with him. Now, I believe what is motivating Paul as he continues his defense of his apostleship against the followers of the super apostles is to show that the true gospel had actually found a conduit in him.

That's all he's saying. The gospel of grace has now come to reside in me and I'm a co-worker with God, not because I'm an egomaniac, but because God has blessed me with grace.

And the test of my ministry is the grace, the reconciling grace of God flowing through me. In other words, Paul's able to say, I just want to assure you that I'm keeping the flow going.

[ 10 : 22 ] The reconciliation of God is continuing to flow through me. He says it, first of all, positively by me, but with these words, I'm a co-worker with God. But he also says in a sort of negative way, he says, we put no, verse three, we put no stumbling block in anyone's path.

Rather, and he uses the second metaphor in the passage to reflect his identity as servants of God. We commend ourselves in every way. In other words, there's nothing in my life that is a blockage. So I'm a person in whom the gospel flows and nothing about me hinders the work of the gospel. Let me just try to pull together these thoughts around these two great metaphors.

First of all, co-worker with God, and secondly, servant of God. You want to know who you are? This is who God considers you to be. A co-worker with God and a servant of God. If you grasp that identity, it will take care pretty much of everything else in your identity crisis and in your life.

First of all, Paul says, I'm a co-worker with God, and I don't think we have any reason to say that any of us can't claim that as well. Because we too have received this reconciling gospel.

[ 11 : 29 ] I want to say four things about this great title, co-worker with God, that speak deeply into our struggles with identity. The first is the great idea of dignity and privilege.

The word Paul uses here in the Greek is synergontist. It's the idea, it sounds like synergy. What Paul's saying is, I'm in a synergistic relationship with God.

We can't press that point too far, because once again, you know, this is all God. And it is all of us. The way in which God uses us as his missional people, it's all his initiative.

And yet it does involve our agency. We have real agency in carrying out the mission of God through evangelism, through justice seeking, through compassion to the world, through creation care.

That's a full description of the mission of God. And we can all take part in that. And we can all be in this wonderfully compatibilistic relationship with God, where he works and we work.

[ 12 : 33 ] And it's a relationship of amazing dignity to think that he would use you and I to be his missional people.

But he does so because we belong to him, because we're in him, because we're ensconced in Christ. And that's the amazing reality out of which Paul can therefore say, I am a co-worker with Christ.

So first of all, there's a tremendous sense of dignity in this term. I want you to know as a child of God that you're a co-worker with him. He's at work in your life. And he wants to work in you and through you.

But he does so by granting you a deep sense of identity, a deep sense of dignity. You are in Christ, in union with him. And in fact, your very life is hidden with Christ in God.

And that's why you can be used. So first of all, dignity of a position in Christ is inferred here.

Secondly, there is a purpose that runs very much through Paul's life as a result of his knowing that he was a co-worker with God.

[ 13 : 39 ] In other words, let me put it this way. The reconciling grace of God worked its way through the veins of the Apostle Paul. And he didn't have to worry about what his purpose was in life.

His purpose was to reflect Christ. His purpose was to preach the gospel. His purpose was to be missional in the fullest sense of that term.

To be a co-worker with God meant that the business of mission was not something he had to work up. I sometimes think that when we speak about evangelism or mission, we have to sort of work ourselves up into a certain frenzy before we'll dare to share Christ.

And this is a difficult era in which to share Christ because Christians are often thought of as anti-intellectual or certainly not very tolerant people. And yet, I believe the reconciling message of the grace of God is what our world needs.

And we need to present it with love, with care for the dignity of every human person made in the image of God. And as we do so, we will find the life of God flowing through us.

[ 14 : 45 ] God is the missional God. And if you belong to that God, then mission flows through you. We just need to be in touch with that. So, the dignity of being a co-worker with God.

Secondly, the sense of purpose that comes when we recover our sense of being in Christ and in the mission of God. But there are two other amazing, I think, implications of this.

To be a co-worker of God arises out of being in close communion with God. It's one thing to actually be in union with God and be missional because He's missional.

It's another thing to actually be so close in relationship with God, so devoted to God, that His love and His life flow through us. So, in other words, there's an implication which is more challenging here.

Paul could say, I'm a co-worker with God. Why? Because Paul spent his life in communion with God. I bring that challenge to my own life as I bring it to yours. As we live into communion with God, we will find ourselves entering into this wonderful identity of who we are in Christ.

[ 15 : 49 ] And this purpose of being on mission with Christ. Fourthly, there's a sense of authority flows from this great title, being a co-worker of Christ. Because Paul actually states something quite stark.

After saying, I'm a co-worker with God, he then says... We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Seems like a sudden change in the passage. I'm a wonderful co-worker with God. Now, let me speak to you, Corinthians. But there's a reason. The Corinthians have sold out to a group of super-apostles who are no longer preaching the gospel of grace, no longer preaching the gospel of reconciliation, but preaching a legal gospel.

And a gospel of human achievement. A flashy kind of leadership, Greek kind of understanding of leadership. And Paul's actually concerned with the Corinthians here.

So much so that in chapter 11, he says, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I'm afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led away.

[ 17 : 00 ] Led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. So here's the flow of thought. Being a co-worker with Christ, it's wonderful dignity, it's a wonderful sense of identity, wonderful sense of purpose.

It beckons us to communion with God. And fourthly, it gives us a profound sense of authority. Paul has authority here, by which he speaks to the Corinthian Christians, and he says, look, here's my concern.

I am a conduit of the gospel of reconciliation. How about you? How about you? The gospel actually got clogged in Corinth. Because you've been led astray from the one true God, and from the one true gospel.

And so for all of us comes this challenge. Will the gospel of reconciliation flow in us? Or will it become clogged in us? For all kinds of reasons.

But Paul, secondly, brings us to this great reality that he says, I'm also a servant with God. This qualifies the first.

[ 18 : 03 ] I'm a co-worker with God, but there's no question who's taking the initiative. God works, and therefore I work. I'm an obedient servant of the living God.

These two identity markers are connected. The idea of being a co-worker with God is a result of being in union with Christ. And the idea of being a servant of God is a result of being also in union with Christ.

But the first, I think, is a result of our being in union with Christ in his risen power. The second is we are in union with Christ in his suffering and in his dying.

Because Paul begins to give us a description here of what it means to be the servant of God. The reasoning goes a bit like this. I'm a co-worker with God. I don't put any blockages in the way. In fact,

I'm a servant of God.

Now let me give you some examples of how I am a servant of God. And it makes for incredibly challenging reading. I won't stay on this long. My time is almost gone.

[ 19 : 04 ] But let me just say this. There are 28 phrases that characterize Paul's life. You can count them up later. There are 10 that have to do with his circumstances and how he's persevered through tough circumstances.

Endurance, troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger. Do you have any doubt now that I am a servant of God? And then there's another 8 that speak not so much about the adverse circumstances he's gone through, but they speak about his character and the cost of developing that character.

He speaks about purity, understanding, patience, kindness. And then he gives us a little A, B, B, A pattern and in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love, in truthful speech, in the power of God, as if to say, this isn't me.

I didn't develop this character on my own. It's the work of the Holy Spirit. And it's by the power of God. But the point is simply this. Paul is saying, I'm a servant of God and here's how it shows. I have gone through incredible circumstances and I'm still faithful. So if you'd still doubt my apostleship, I'm not sure what else I can say. He says, I've counted the cost of developing a godly character.

[ 20 : 21 ] And thirdly, there are another 10 descriptions of how he has engaged in conflict and persevered. If you like, the first set has to do with his being crucified to the world.

The second is being crucified to the flesh. And the third is being crucified to the devil. The point is this. Paul encourages us to pursue the life of servanthood with God because this is our identity. Coworkers with God, servants of God. Great privilege, great challenge. Paul knows that to be in union with Christ means to be in union with him in resurrection and in death.

in the fellowship of his sufferings. And for Paul, and this was so countercultural to the Greek thinking in Corinth, Paul says, actually all these things I've just rehearsed for you, these 28 characteristics that look like I'm a loser, they're actually every one of them about being a winner because the economy of God is different to the world around me.

and I give myself wholly, faithfully to the work of being a co-worker with God and a servant with God in order that the reconciliation of God might flow through me.

[ 21 : 43 ] I close with a little phrase, a little quote from A.W. Tozer which I think expresses the challenge of my own heart as I read this passage.

When I read this passage, my actual first reaction was who can possibly ever live up to this? The truth is, none of us can on our own. But I believe that within our hearts, there is this burning desire. We want to live in communion with Christ. We want to live into our identity as a co-worker of Christ. We want to be servants of God because that's who we really are. And that's the road to joy. And that's the road to ultimate fulfillment. Tozer said, to have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love. Scorned indeed by the too easily satisfied religionist but justified in happy experience by children of the burning heart.

and there is a lot of fuel élections where he can wy Oliviam and after all of them we want to■■ to enhance our Chubb sunt.

[ 22 : 53 ] Maybe the truth is just to be careful I have to affirm But I love the truth a whole lot of ■ that we want to beinfocyst massive and a lot of weeds to fulfill and the ■■ ■■her to live by embracing and settling