

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Co-Workers For The Kingdom

by Dan Trygg

“Tychicus, our dearly loved brother, faithful servant, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus, my co-prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only co-workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.” Colossians 4:7-11

“For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building.” 1 Corinthians 3:9

“...and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith...” 1 Thessalonians 3:2

“And working-together-with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God for no purpose...” 2 Corinthians 6:1

The Greek word, *sunergos*, translated as “co-worker”, occurs some 13 times in the NT (Rom. 16:3,9,21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Philem. 1:1,24; and 3 Jn. 1:8). The verbal form occurs another 5 times (Mk. 16:20; Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 16:16; 2 Cor. 6:1 and James 2:22). It is a compound word, from *sun*, which means “together-with”, and *ergon*, which means “work, action, or deed”. **The word means “a co-worker”, and could refer to a “fellow-worker”, but it more literally means one who works “together-with” someone else. The implication is that they are working on the same project at the same time, ...both putting in effort and energy to accomplish the task at hand. It is not describing a general partnership, where there is agreement on what needs to be done, but one person is doing most of the work. No. The word describes contemporaneous effort and action in what is being accomplished.** All the participants are involved and invested in the effort and the outcome. Obviously, this does not necessarily imply equal ability, strength, skill or impact, but it does indicate that **every “co-worker” is engaged and active, ...or that they are all involved together at the same time.**

In the references from Romans 16, **Paul identifies people who had been “co-workers” with him, in the past.** They had worked-together for the sake of the gospel. “Co-workers” seems to fit the references in 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3, and the two verses in Philemon, although the emphasis is on their active involvement in the work *at the present*. Even though Paul was not actually “with” them, **they were working-together in a common cause.** 3 John 1:8 is interesting, in that it advocates helping to support gospel workers, “so that we might become ‘fellow-workers’ in the truth”. The idea is that our support allows them to keep sharing the word, so in that sense, we can be “joint-workers.”

In Romans 8:28, “God ‘works-together’ all things unto the good”. In this passage, the verb seems to imply that God “mixes-things-together”, or “fashions-things-together”. or somehow “works-them-together”, to bring about a good result. **James 2:22 is like that. There, it is “faith working-together with works”,** and the result was that “faith was completed” or brought to fulfillment. One significant distinction is that in Romans, God is the only subject, who is acting on other “all things”. They are *not* all equal participants. *God* is doing the work, and, in fact, He is working-*them*-together. He is like the Master Cook mixing together the various ingredients to bring about a good result. In James, it feels like faith and works are on a more equal footing. Yet, it is clearly “faith” that is the subject. “Faith” is co-working with works in such a way that faith is completed or fulfilled in the outcome. It is not “faith *plus* works”, but “faith operating in conjunction with works”. Faith and works form a cooperative partnership. But the primary position, the initiating force is the faith. It is not faith alone, nor works alone. It is faith working-with works. **Faith is made visible through the works, ...and faith is completed by means of the works it produces.**

The next passage to consider would be **1 Corinthians 16:15,16.** Paul was finishing up his letter, and **he mentions the “household of Stephanas”.** They were some of the first to come to faith in Achaia (southern Greece, where Corinth was), and **they had set themselves to serving the saints. Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to cooperate with and yield to such people, and “to everyone co-working and laboring”.** The implication is that they were “working-together-with” Paul and others who were also devoted to serving the believers.

This brings us to the passages at the top of our sheet, today. **The first one, from Colossians 4:7-11, tells us about some of Paul’s “co-workers”.** There is Tychicus, who Paul describes as “a beloved brother, a faithful servant and fellow-slave in the Lord.” He was coming to the Colossians to “make known all the things about me”. Paul had sent him for this purpose, that their hearts might be encouraged by what he would share with them. He would be accompanied by Onesimus, who was from Colossae. Paul repeated their purpose: they would inform them about what was happening to him, since he was in Rome, under house arrest at this time (Acts 28:16-31). Next, he mentions

Aristarchus, who Paul calls his “fellow-prisoner”, who sends his greetings, as does Mark, Barnabus’ cousin, and also Jesus, who was also called Justus. Regarding these men, Paul notes that these alone are the “co-workers unto the kingdom of God” who were “of the circumcision” who were with him at that time. **It is significant that Paul called them “co-workers for the kingdom of God”. What had they done?** Of these men, Tychicus appears five times in the NT. He was an Asiarch, probably from Ephesus. In Acts 20:4, he and Aristarchus were both a part of the group of men who carried the offering Paul had helped to collect for the saints in Jerusalem, at the end of his third missionary journey. He also would later serve as the carrier of Paul’s letters to Ephesus, Colossae and to Philemon (Eph. 6:21,22; Col. 4:7). Paul later sent him to Crete to join Titus there, and also again to Ephesus (Tit. 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12). Onesimus was the runaway slave of Philemon’s, who Paul met in prison and converted. In his letter to Philemon, Paul mentioned how he found Onesimus to be very valuable to him. Aristarchus was from Thessalonica. He was with Paul at Ephesus, and accompanied him to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 19:29; 20:4). He managed to stay with him during his imprisonment and journey to Rome (Acts 27:2). He was clearly very devoted to Paul, shared his trials, and here is even described as his “fellow-prisoner”. John Mark needs no introduction. He was Barnabus’ cousin, who had accompanied Paul and Barnabus on the first missionary journey. Although he went home early, and Paul did not want to take him on the second journey, Barnabus took Mark with him to follow up the work they had done on Cyprus. Later on, Paul and Mark were on good terms, as we see here. He later became a close associate of Peter, and wrote the gospel that bears his name. This passage is the only reference we have to Jesus, who was called Justus (“the upright”). From the little scraps of information we have, **it is clear that these were dedicated people, ones who had sacrificed much for the kingdom, and had associated themselves with Paul to be of service.**

In the next passages, Paul uses *sunergos* in a new way. Up until now, the focus was on being “co-workers” with Paul. Here Paul plainly says that he, other apostolic people, and other believers, were fellow-laborers *with God*.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6-10, Paul wrote, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.”⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.⁹ **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.**¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation...” **Do you see the interactive partnership here?** *God* gives the opportunity and the wisdom, but *people* have to do the work of planting and watering. **People can do the work of preaching and teaching, but God must give the growth. God gives the wisdom for building, but people must do the work of building.**

In 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Paul explained, “...we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.” It was not enough to just pray for the Thessalonian Christians from a distance, ...someone had to *go* there. **Timothy was a fellow-laborer of God in the gospel of Christ. He was one operating in that balance of God's empowerment and gifting, and his own human effort and investment.** Timothy was willing to go back into the city Paul had just had to flee from, because of persecution. **Timothy was willing to risk inconvenience, hardship, danger and possibly even death, so that he could join with God in the work that He had been doing there.** They had seen the powerful hand of God change hearts in that city: “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;⁵ for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit...” (1Thess. 1:2-6). **Paul could continue to pray at a distance, but he understood that there needed to be “boots on the ground”. Someone had to go there to share the word, disciple the people, get the church meetings established, ...and Timothy was the one God had gifted to do that.**

We come to the challenge of 2 Corinthians 6:1, “Working-together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” We, ...you and I..., are meant to be co-workers with God. **He puts His grace-gifts, His wisdom, His mercy and compassion, His love, His Spirit in us, but He needs us to put it to work out there in the world around us.** *He* will bring the opportunities, but then *we* need to sow the seed, ...or share the love, ...or in some way express Jesus *according to the grace giftings God is working in us.* **God has set up a dynamic, interactive partnership. He wants to work through us.**

Are YOU willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus? ...the mouthpiece of the Lord? YOU cannot do it without HIM; ...and HE has chosen not to do it without YOU. He wants us to work together, ...to be co-workers with God, ...fellow-laborers with Him in the gospel, ...interactive-partners responding to the King to advance the kingdom of God among the nations of humankind.