

Working With God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, looking at verses 8 and 9.

1 Corinthians 3, verses 8 and 9. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building. As we know, the Apostle Paul was one of the most practical of men.

And he always dealt with issues, and there were loads of issues within the churches that he was involved in. He dealt with these issues both practically and sensibly.

And so many of his letters were dealing with the issues that arose in the different churches.

Although many of his letters are very theological, very doctrinal, they're also very practical.

[0 : 59] And in fact, one of the sort of the themes of the Apostle's letters was that there would be so much of the letter would be very theological.

But he didn't just teach the church theology. He used that theology in such a way to bring it into the practical use, and particularly if it was dealing with problems and issues that had arisen within the church.

And one of the things that Paul was always keen for all the churches to do was to bring them back so that they would turn from wherever they were to look to the Lord.

And to remember that the Lord is the one who rules over all things, and that the Lord is the one who directs us. He is the one in whom we live and move and have our being. And our world becomes a much richer place when we see God's hand in everything.

We really have a choice in this world. There are some people, and they will never really look up.

They don't acknowledge God. And I always feel they miss out so much.

[2 : 06] Because life is so enhanced and so enriched when we're able to see God's hand in everything. Not just in the creation, but in the way that everything works together.

And although there are many things we don't understand, many things within our own personal lives that we do not understand, it's great to have the faith that we can lean upon the Lord and trust in him so that we can say to him, Lord, even though I have no idea what you're doing, I know that you know what you're doing.

And it's important for us to have that simple trust and faith in the Lord at all times. And so the apostle was very keen always to bring the church back to that place.

Now, as we know, the Lord has indeed given great promises to the church. Now, as we know, the church in Corinth was full of divisions.

And that's one of the purposes of Paul's letter, was trying to deal with all the divisions that had arisen within the church. They were divided in various ways.

[3 : 15] And some of them were saying that they were of Paul, and some were saying that they were of Apollos, and some of Cephas, and so on. And the apostle Paul is saying to them, look, you've got it wrong.

Because, say, for instance, one of the believers in the church, they came to faith through Paul's ministry. Then they were just focused on Paul.

And they weren't giving Apollos any place at all. And then there would be others who had come to faith through Apollos. And they weren't bothered with those who had come to faith through Paul, or with Paul himself.

And so it seemed to be in the nature of the Corinthian church that they divided very easily about different things. In fact, they were taking one another to court over issues. And Paul was trying to deal with all these matters.

But he was saying, look, you've got to remember at the end of the day, it's not about me, it's not about Apollos, it's not about Cephas, it's about the Lord. Because we're simply instruments in the hand of the Lord.

[4 : 18] Although you may have come to faith through my preaching, or through my testimony, or whatever, yet I was simply an instrument. I was somebody who, I did no more really than point you to Jesus Christ.

It was the Lord who saved you. It's the Lord who saves. It's not Paul saying it's not me. And it's the same today. That's simply the work of the churches. In many ways, its primary work is to point people in the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, Paul is saying that. Now, of course, at a natural level, and I should say natural, and there's a spiritual level, there is always a bond and a link between a person who comes to faith and the person who may be responsible, or who has had a part in leading them to the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a bond, a spiritual bond is born through that. And very often lifelong, although sadly sometimes that disintegrates. But by and large, it is true. But Paul is also recognizing that there's subtle dangers in this.

Because there can be the danger that the person who has been converted, the person who has come to faith, is giving too much praise, too much glory, to the person who led them to faith, rather than to the Lord.

[5 : 42] And there's also the danger that the person who led another person to faith, is becoming puffed up in himself or herself, and because of what they have done, that they begin to take a little of the glory to themselves.

And so the apostle deals with these things. And he says, look, it's not about you. It's about the Lord. And you are simply an instrument in the hand of the Lord.

And we've always got to remember that that's what we are. And I planted, says Paul. Paul is watered, but it's God who gave the increase. And that's how it will always be.

And we must remember that. And the amazing thing is that so often, when a person comes to faith, there are many influences along the way.

If you look back over your own life, and you think of your life, it can often be there might be parental influence. There might be the influence of neighbors. There might be the influence of various people.

[6 : 49] It might have been somebody at work who had a great influence upon you, a Christian whose life really challenged you, whose life spoke to you. These things maybe have affected you.

And again, so often, it might be a book that has been given. It might be a sermon that was preached. It might be just through sitting down with somebody who's in trouble, and sitting there for them, and listening to them.

It might be through your conversation with somebody. And there might be so many of these things coming, this bit and that bit, and it all together. And the Lord uses all that, and brings it all together, and brings people to faith through it.

And so that is often the case, that there's a little bit here, and a little bit there, but it's the Lord who is over it all, and doing it all. And so that's why the apostle is saying, at the end of the day, you've got to remember, we are no more than just instruments in the hand of the Lord.

And so we have to be suitably prepared in heart for these things. And if the Lord uses us, it should be a reason for us being really humbled, rather than being puffed up.

[8 : 01] If we're spiritually in the right place, if the Lord uses us, that should humble us, that the Lord would use someone like us, rather than being kind of puffed up, and trying to take glory to ourselves.

And again, another thing that the apostle in this letter is highlighting, is the oneness of the Christian church. That we are all, you know, we use this expression, all one in Christ Jesus.

And that is true. Out of all the different personalities, different backgrounds, different races, different cultures, different whatever, when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we are all one in Christ Jesus.

And the apostle was always at pains to highlight that, because sometimes within the Christian church, sadly, there are some who try to set themselves up over others.

Some that are Christians who, not to put too fine a point, are Christian snobs. And they look down on others. And they belittle others, because they feel that they don't reach up to their standards.

[9 : 14] And that's something that was an anathema to the apostle Paul. Because he was very, very strong on the fact that the church is a unity, it is a one, it is a body.

And a body, an out body, in order to function properly, all the parts need to be functioning properly together. If not, then we're ill, we're not well.

And similarly, at a spiritual level, the whole body of Christ must be functioning together. Otherwise, there's division, there's problems, there's this, there's that, and the next thing.

And so the apostle is really homing in on the importance of this. And we've got to remember that every single believer at the end of the day, every single believer, is heading to glory.

And whether that believer has been like John the Baptist, who came to faith in the womb, was set aside like Jeremiah, set aside by the Lord in the womb, or whether came to faith like the thief on the cross just before, the thief died, remember?

[10 : 20] And that shows the huge difference, so that you can have someone coming to faith in the womb, and somebody coming to faith as they die, and yet, all going to glory.

Now, and everybody, every single person who goes to glory, will be full of the same glory. That doesn't mean that everybody will have the same capacity for glory, but everybody, with according to their own capacity, will be full of the glory that they're sharing in.

For instance, if you, we use the expression, as full as an egg, you can't get anything fuller than an egg, it's just so compact, it's there in the shell, and it's tight, full.

Well, a bantam hen's egg, and a goose's egg, are totally different in size, and yet they're both absolutely full.

And that, I believe, is how it will be in glory, that each person, according to their faith, according to their work, according to all that they are, will receive the fullness of the capacity that they have.

[11 : 38] And, as we know, in this world, there are Christians who are living at different, what we would term different levels. Not that we're looking down on anybody, but Jesus said that.

Jesus, in the parable of the sower, he says, you know, when the good seed falls into the ground, some will bring up 30-fold. So, the growth, in some Christians, will be 30-fold.

And in others, it will be 60-fold. And in others, there'll be 100-fold. In other words, some Christians, they seem to have this incredible zeal, and passion, and love, and faith, and hope.

And they're bright. They're living. They're so bright. And there's other Christians, they're kind of, they're struggling along. It's like they've got heavy boots on. And they're kind of, they don't seem to have the same energy, the same zeal, the same passion.

But they're still following the Lord. And so, what we are in this world, in Jesus Christ, will have a bearing upon the glory. But everybody, nobody will be in glory saying, you know, I'm missing out.

[12 : 45] You won't. You will be, according to your own capacity, you will be full of the glory that is there. And so, that's part of the wonder.

And in heaven, in glory, it is there that we will see the total reality of all being one in Christ Jesus. Now, we're told again, that, at the end of the day, there will be a recognition of all that has been done in and for the Lord.

Each laborer, we're told that, in verse 8, each one will receive his wages according to his labor.

We're told in Revelation, chapter 11, that the nation, this is what it says, the nations raged, but your wrath came and the time for the dead to be judged and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, both small and great.

In fact, that encompasses everybody. At the end of the day, this is how it's going to be. And God rewards, we see that, on the basis of our labor, not on the basis of our success or the basis of our results.

It's very different to, very often, the way that this world may judge things. God bases upon our faithfulness. Remember, at the end of the day, the Lord says, his welcome is well done.

[14 : 16] He doesn't say, well done, good and successful servant, but well done, good and faithful servant. And we've always got to remember that because sometimes people can serve the Lord and I'm not just talking about a person who might be in a position of ministry like I am or a position of office as our elders or deacons, but every believer is serving the Lord.

We're all serving the Lord and whatever, wherever the Lord has placed us and put us, we're all serving. You can serve the Lord for 40 or 50 years, 60 years.

And being a very faithful believer and your life has been a witness to me and yet you say at the end of the day, you know this, I don't think I've ever done any good for anybody. And you can feel

almost a sense of failure.

And you say to yourself, what have I ever done? But you know, that's part of the great shock. You know, Jesus highlights it.

It's going to be a shock at the time of the judgment because remember how he welcomes his people and he says, you know, he's thanking his people for how he, when they saw him hungry and thirsty and poor, all these kind of things and that they fed them and clothed them and all that.

[15 : 35] And his people are going to say, Lord, when, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked or anything? And Jesus said, as much as you have done it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you've done it unto me.

And so, we're not understanding or appreciating all that's going on, but the Lord's taking note of everything. And so, there'll be a lot of surprises on that day. And again, when you think about it, if you look at the like of the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah had a really, really hard life.

He was, he was probably the most faithful, he was as faithful a prophet as ever you came across. And yet, he was mocked and derided and persecuted and imprisoned.

And he was termed the weeping prophet because he had such a hard time and nobody would listen to him. And the more faithful he was to the Lord, the more he suffered.

And you look at the ministry of Jeremiah and you say, what fruit did it bring? And you say, there wasn't much fruit there. And then you look at the prophet Jonah, the reluctant prophet.

[16 : 45] God told Jonah, you go to Nineveh. And oh, he took a boat going the other way as soon as possible. Eventually, he did go to Nineveh and God used him to bring a whole city to repentance.

He was, he was as reluctant as they come. And yet, at the end of the day, who was, who was the most faithful? See, it's not judged on our, on our, on our results or our success, but as we say, on our faithfulness.

And so, this is what the apostle is telling us. Yes, here that, that, at verse 8, he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

And, so it's, it's very important that we appreciate one another in this, in this life, and always remember that the Lord gives different people different gifts.

Remember that. and that if a person is endowed with particular gifts, any man or any woman, particular gifts, in the work of the kingdom, always remember it's just a gift.

[17 : 58] And there's, that, that should take us away from ever worshipping men or women in this world or putting them on a pedestal because it's easy sometimes for us to do that because we look, we say, oh, they're, they're, they're, they're, they're, we put them up there.

And the Lord says, no, you don't. Who are they? Who's Apollos? Who's the Apostle Paul? Who was like the Apostle Paul? And Paul is saying, no, it's all of the Lord.

But we're all in this together, all one together, all working for the same good, the same cause. And so, it is important we remember that. And then, Paul goes on and says, for we are God's fellow workers.

Isn't that wonderful? Working together. Working together in the gospel. And then he says, you are God's field, God's building. Well, if you think about a field, a person, what does a person, a person buys a field.

Here's a, here's somebody and he says, you know, I'm going to buy that field. I want, I want to own that field. So, that person goes and he purchases and buys that field. And in order, of course, to, to buy a field, a price has to be paid.

[19 : 07] And the Bible, Paul is telling us here, you are God's field. The church is God's field. So, how did God get his field? How did he get to the church?

By paying a price. And what was the price? The price, of course, was his own dear son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He sent his son to be the price.

Jesus paid the price. He was the price. As if, when he came into this world. And you know, the more we think about it, it's incredible to think of what the father did with the son.

You know, nobody would have ever suggested in heaven. And the father is saying to the son, I'm going to save this world.

I'm going to, what, how will I save this world? Even the angel Gabriel would never have suggested and say, you know, I have an idea. What about sending the second person of the Godhead, the son of God, into this world to become, become a man and to live just as a human being in this world and yet remain God, be God and yet be human so that he can identify himself with humanity and that he

can then die in that place and take the punishment that is due for their sin on himself and because he is God then he has the merit and the worth because nobody else could do that.

[20 : 46] You can't imagine anybody ever suggesting such a thing and yet that's what God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit purposed and planned. and that's what we've always got to remember that every believer, that's why Paul says, division, no, no division in the church.

Look at that person that you're looking down on. Remember something about that person. God so loved that person that he sent his son Jesus Christ into this world to die for him.

that person, that old lady there that you don't like, you remember that Jesus Christ died for her.

She's precious and that's why there's all this, he keeps going back to this oneness.

You're all one. You're all united. You're all one in Christ because this is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you. And if you ever doubt God's love to you, just stop and think of what he has done. And you know, sometimes as believers we can lose our way a wee bit. Sometimes we think, you know, maybe I'm not really. What if I'm not really a Christian?

[22 : 05] What if, we've all got these doubts because we're human. Satan loves to feed these doubts into our heart. Our own heart does as well. And sometimes when we lose our way and when we stumble a bit, and when we're not maybe walking the way that we should and we're kind of not doing too well in this world.

And you know, we've got to remember that that's going to happen to believers. Remember how it says in the Psalms, the steps of a good person are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, shall not be utterly cast down because the Lord holds him with his hand.

And that is true for every believer. The Lord is holding us and in this world, as we walk through this world, naturally, normally. Not talking spiritually.

We've all fallen at some time. We fall lots on our children. But we fall as adults. We fall when we get older. The falls, you and I know that the older we get when we fall, the falls are worse.

When you're young, you kind of bounce back from them. When you're older, you pull this or you pull that. And so the older you get, the easier it is to break something.

[23 : 18] And you know, it's true spiritually as well. We'll never go through this world. I don't believe any person. Supposing you're as good as Abraham, who was the friend of God, or Daniel, who was beloved by God, or Joseph, all these great saints.

They all, every single one of them, they were sinners. They fell on their walk home. But, and sometimes, we're gone.

But sometimes, when we fall, when we lose our way, we begin to say to her, was I ever a Christian in the first place? But you know, one of the things, see when you, even though you might feel the worst and say to yourself, oh, I don't know what kind of person I am.

There's a seed of desire within your heart, isn't there? A seed of desire and say, you know, Lord, and you speak to the Lord, and you tell the Lord, Lord, I feel that I'm the worst that it is, but you know something, Lord, I want to follow you.

I want to be like you. And you know, nobody can say that but somebody who does love the Lord. It's impossible. It's impossible for a person to be saying to the Lord, Lord, I want to serve you.

[24 : 33] I want to be like you. I'm not doing a very good job of it, but Lord, help me. Lord, help me. That's faith. And that's the way, that is an evidence of that faith that is there within our heart.

So it's important for us to stop and to reflect and to remember just what it is that God the Father has done for us in sending his Son into this world to save us.

So Jesus, as we said, he became he became the price and he took upon himself all that we deserved. But the owner of a field, once he has that field, one of the things that the owner will do will make that field secure so that your fence round about and make that so that this is now your property.

And if you're going to sow crops into it, then you're wanting so that nothing will come in to spoil them or whatever. And so the church is incredibly secure.

Every believer is secure. You today as a believer, there's nobody more secure in the world than you because you are enveloped in the arms of the Lord and nothing can come upon you but that which God will permit.

[25 : 50] Now, it's here that we often have difficulty in trying to understand because God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. And very often we're left bewildered by

God's providence and we ask the question, why?

Lord, why have you allowed this to happen? Why? We do that personally, individually, things that happen within our own lives, things that happen within our family, things that happen within our communities, things that happen on an international stage.

We often ask, Lord, why? Well, we often in this world will not have the answer. but God reminds us that his way of thinking and our way of thinking is as far apart as the heavens are from the earth and that his ways and our ways are so completely different.

And that is where faith has to come into play and rest and say, well, Lord, I haven't a clue. I'm bewildered. I'm hurting. Lord, I know that you know.

That's part of the beauty of the Psalms. I've said it so often. That's part of what I love about the Psalms is the Psalmists, they spoke to God in a way that I often wouldn't speak to him.

[27 : 03] There's sometimes almost a brutal way of speaking that they're just, they're expressing from the very depth of their being. Sometimes they're angry. Sometimes they're saying things and say, whoa, I don't think I could speak that way.

And yet there's this incredible, this wonderful honesty, particularly when life is, life is hurting and life is tough and things are going completely in the wrong direction.

And you know something? The Lord wants us to be absolutely honest with him, to bear our souls to him. But the point we're coming back to is that there is a security given to you every single day.

Do you remember the great complaint that Satan had when he could, before Job, Job's life was devastated? Before Satan could get a job, God had to allow Satan to get there.

Because remember Satan's great complaint, he says, I can't do anything to Job because you've built a hedge around him and all that he has. And it was only when the Lord for his own ultimate, for ultimate end, allowed Satan access, that Satan was able to get that job.

[28 : 23] So we are encircled by the arms of the Almighty. And again, the person who has the field, he or she, if you're going to plant something, that's what they do. They dig, they work, and they plant.

And so, that's what the Lord does with us. That's what he's doing with the church. He's working, he's feeding us. That's what we do when we come to church. We come in order that we will meet with the Lord and that the Lord through his word will feed us, will teach us, will give us something. You know, I love to think, and it might not happen today, but I love to think that every time we come to the Lord's house, even if it's just one thing, even if we just get one thing that will satisfy our soul, something else, you know, it might be in the singing, it might be in the reading, it might be in a prayer, it might be in the sermon, you know, and that was good.

And just, even if it's just one thing that helps us along the way. Well, that's what the Lord is doing.

All the time, he's feeding us, he's encouraging us, he's helping us, along the way.

And again, if somebody buys a field and the field is growing, it's developing, and supposing this is a big landowner, he or she might say, you know, I need lots of workers.

[29 : 47] And that's exactly what the Lord has done. He has employed, that's what he does, he makes us co-workers with himself. It's not an amazing expression, co-workers with the Lord.

We're working with the Lord. That's what we're doing. And you know, the Lord enjoys. And if somebody is a, say, a huge field and the crops are growing well, you take pleasure in that, don't you?

You go out and, I remember when we were in Moodyford, we had a huge garden and there was times like that, you know, you'd have the potatoes and the veg would be growing.

You'd stand there and say, ah, that's brilliant. You really enjoy it. And sometimes you'd come out and you'd find the rabbits had come and eat your carrots and you'd get, ah, no, that was just, that was just so annoying.

But when everything was beginning to grow, you would stand back and you'd say, ah, that's, that's great. You took pleasure in seeing the growth because you had put a lot into it and the Lord has put a lot in to your safety and your salvation in your development and your growth.

[30 : 59] And I think sometimes that we forget this because the Bible tells us that the Lord takes pleasure in his people. And sometimes he says to yourself, how can he take pleasure in me? Well, he takes pleasure when he sees you reflecting more and more his son.

And that's his great aim, his great purpose in this world. So I hope today that you and I, that all of us, know the oneness in Jesus Christ.

And we cannot know that oneness in Jesus Christ until first and foremost we belong to Jesus. You make sure that Jesus is your Savior and then that you are willing and ready to be used by him and for him in this world.

Let's pray. Lord our God, we pray to bless us as we have reflected for a little while on your word.

We pray that that word may go into our hearts and affect us for good.

Help us, Lord, to understand the duties and the responsibilities that we have one to another and help us, Lord, to be encouraging to one another, to be kind to one another.

[32 : 06] We give thanks, Lord, for your goodness and mercy and we pray that that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and that we will dwell in your house forever. Take us to our home safely, take us, Lord, safely along the way wherever we're going, Lord, watch over us and be with us and take away our sin in Jesus' name.

Amen.