

## Working for God

2Corinthians 8:16-24

I think most of us would agree that it is a frustrating experience to think you have won only to find out you have lost.

That is exactly what we see among the religious leaders in Jerusalem in the early days of the church.

There were two main groups of religious leaders in Israel in Jesus' day.

One group was called the Pharisees and the other the Sadducees.

They didn't always get along with each other because they had some big differences in what they believed about God and His Word, but one thing they really agreed on was that they hated Jesus and wanted Him to die.

After thinking about a way to get rid of the LORD for a long time they finally got their opportunity during the Passover feast in Jerusalem.

They convinced one of His followers to betray Him, they held a trial and got false witnesses to lie about Jesus, and they convinced the Roman governor to crucify Him.

After all their other attempts and after Jesus had made them look foolish so many times, He was dead and His followers were scattered.

They thought He was dead, but then His body went missing from the tomb even though it was sealed and under heavy guard.

They ignored the eye witness accounts of the guards and spread a lie about Jesus' body being stolen.

Not long after, about fifty days or so, Jesus' followers started publically preaching that He was alive and that people needed to turn from their sins and trust Him to be forgiven.

That made the Pharisees and Sadducees angry and so they arrest the guys preaching in Jesus' name and tell them to stop it.

In response Peter and John say, **"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."**

That is exactly what they do, they keep on telling people about Jesus, which makes the religious leaders even more upset.

It is not long before they arrest the disciples again and say, "We told you to stop!"

Peter again says that they need to obey God and takes the opportunity to preach the gospel to them which enrages them, the Bible says, and they want to kill them.

In that moment, Acts 5:34 says, "...a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher held in honour by all the people" stood and spoke to the assembly.

He reminded them of a little bit of history.

He told them about Theudas and Judah the Galilean.

Both men had started an uprising but when they died their movements came to nothing.

His point was that that works of men come to nothing and so if the preaching of Jesus is of men it will fail, but if it is the work of God there is nothing they can do to stop it they will only find themselves on the losing end of fighting against God.

He was exactly right. The preaching of the gospel has faced tremendous opposition throughout the history of the church and yet here we are this morning gathered for the glory of Jesus' Name.

We are here this morning because God is at work in the world for His glory and the good of His people.

[Just like it has always been, most of God's work in the world happens through people. God in His wisdom uses people to accomplish His purposes in the world. Since that is true it is good for us to ask, "What does that look like?" Our text this morning **2Corinthians 8:16-24** has some important lessons for us about working for God. In these verses Paul continues his discussion with the Corinthians about the work he is doing to help the believers in the church at Jerusalem. From what is written here we can learn at least four important things about working for God. Number one...]

**Point #1 – God calls people to His work. (Verses 16-17)**

Typically through what seems like ordinary everyday events the LORD moves people to want to do the things necessary to accomplish what He pleases in the world.

We see that here in the life of one of Paul's fellow gospel workers named Titus. (Verse 16)

The apostle does not explain here how this works but he is very clear that God is the one who put something into the 'heart of Titus'.

On the surface that seems like some sort of mind control, that the Lord turns people into mindless robots to do what He wants.

There is, however, something much more substantial going on here.

Whatever God has done in the heart of this man, it is his own feeling of 'earnest care' that he has for the Corinthian believers.

His heart has been affected by God and therefore he is feeling and desiring things in his own will.

I confess how that works exactly is beyond me, but that is what happens when the LORD calls someone to a task.

Paul goes on to explain why he is convinced that God has done this in the heart of Titus. (Verse 17).

They needed someone to go to Corinth, to bring the letter we are now reading, and to work with the believers there for the ministry to the saints of Jerusalem.

When they asked Titus if we would be willing he accepted the job, but more than that it says he was, “very earnest” in doing so and that he is doing it of “his own accord.”

No need to twist his arm or beg him to do it, he is all in and wanted to go.

To appreciate the full significance of that we have to remember that Titus had just been in Corinth and had travelled a great distance to meet up with Paul and his fellow companions in the work of the gospel.

Travelling in the ancient world happened mostly walking and by boat.

There is a good chance it was a long and difficult journey and on account of his being ‘very earnest’ he gladly signs up to do it again.

Why? Because he wants to do God’s work for the good of God’s people.

[Taste buds are a good illustration of this point. Everyone has foods they like and foods they dislike. I enjoy green olives, anybody with me on that? I’ll eat olives right out of the jar, I put them on sandwiches, tacos, and pizza. I never have to be forced to eat an olive because I like them. On the other hand I am not a fan of coffee. I know that makes me strange and I’m ok with that. I can drink it but not because I want to, but what if my taste buds changed and the next time I took a sip of coffee I really liked it? I would want to drink more.]

That is the kind of thing the LORD does with people in a spiritual sense.

He does that in saving people. God doesn’t force anyone to believe, He does spiritual surgery on their heart so that they will want to trust Jesus as their Saviour.

He does the same thing with calling people into his service.

He does spiritual surgery on their heart so that they have a desire to serve Him.

This is why Jesus says, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*”

He says, “Ask the Lord of the harvest...” because He understands that God’s work depends on God and one of the things He does to accomplish His purposes in the world is He calls people to His work.

[Sometimes we can get worked up or discouraged at the lack of people available to work at a particular ministry. Sometimes we get discouraged because we fail to stop and ask ourselves, “Is this my work or God’s work?” If it is God’s work we can rest in His power to provide all that is necessary to the task. Now that brings up an important question. How do we tell the difference between people working for God and people working for themselves? I believe the scriptures show us many things to look for and one of them is in the next few verses. That is our second lesson about working for God, it is that...]

**Point #2 – God’s workers like accountability. (Verses 18-21)**

When people are confident that what they are doing is in service to the LORD, they have no problem with people checking up on them.

The particular ministry that Paul is talking about in these verses is the work of raising money to send to believers in Jerusalem who are in serious need.

We know that money can be source of trouble between people and we know that the Bible warns us that the “love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

Sadly money has been the source of much trouble for many Christians and ministries.

Some commentators think that money was one of things that Paul’s critics in Corinth were using to stir up trouble for him in the church.

Whether that is the case or not how the apostle handles the situation demonstrates a very good and godly principle for Christian ministry and the Christian life in general.

Look at what he tells the Corinthians in **verses 18-19**.

We can only guess as to who the famous brother in this text is, but what is clear is that he is known among “all the churches” and he has been appointed “by the churches to travel” with Paul and his co-workers as they seek to carry out this work for the glory of God.

It seems very clear from what is written here that Paul has no doubt whatsoever that he is working for the LORD.

Because that is true, he has no problem with this brother joining them on the journey.

He explains further in **verses 20-21**.

There is nothing to hide here.

The apostle is happy to have another witness from outside of his group approved by the churches (likely someone the Corinthians know and trust) to be able to bear witness that everything is in order.

He knows that he is doing things rightly before God and is happy to have that examined by anyone so that they will be confident in that too.

[I remember one time as a kid I was at a pond not far from my parent’s house in the winter time. The pond was frozen but we weren’t sure if it was thick enough to walk on. Someone got the idea to throw a rock on the ice and when it didn’t break through we decided to give it a try. Being the youngest I was selected to go first. After one or two steps I broke through and sank in up to my knee. I knew better than to do that because my dad had told me not to play on that pond many times. When I got home I changed right away and tried to hide the evidence of my frozen pants. It didn’t work!]

We try that sometimes don’t we? We try and hide and keep people from knowing what we are really up to.

That is not good in our personal life and it is certainly not good in any type of ministry work.

If a pastor or ministry leader says something like, “That is none of your business!” that should concern you.

If a mission organization has a hard time accounting for where donations end up, that is a problem.

If you are scared of what people might find on your cell phone or computer then you are likely in the grip of sin and need to confess and repent from whatever that is.

[When we are striving to serve the LORD we will be happy to have others check up on us and know what is going on. There is a great deal of freedom in that because it means you have no fear of what people might find out. It is good for the ministry of the gospel all around because people learn that servants of the LORD can be trusted. That leads us to another lesson about working for God. This one is extremely relevant for us as we live in a time and culture that has elevated the desires of the individual to such an extreme degree. The lesson is that...]

**Point #3 – The faithfulness of God’s workers is affirmed in the church. (Verses 22-23)**

It is right and good to examine believers before they are entrusted with ministry in the church and anyone who is truly serving the LORD will be happy for the examination.

Along with Titus and the ‘famous brother’ there is someone else being sent along to work at this God given task. (Verse 22)

This is someone who is very sincere and dedicated to the task that is before them.

That is a very good quality to have when you are serving the LORD no matter how great or small the task at hand may seem.

It would certainly be a requirement for the work of administering this gift from so many churches to believers in Jerusalem.

They were signing up for an extremely long and dangerous journey.

This is a big undertaking and a big responsibility.

He had to be eager and sincere to be sure, but there is clearly more to it for Paul than that.

Do you see in the middle of the verse it says this brother had been “often tested and found earnest in many matters.”

Working alongside Paul there would have been many opportunities for testing.

Perhaps this brother brought Paul supplies while he was in prison, perhaps he had journeyed over great distances in the service of the gospel, perhaps he had gone without food and sleep like the apostle had.

While the particulars are left unsaid here we know there have been many situations over a significant amount of time where this brother has demonstrated his earnestness for serving the LORD.

His character has been observed and affirmed by fellow believers and that is why he is appointed to this work.

**Verse 23** points us to the same thing in the lives of Titus and the “famous brother.”

Titus has shared in the work of the gospel and so Paul has had much opportunity to see that he has been called by God to do his work.

Beyond the work of sending this gift to Jerusalem, Paul would appoint Titus to go to churches and minister to them preaching, teaching, and appointing others to the work.

His personal call by God is affirmed by Paul and others in the church.

In the second half of this verse these brothers are referred to as “messengers of the churches.”

The word “messengers” there is most literally translated as “apostles”.

Normally when we think of apostles we think of guys like Paul, Peter, James and John.

That select group of servants directly called by the Risen Christ given authority to establish the church and speak directly on Jesus’ behalf.

Those guys lay the foundation for the church and there authority is preserved for us in the New Testament.

Apostle in that sense is a onetime deal.

The ESV wisely translates the word here as ‘messengers’ because the word means someone sent under authority to speak on behalf of the one who is sending them.

These brothers are being sent by the churches under their authority to do the work God has set them apart to do for the ‘glory of Christ’.

You see they have been affirmed in the church.

That is important to working for the LORD.

[Just imagine someone saying, “I am going to be a doctor.” That is a noble desire to be sure, but what if they barely graduated high school and couldn’t pass the necessary courses in university. Should a medical school admit them? What if they don’t have any schooling and show up at the hospital and want to perform the surgeries scheduled that day? Should the hospital let them? I dare say you wouldn’t want to go to that hospital for treatment.]

That sounds silly doesn’t it, but how often do we let that happen in other areas.

If someone says they want to teach Sunday school but they don’t have the first clue about what the bible teaches should we let them because they feel like doing it?

If someone feels called to be a pastor, does that automatically mean they should be one?

If someone wants to lead music, but lacks the wisdom and ability to do so should they?

[I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to every single believer, but I also know that sometimes believers think they have a gift when they don’t. One of the things we need to work for

the LORD, perhaps the most important thing we need is humility. Humility gives us the capacity to place ourselves under the authority of other godly people and when we are willing to do that we will always find a place to serve the LORD. That leads us to the final lesson from our text. It is an important one because from what we have heard so far someone might get the impression that they can sit on the sidelines and do nothing. Far from it. Instead we learn that...]

**Point #4 – Believers demonstrate their faith by participating in God’s work. (Verse 24)**

We rightly say all the time that salvation happens by faith alone and not works, but it is equally right to say that true saving faith produces works. When we do things that the LORD wants us to do, we are showing that our faith is real.

Look with me at the first word in verse 24, it says “so”.

If you have the NIV, NKJV, or the NAS you will see the word “therefore” at the beginning of the verse.

Because of all the things he has told us about God’s work and God’s workers he comes to an important conclusion about it all. **(Verse 24).**

One of the most basic things that happens to us when we accept Jesus as our saviour is that the Holy Spirit gives us a love for other believers.

I have often heard people say that they feel closer to their brothers and sisters in Christ than they do to their own family of unbelievers.

I believe wholeheartedly that the bond of the Spirit is far greater than flesh and blood or any other relationship that we can have.

I’m sure we all know that it is one thing to say that we care about someone, it is quite another to show it.

The fact of the matter is that the Christian faith is more than words.

I have no doubt that if we could all jump into a time machine and go back and talk to the people in Corinth and ask them, “Do you love the LORD?” They would say yes, we do.

If could ask them, “Do you love other believers?” No doubt they would say yes.

I’m sure if we were to go around the room and ask the same questions of ourselves most of us would give the right answers.

That is good. It is good to say the right things and it is even better when we show that what we are saying is true.

The evidence that Paul is asking for here is for the Corinthian believers to participate in this work of the LORD.

He has believed their faith and their love to be genuine.

He has told other believers about the sincerity of their faith and he knows that if it is truly real it will get lived out.

[Jesus told a story once that taught this lesson. He said, A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered,

'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" The answer is the son who went to work.]

It is very important to see here that working for God here does not make them loving.

Nothing that we do ever makes us right with God. If we think for even a second that anything we do can make us good in God's eyes then we have a very low view of God and we are showing no appreciation for what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross.

It is not 'work to become loving' it is rather that the work shows the love of God that is already in you by faith.

Every believer, everyone who truly understands what it means to be forgiven by God on account of their faith in Christ alone, is a servant of God.

There are some things that we all can serve at.

We can all pray, we can all put others before ourselves, we can all encourage one another in some way.

We also know that we serve the Lord in different ways as well.

No matter what gift we possess, no matter how much is at our disposal in terms of worldly means we can be working for God in some way.

*I would even take that a step further and say, "We all must be working for God in some way."*

Has He put something on your heart? Don't ignore that.

Be willing to be accountable to other believers.

Be patient and faithful in the church. Allow others to speak into your life so that your work might be affirmed by those who also love the LORD.

The Lord doesn't want us to be bench warmers, He wants us to be doing His work for His glory and for our good.

Many of you have been working for the LORD for a long time.

Many of you go unnoticed and some of you struggle because you want to do more than you are but you are limited by things beyond your control.

I thank God for you. It is by His grace at work in and through you that we can carry on day by day.

May the LORD in His mercy raise continue to sustain us in His work and may He add to our number until the day of Jesus' coming.