GOD’S FELLOW WORKERS

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

Key Verse: 6:1

“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.”

Thank God for revealing to us that he is the God of reconciliation. The reconciliation between God and men has been accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross. And God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ through the ministry of reconciliation and Christ’s ambassadors with a clear message, “Be reconciled to God.” In today’s passage, we can see the characteristics of the ministry of reconciliation, which goes hand-in-hand with the lives of Christ’s ambassadors, servants of God.

**First, God’s fellow workers (1-2).** Verse 1 says, “As God’s fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.” In chapter 5, Paul talked about God’s reconciliation for sinners and the ministry of reconciliation and Christ’s ambassadors. Then at the beginning of chapter 6, he mentions “God’s fellow workers.” Christ’s ambassadors for the ministry of reconciliation is first of all God’s fellow workers, those who work together with God, being involved in a cooperative effort with the living God. What a privilege! To work with a great servant of God or a great boss is a definitely a blessing and privilege. Then how about being God’s fellow coworkers, even in helping one person? Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 3:9, “For we are God’s fellow workers, you are God’s field, God’s building.” Let’s remember that Christ’s ambassadors are God’s fellow workers for the ministry of reconciliation that God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ. God is right there, being ready to work together with us in serving one person after another, for the purpose of reconciliation.

In verse 1, “As God’s fellow workers, we urge you…” Christ’s ambassadors are to urge people. Here, “urge” is the same as to implore, entreat, beseech, beg, or exhort which in Greek is *parakaleó*, related to the word *paraklétos*, meaning Counselor (that is, the Holy Spirit). God’s fellow workers are to have passion and zeal to urge, implore, that is to go together with persuading. They have enough reason to have the passion and persistence to urge and entreat. It is because of the amazing grace of God’s reconciliation for sinners, without which people will eternally perish. This grace of God’s reconciliation demands urgency, urgent appeal and begging for the people of this perishing world. The preacher is a pleader. He is a beggar. God is a beggar and God’s representative is a beggar too.

Then Paul says, “…not to receive God’s grace in vain.” We remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:2, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” It is really a painful thing and even a dreadful thing to receive God’s grace in vain. God’s grace bestowed upon us should not be in vain to the end of our lives.

In verse 2, “For he says, ‘In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’” This is a quotation from Isaiah 49:8, “In the time of my favour I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you.” In Isaiah, the words of the LORD are written in future tense, looking forward to the time of God’s favour and the day of salvation, but Paul made it past tense, surely by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because the promise of God has been fulfilled through the coming of Christ Jesus. So Paul says in verse 2b, “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.” Now is the time of God’s favour and salvation in Jesus Christ. We are living in this era of grace. There will be a time when the door of grace will be shut, as the door of Noah’s ark was shut at a certain time. This era of God’s grace will end at the time of Jesus’ coming again.

It is also so important to live with the awareness of time. It is written in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot…to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance…a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time give up, a time keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to silent and a time to speak a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” As you know, no one is young forever. Opportunities are not given always. University days are normally for four years, and these are the years to seek for the truth and the meaning of life and the life direction. Such a time is limited.

Proverbs 1:28 says, “Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me.” And Isaiah 55:6 says, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” And it is written 3 times in Hebrews, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7, quoted from Ps 95:7). In Luke 19, when Zacchaeus the tax collector repented, Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham” (Lk 19:10).

When I think of God’s ministry here, I sense that God has been opening the door of blessing of God’s words more since we began the study of Revelation in March of 2020 at the beginning of of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the words of Revelation, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude, James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Nahum and 2 Corinthians. May we keep this blessing until we go through the whole Bible. Nowadays in our campus invitation, students are giving us their correct information. I believe that it is a good sign of gaining new Bible students through faithful gospel preaching. When I also think of Kane’s life, the Lord is bestowing his grace upon him revealing Jesus, the light of the world at this point of his life. May God richly bless his life testimony sharing, and may Kane bear this time of God’s grace keeping open his heart toward God through each week’s worship and sincere testimony writing, serving one Bible student and praying for his wife, Sara. In Daniel’s life, the Lord is showing his grace upon him once again. May God encourage S. Daniel to bear this new time of God’s favour to the end of his life, serving house church ministry along with his son and with his future co-worker whom we believe God will provide for him.

Jesus said in John 9:4, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.” Christ’s ambassadors are to know their privilege of being God’s fellow workers and have passion to urge and time sense for God’s flock of sheep and for themselves.

**Second, the lives of God’s servants (3-10).** Now Paul says in verse 3, “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.” This is what God’s servants should avoid in a negative sense, putting no stumbling block in anyone’s path. It is as Paul said in 2:17, “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.” He also said in 4:2, “Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every one’s conscience in the sight of God.” Certainly, a preacher’s life and preaching cannot be separated. Not for any reason should God’s ministry be discredited.

And Paul says in verse 4, “Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.” Positively God’s servant should commend themselves in every way. When we think of commendation, how to commend, what does come to your mind? Probably excellent advertisement to get a 5-star review. What comes first to Paul is great endurance in 28 elements. It is not just endurance, but great endurance, the only element with an adjective. It shows how many difficulties Paul had gone through, beyond his expectation. Difficulties in life vary, personally and ministry-wise. For any servant or any true believer there are many difficulties, which no one can understand. God demands great endurance of his servants. Endurance is one of beautiful characters of God’s people called saints. It has the meaning to triumph under difficulty. Apostle John said in Revelation 1:9, “I, John, your brothers and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are our in Jesus.” And in revelation chapter 13, after talking about the beast coming out of the representing the final Anti-Christ, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world”, John said, “He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints” (13:8-10). Also in Revelation 14:11,12, after saying, “There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name”, John continued, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” There are times again and again in life to be tempted to give up, but endurance, great endurance, keeps us going.

Subsequently after mentioning great endurance with a semicolon, he lists three:e troubles, hardships and distresses. Troubles are afflictions, which mean anything that expresses pressure – physical, emotional, spiritual pressure – or crushing experiences. Hardships are generally difficulties that have no relief and no exit. And distresses meaning to confine in a very narrow place where someone cannot turn around, with no escape and no way to get comfortable. God wants us to have great endurance in troubles, hardships and distresses.

At this point I am reminded of Hebrews 12:5-11, “…Do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, because the Lord disciplines those he loves…Endure hardship as discipline…No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” May we really endure hardship as discipline until it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

Paul continues in the list, “in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.”

Then Paul describes internal struggle: “in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love.” Purity is at the top of the inner positive list. How important purity is in the lives of Christians and certainly of God’s servants. Endure in a pure way with purity of life, purity of thought, and purity of motive, being free from all fleshly stains. God wants us to endure in purity and in the pure life to the end.

And here “understanding” is in many other translations “knowledge.” It is related to Paul’s understanding of divine things, his commitment to sound doctrine, his grasp of God’s redeeming love and purpose, his understanding of sinful man, his understanding of false teachers, his grasp of the strategies of Satan. He understood such things in knowledge and never wavered from a proper understanding.

And “in patience and kindness.” Patience can mean tolerance with people. Paul was tolerant with various kinds of people. Kindness is goodness in action. He did good to the people no matter what they did to him.

Then “in the Holy Spirit.” This is the heart of everything. It’s kind of thrown in the middle of the list but it’s really the heart of it all. Paul endured in the Spirit, in the fullness of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the comfort of the Spirit, the joy of the Spirit, and the freedom of the Spirit. Consequently, the Spirit of God was in control of him, and it was in the Spirit that he worked and served and prayed and preached and lived. We remember his commands, “Walk in the Spirit”, “Do not grieve the Spirit”, “Do not put the Spirit’s fire” and “Be filled with the Spirit.” Surely, we can also endure everything in the Holy Spirit. May we all the more learn to live by the Spirit praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

And “in sincere love” which is “in genuine love.” This is *agape* love, that is the love of sacrifice, the love of the will, not emotional. This love is the fruit of the Spirit, along with patience and kindness.

And then Paul says in verse 7, “in the truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.” “In the truthful speech” is “in the word of the truth” in other translations. What does he mean when he says, “in the word of truth”? It is written in Colossians 1:5, “…the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel.” Here is the phrase, “the word of the truth, the gospel.” The word of the truth is the gospel, the good news that God is reconciling sinners through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ described in 5:21. James uses the same phrase in James 1:18, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth…” Paul was faithful to the gospel. He never wavered on the gospel.

And “in the power of God.” Paul preached the gospel in the power of God. We are reminded of Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” Also Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:23, “we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” Paul must have depended on God whenever human power against him seemed to be so strong and he, so weak. We are reminded of 2 Corinthians 12:10, “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

And “with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.” He did not reply on the weapons of the flesh/world, but had the weapons of righteousness in battling the kingdom of darkness. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Here strongholds or fortresses are not outside but inside of men, human ideas, wisdom and ingenuity. Sinful human being have invented intellectual system that do not understand human depravity, spiritual ignorance and divine grace through the cross. In verse 5, “arguments and every pretention” is “speculation and every lofty thing’ raised up against the knowledge of God. In such human ideas and wisdom, self is everything and the satisfaction and comfort and success of self directs all of life. But self is defiantly against God and self-love is the way of destruction. The truth is that people should repent and love God and live in Christ-centred. Christian warfare then is aimed at pulling down human reason, pulling down human speculation, human wisdom, human rationalization, proud intellectualism. In this fight our weapon, divinely powerful weaponry, is the truth of the word of God.

Then in verse 8, “through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” Here we see the paradox of ministry, between honour and dishonour, good report and bad report, genuine and ingenuine, known and unknown, dying and living, beaten and alive, sorrow and joy, poor and rich, having nothing and having everything. In the Corinthian church, the joy and sorrow were manifested at its highest and lowest level. We see that those who serve Christ have the most profound blessing and at the same time suffer the most severe disappointment. Truly a gospel servant is a sad/happy person. God wants us these characteristics of the gospel ministry, the ministry of reconciliation and the nature of the lives of Christ’s ambassadors.

Thank God that Christ’s ambassadors for the ministry of reconciliation are God’s fellow workers having passion to urge with time sense for the perishing souls and for their working opportunities. They are to commend themselves, in great endurance, in purity, in the Spirit, in the word of truth, the gospel, with the weapons of righteousness, and in the awareness of the paradox of the ministry, between honour and dishonour, and between joy and sorrow. May we really be God’s fellow workers in our time for the ministry of reconciliation, deeply knowing that our God is the God of reconciliation through Christ.