

1 Corinthians (Quality: Average)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 September 1975

Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[0 : 00] As the Lord may help me, I will speak from the first epistle to the Corinthians, the third chapter, reading the ninth verse.

For we are labourers together with God. Ye are God's husbandry. Ye are God's building.

The first epistle to the Corinthians, the third chapter, the ninth verse. For we are labourers together with God. Ye are God's husbandry. Ye are God's building.

It is on my mind to make a few remarks concerning the context of this word, before I attempt to direct your meditation into the substance of it.

Things were not going very well in the Church of God at Corinth. And the apostle, being informed of these things, was directed by the Holy Spirit to write this epistle to correct them.

[1 : 23] And I've made this observation that although it can never be a matter for thanksgiving that there should be divisions and heresies in the churches of God, that we may be thankful that they were permitted to occur during the apostolic period.

So that by that occasion, the apostles, and especially the apostle Paul, was led to deal with matters which would subsequently tend to arise throughout the whole of this dispensation.

And it is to be noticed that although there were grievous things at Corinth in different ways, in doctrine and in practice and in the party and divided spirit that had crept in amongst them, the apostles did not disclaim them to be a church of Jesus Christ on that account.

For he directed this epistle to them as to the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints and he wished them well.

There is a point of instruction in this. Where the Lord works, devil works so often. And where the good seed of the gospel is sown and begins to spring up in the hearts of sinners, then the devil sows the tares of evil.

[3 : 15] The Lord Jesus Christ intimated that it would be so in the parable of the wheat and the tares. The sad fact that there were tares in the church of God at Corinth didn't mean there was no wheat.

And the apostle remarks upon it that in some ways they were very much favored as a church. The point of instruction I feel is this.

We should be careful what judgment we pass upon churches because there are things amongst them that we feel are not right.

You know there are some people, if there are tares in the field, can only see the tares and condemn the field because of the tares. And on the other hand, if there's wheat, some can only see the wheat and turn a blind eye to the tares.

Now both are wrong according to the word of God. To disclaim a church, to be a church, because there are things there that are not right, that is not according to the word of God.

[4 : 39] Because as I am saying, the apostle did not de-Christianize the church of God at Corinth for all that was wrong there. But to condone what is wrong, as though that is a matter of indifference, is a very sorry thing indeed.

And the apostle did not condone what was wrong, but he did not condemn the whole church because of it. Now, in this connection, the apostle is dealing with the divisions that there were amongst them at Corinth.

There was a party spirit there. And this party spirit had gathered around individual ministers, and so there had come groups in the church attached to particular ministers.

Now here is another matter of instruction. It is not for anyone to say that the Lord's people should feel the same to all the ministers that minister the word to them for this simple reason that we know very well all ministries are not blessed alike to all spiritual hearers.

with regard to the Lord's blessing upon a ministry that is a matter of his sovereign will. And four reasons I needn't even go into.

[6 : 13] Some feel more attachment to one ministry, a minister, because his ministry is made in a special blessing to them, very likely, as in the apostle's case, the means of their conversion.

He is their father, spiritually, in the gospel. And it's not to be said that one should not feel a special esteem and affection for such.

But then that becomes to be the nucleus of a party spirit and perhaps a disesteem of other of the Lord's servants that is a very grievous thing.

You see, my friends, we can grieve the Holy Spirit who raises up and sends forth ministers into the ministry by not esteeming those gifts.

For spiritual ministers are gifts to the churches. We may grieve the Holy Spirit by not esteeming them. On the other hand, we may grieve the Holy Spirit by idolizing them and making more of them that is just and due.

[7 : 31] Oh, how much we need our judgment and our understanding and our affections to be rightly balanced and rightly guided in these things.

Because, as you can see, in the case of the Church of God of Corinth, they may lead to very grievous divisions. Some said, I am of Paul, others, I am of Apollos, and others, I am of Cephas, and others, I am of Christ.

And it is very probable that those who claim to be of Christ were as contentious in their spirit as those who claim to be of Paul and Apollos.

Now, I am not making this the subject of our meditation this afternoon, but the context that the word I have brought before you seems to call for a few remarks upon it.

for these things, wherever they are, need to be graciously checked before they cause trouble. And no one, I take it, will have a minute's thought that I am thinking that these remarks are in any special way necessary to this Church and people here at Rockford.

[8 : 53] It is not of any means at all on setting these things before you as I see them in the word of God without any direction of my remarks at all.

I feel sometimes these matters call for consideration. Now, the Apostle asks some very pertinent questions with regard to these divisions at Corinth.

To begin with, he said, is Christ divided? No, Christ is not divided. He never is, he never can be a centre of division.

He is always a centre of union, union, the true centre of all spiritual union in one's own personal healing and the people of God gather together as such.

The centre of their union is in Jesus Christ. There is only one Christ and he is not divided. His headship over the Church of God is not divided between Christ and Paul and Apollos.

[10 : 09] He is the one, only head of the body of the Church, supremely and blessedly so. Paul, is his righteousness divided? No, it is the one, only righteousness that clothes and justifies a believer in the sight of God.

Whatever Paul was, whatever Apollos was, could never be a righteousness to justify believers. The righteousness that justifies is not divided.

And so I might set before you in other considerations of this truth, that Jesus Christ is not divided.

He is the true centre of spiritual union. In him every living heart believes, to him every believing eye turns, to him every believing desire centres.

Jesus Christ is all and in all, and he is not divided. Then the apostle asks another very close question.

[11 : 26] Was Paul crucified for you? As I would say to that section in the church that claimed Paul to be their great minister and leader, that said, I am of Paul?

Here is the question. Paul? Was Paul crucified for you? What do you owe to Paul? You owe a great deal to Paul ministerially, but you don't owe your salvation to Paul.

Paul did not bear your sins in his own body on the tree. Paul did not shed his blood for your redemption. Paul did not reconcile you to God.

Paul? Well, he was not crucified for you. It would seem almost as though they thought so much of Paul as that that egg dimmed their view of Jesus Christ.

They could hardly see Jesus Christ for Paul. Was Paul crucified for you? You cannot cleave to Paul, but you cleave to Jesus Christ.

[12 : 43] Then, he has another question. Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Paul? Now, baptism, spiritually, scripturally considered, is a very meaningful ordinance.

And, one meaning of it, as I understand it, is this. By baptism, a believer identifies himself with Jesus Christ.

as you read, know ye not that so many of us as we're baptized, into Jesus Christ, we're baptized into his death.

That is to say, we are identified with Jesus Christ in his death, and in his resurrection. Because in these solemn matters, especially the ordinances, that which is symbolized, and that which symbolizes it, is spoken of as one and the same thing.

That which is symbolized, is a believer's union with Jesus Christ, by faith and love, and to be united with him, is to be united with him in his death, and in his resurrection, and that is to die with Christ, and rise again with him.

[14 : 15] Now, baptism is a symbol of that identity, of the believer with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. Now, the point is, this is as though Paul would say, were you identified with me in your baptism?

Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Paul? Nay, you identified with Jesus Christ, not with Paul. Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

No, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, now, I must not dwell longer on these general considerations. That is how the apostle deals with this question of the divisions in the church that come with regard to their ministers.

God's love. Now, to come to the text, the apostle puts the ministry in its right place. He said, we are laborers together with God.

Whether it's Paul, whether it's Apollos, whether it's Cephas, it is not what we are in ourselves, it's what we are in the ministry as laborers with God.

[15 : 31] God. For we are laborers together with God. We are God's husbandry. We are God's building. So that this labor is set forth in this place, as in many other places, as being in the nature of husbandry and building.

For just as there is natural husbandry and husband men, so there's a spiritual husbandry and spiritual husband men.

That is, those in the Lord cause to labor in that husbandry. This is a thanksgiving service today, especially for the blessings of God in the harvest and in the provision of our food by that means.

And my mind was directed to this word as I considered that. We are laborers together with God. And as an entrance into this point, we may notice the parallel between natural and spiritual husbandry because the same principle obtains in both, laborers together with God.

There's a laborer together with God in natural husbandry. For instance, God has made the earth to be fertile by the blessing that he pronounced upon it in the first creation.

[17 : 13] God blessed the earth with fertility, made the earth capable of bringing forth food. food. Yes, but then the ground must be tilled.

It must be plowed. There must be a labeling together with God in that. The earth will not bring forth food unless there's proper tillage.

But if it were not for God's operation in the earth as a creator, no amount of tillage would ever cause it to bring forth food at all.

You see, the two must go together. God's blessing in the earth and man's labor upon it. When God said, while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not fail, would not justify man in doing nothing.

The seed time will not come unless there's first a sowing. And then with regard to the seed. Now, man can never make seed.

[18 : 17] Never. I don't think man with all his skill and science can produce anything that's got life in it. To give life, even in a natural sense, seems to be God's work alone.

Now, God has provided seed. He's provided seed, having in it that natural life to reproduce itself. God's love.

But then the seed must be sown. That's man's labor, to sow the seed. God provides it, man must sow it.

The seed kept in the gardener will ever produce a harvest. It's never intended that way. There must be a laboring together with God. With the blessing of God, the seed sown in new time, comes to the harvest.

That's God's blessing in all those ways that are so necessary, I mean the elements of the rain and the sun and so on, necessary that's God's work.

[19 : 32] No man can cause the sun to shine or the rain to fall. But when that harvest time comes, it's man's work to gather it in. And so you see, in natural husbandry, there's a laboring together with God.

So there is in spiritual husbandry, in a spiritual sense. And you notice how pointed this expression is?

Now, here are God's husbandry. Now, to open these matters up, as I may be helped and directed, I will speak a word first concerning the laborers.

We are laborers. And then to notice the connection between our labor and God's labor. We are laborers together with God.

And then to notice in the third place the sphere of this labor. Ye are God's husbandry. I hope that a consideration of these things would not be unprofitable because the ministry of the word has such an important place in the appointments of the gospel dispensation and such an important place in the experience of believers.

[21 : 05] In so many ways I feel a consideration of the laborers and their labor is profitable. As I'm saying, the ministry of the word is a divine appointment.

It is, I would say, in that sphere, the most important appointment and feature of this dispensation. It is by the preaching of the gospel that the truth is maintained and propagated and with the Lord's blessing in it, made effectual from one generation to another.

More in one generation, perhaps, than in another. as in every generation, the preaching of the word is the appointed means of maintaining a living testimony and a means of blessing in so many ways.

Now, everyone listening to me at this time who is experiencing these matters must appreciate how much the preaching of the gospel has meant to them, as the Lord has been pleased to make the labor of the Lord's servants a means of grace and blessing.

But the ministry needs ministers. The laborer needs laborers. Now, it is with the Lord to raise up and qualify and send forth laborers.

[22 : 51] The Lord Jesus Christ himself has led the direction to his church. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.

Laborers, mind you, not just preachers, laborers. How does the Lord send laborers into the harvest?

harvest? Very important consideration. An important consideration especially for any who may be under a personal exercise in this matter.

But an important consideration for right judgment in these matters is very desirable.

have entered the Lord's laborers into his husbandry? Well, first, of course, he lays upon their hearts and minds the burden of the word of the Lord in such ways as that they must in due time enter upon that labor.

[24 : 13] It is one thing, brethren, to have the word of the Lord in general laid upon our hearts, and I feel many do have that in different ways that does not necessarily constitute a call to the labor of the ministry.

But it is very certain that the Lord does lay the burden of the word of the Lord in such wise upon such as he will call into the labor of the ministry in the sense that they cannot free themselves from that burden of the word of the Lord.

I believe that some carry it a long time, some not so long. It may perhaps to some extent depend upon the degree with which the heart and mind is burdened.

Now, I must not indulge any personal reminiscences about this, but in my own case, I could not have borne that burden for many years.

I just could not. When I heard of people being exercised about the ministry for 20 years or so, I thought, well, that was the Lord's way with them, no doubt.

[25 : 34] I couldn't have borne that burden for 20 years. I thought, either the Lord must take that burden off my mind, or else he must open the way for me to speak, or else I should just go down.

Now, you can be sure, my friends, that when the Lord calls, he lays the burden of the word of the Lord upon the heart and mind. But then other things go with it.

The Lord does graciously impart suitable gifts for the ministry to those that he calls to that labor.

He who calls equips. He will give that understanding and insight and gracious ability of utterance that is so necessary to the labor in the Lord's husbandry.

And this will often be more apparent to others perhaps that are discerning than to the one concerned himself. He may not be conscious of the ability that the Lord is imparting to him, but others will be conscious of it.

[26 : 52] And in different ways there will be that discernment concerning such and one an impression that the Lord is fitting them and calling them into the labor of the vineyard.

All of course have not the same degree of gifts and ability, but all have that degree of gift and ability necessary for their labor. Moreover, the Lord will open the door for them into the labor of the gospel.

No one need ever put his hand to this matter. The Lord will be sure to make the way if it's his will and his appointment in some way or another.

In fact, not to be too long on this matter, I feel that the Lord opens always three doors into the ministry. He will open a door of entrance.

Behold, I've set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. And he will open a door of utterance, and he will open a door of acceptance.

[28 : 10] Now, when anyone has passed through those three doors, they may, I feel, be rightly considered to be amongst the laborers that the Lord has called to labor in his husbandry.

Of course, it must be considered that there's considerable diversity in this, there's difference of personality, and mind you this, my friends, personality enters into this.

In fact, I feel, to some extent, the preaching of the gospel may be said to be the public expression of truth to the personality of a minister.

A gracious personality is most necessary for a profitable ministry. The Lord sanctifies a personality.

I'm sure of it. And then, of course, ability varies, things, and the particular line of labor varies.

[29 : 20] Paul had his line, Apollos had his, and Timothy no doubt had his, and Paul says of Timothy, receive him, for he worked at the work of God even as I do.

It was the one work of God, but they are different lines to take, they're different work to do, and as has often been said, one cannot do another's work.

They are laborers together with God. And what is the labor? Well, it's the labor in the word and doctrine.

There's the labor in meditation, in application of mind, in prayer, and in the public ministration of it. And it is labor that needs patience, it is laboring in season and out of season, in encouraging circumstances and discouraging when one feels to be like a hind let loose, and when one feels to be in bondage of spirit.

The husband man hath long patience and waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and the Lord's husband men need to have long patience and wait for the precious fruits of their labor.

[30 : 56] But he that goeth forth and laboreth, bearing precious seed, will come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. And with all this, brethren, there does need to be a love to souls and a love to Jesus Christ.

I'm sure that is the real center of it all. I put it the wrong way round. Love to Jesus Christ and love to souls.

Well, now, I mustn't dwell longer. Perhaps I dwell too long on this point already. We are laborers together with God.

The Lord bless each laboring servant. The Lord grant to all that he calls into the same solemn labor, a right spirit, one towards another.

We are fellow laborers, brethren, we're not competitors. We are fellow laborers. We're not one better than another. We're all nothing in ourselves whatever.

[32 : 09] The best, the most gifted, the most understanding of the Lord's servants are just nothing at all unless the Lord works with them effectually.

We are laborers together with God. Now for the last few minutes this afternoon, I direct your consideration to this, laborers together with God.

Now I must say quite freely, if this were not in the scripture, I would fear to use such an expression, laborers together with God.

God. For one considers that the whole work is his entirely, and all the honor and the glory of it is due to him.

But still, there it is in the scripture, we are laborers together with God. And I feel that is so in these ways.

[33 : 18] We're laborers together with God instrumentally. But when we speak instrumentally, our friends must understand this.

With regard to natural husbandry, the husband man must use his instruments, his bow and his hurl and his drill, and such instruments as are suitable to perform the work that he sets out to do.

But now the Lord's servants are not instruments quite like that. They're living, healing, sensitive instruments. I once heard someone speak of the ministry and the blessing of the Lord through it.

They said it's like water flowing through a pipe. But I didn't quite appreciate that. throwing through a pipe. The pipe has no feeling.

I would think it more suitable to put it like this. It's like blood flowing through our blood vessels and our arteries. Now you know, although the heart pumps the blood, there's a pulsation in the arteries that all help is circulation.

[34 : 44] Now we're labors together with God. All the life, all the grace, all the power flows from him alone.

But if we are labors together with him, our heart pulsates and beats in our preaching. Our hearts go out to our hearers.

And sometimes in special ways, we really preach our hearts out to our hearers in preaching the word brethren. We're not just pipes.

We are feeling hearts. And I sometimes wish this were more appreciated. And the hearers of this word would give a little thought to us to how their actions affect the spirit of such as labor in love and concern for their souls.

We have labors together with God. And we would hope this, that it's in the same love that God has the souls that he has chosen to salvation, that we preach the gospel to them in the same love.

[36 : 03] I'm very sure about this. No one can preach the gospel of right unless they preach it lovingly. I know there are solemn things have to be said, and solemn things have to be said solemnly.

love. And we must not avoid setting forth such things as in their nature might not seem very much to breathe love, but for all that we desire to preach them in a loving spirit.

we are labored together with God in that, in the same love. Wonderful thing, very wonderful to me, even while I'm saying it.

And what is the love of God? But the love of God in Jesus Christ. And what is the love of Jesus Christ? But that love we're with, he bore his people's sins and guilt in his own precious suffering body on the tree, and shed his blood for their redemption.

It was all in love for him. I remember once how my heart responded to those lines of Joseph Hart, and they are very rich.

[37 : 29] Joseph Hart's hymns, and some of them especially, are very rich. and he put it like this, what mighty motive couldst thee move the motive's plain was all for love.

My brethren, whoever is a labourer with God must have that same motive in his hand, that same motive. we are labourers together with God.

Then again, at this point, I must close the meditation this afternoon. We are labourers together with God, with regard to his sovereign purposes.

God is, we would love to see all that come under the sound of the word brought effectually upon by the Holy Spirit through it.

for there are those, and perhaps most pastors have such under their ministry, who show as far as one can discern, no evident signs of grace.

[38 : 48] And we would love to see it in them. But then, it is God's purpose, brethren, that we must acknowledge. We are not labourers to fulfil our own purposes in our ministry, even though our own purposes are right in that matter, I mean.

It cannot be wrong to long for the salvation of souls under our ministry. But still, we are not labourers with our own purposes in the matter.

We are labourers together with God. Now we know well that our labour will never succeed beyond God's purpose in it. But we believe it will succeed according to his purpose in it.

Why, if one were to preach their time through and perhaps only one or two really be blessed through their ministry, they would be labourers together with God for those one or two precious souls.

And how precious is one soul, brethren, according to the estimate of Jesus Christ. God has his purpose to fulfil.

[40 : 03] It's his purpose. And we are labourers together with that purpose of God, that it shall be fulfilled. And I do feel this, that when it comes to the end, whatever our own feelings of disappointment may have been, in some cases, or thankfulness in others, when it comes to the end, it will be seen that we've been fulfilling God's purposes, and that's a wonderful thing, where his purpose shall stand, and nothing, nothing, can ever finally frustrate him.

You are God's husbandry. Now, the time has gone this afternoon. I felt in my mind a desire to speak on the first part of the subject this afternoon and the other this evening.

But I've just laid myself liberty to speak as I have felt prompted at the moment. If I have in any wise spoken unprofitably, the Lord pardon that.

But if I've said before you this afternoon in perhaps a somewhat unusual way, a concern, that are a very great weight and importance in the churches of God, and in individual experiences, if I have dropped a word in season, well, I'm thankful for that, that he's been given to me to speak.

The Lord's servants know how we feel about this. We labor before our speaking, we may have a word to speak, we labor in it, we pour out our heart in it, and we labor after it, whether we're spoken wisely or not.

[42 : 05] But the whole matter is in the Lord's gracious hands, and we serve a good master. And he knoweth our weakness, our fears, our tremblings.

How often we feel with the apostles, I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. It all comes to this, the weakness is ours, the power is his, and the blessing is yours.

Amen. I've just mentioned that the collections will be for the support of the cause today.

Lord, we're not even serving with the men at six o'clock.

He is providing the aid of all and sending all wealth to the women. Those that serve with him at 609, here at 444.

[43 : 13] 444. 544. 544. 544. 544. Canaan's Hallelujah.

. Now, O God, the guys' power, we will cause, we will cause. They call us all to thee and come.

My Lord shall make sure to earth we die, you shall take his power, you shall technically come. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[45 : 47] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[49 : 17] Thank you. Thank you. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the communion and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.