

Laborers Together With God.

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I Cor. 3 : 9. "For we are laborers together with God."

We at times stand aghast at the many and vexing problems that confront the church and society. Think of the lapses in church life and the heart of the believer grows sick. Think of the socialistic and the labor and capital problems, and we ask at times is the church meeting the purpose intended of God. Or again we view the struggle between the missionary and the anti-missionary elements of Christendom and as we witness it for instance in the war between Mark Twain and the missionaries, we ask, what of all the consecrated work of the faithful of the past; is it wasted? To day seemingly the church is on the eve of a magnificent and universal union but tomorrow by a fresh tempest of controversy she is made more fragmentary than ever. The dogmatism of a portion of the church says with pronounced emphasis "It is;" and the other portion says with equal vehemence "It is not!"

Or if any of these external forces and problems provide not for spiritual blues, there comes at times the almost foundering depression characteristic of the earthen vessel in which we have this treasure. Sometimes our heads become almost turned. A noted senator in the maze of a legislative problem turned in his bewilderment and asked "where are we at." So are the children of God occasionally disposed to bewilderment and like the children of Israel conclude they have been led forth into the wilderness to leave their corpses to the vultures to eat or the sun to bleach. Herculean tasks and intricate problems are before the church of God. Never was the strain upon the individual or upon the church greater, if as great as it is to-day. We need a stimulant, yea, we need iron in our spiritual blood. We need not only the comfort of the sweet promise, but also the composition of the strong doctrine.

We therefore cannot do better, during the time at our disposal than to press this text—"We are laborers together with God"—that we might if permitted by the Holy Spirit extract and carry with us some of its substance. Every word of it is teeming with significance.

(1). "We are laborers." We do well to pause and ponder the double significance of this term. God herein dignifies labor. That he deigns to catalogue the heavenly calling by the terminology of worldly service—"laborers"—exalts labor, all honest labor is respectable. The rich class has neither heavenly nor worldly right to scorn the honest toiler, much less honest toil. "Let no man despise thy youth," said the aged Paul to the youthful Timothy, and divine writ in this text says, let no man despise thine honest toil.

But if something is done in this expression for the dignity of labor, something is also done for the drudgery of faith. "We are laborers," God has set the ideal of Christian life, and the ideal is that of "labor." If you sigh sometimes with the burden, remember you are a laborer, and cheerfully bear it. If sometimes you are perplexed with the accumulations of work, remember you are a laborer, and take it up anew. If sometimes you long to "be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas," remember you are a laborer and be assured in any other thought you are in a rut of self which will soon become the grave of the soul. We are not spectators, to pronounce on how others do the work and forthwith, become chronic gospel grumblers. We are not statisticians to tabulate the doings of others and to fall back into despondency over even our own statistics, we are laborers.

To inspire you, to cheer you, to give new endurance and new patience to you, remember then you are laborers. This is no accident. This is no issue of the peculiar circumstance by which you happen to be surrounded. It is the divine decree.

Toll on and in thy toll rejoice,
For toll comes rest, for exile home,
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,
The midnight peal, "Behold I come."

(2.) "Together." God speaks further for our comfort. We are not merely laborers but we are laborers "together," and this does not signify that it is "together" with the brotherhood. This we need. Labor even with the confidence of the brotherhood is taxing but what of that without? The former is ever widening its circle, the latter ever contracting it. The former is full of rich comfort as speaks the verse,

"Blest be the tie that binds,
Our hearts in Christian love,
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

but of the latter, we draw back from the very thought of it! Paul says, "and every one members one of another." He also says, "For none of us liveth to himself." We have a life to live that is not lived and cannot be lived nor does it wish to be lived apart from the brotherhood. They comfort us in our sorrows. They plan with us for our work. They help bear the burdens that would crush us. And with the man who finds fellowship better than that the church can give him, there is something wrong,

a root of bitterness has sprung up and sooner or later it will offend.

But as rich and promising as is that together of the brotherhood a still richer heritage is the "together" of which the apostle speaks here. Far transcending the human in joy and in power is it. It is the divine "together with God."

The farmer is a laborer together with nature. He sows the seed at nature's time. He cultivates in nature's way, and he and divine nature working together, a golden harvest is produced. But it is not merely thus that we are laborers together with God in a Christian sense. There is no particular sympathy between the farmer and dumb nature. He sows the seed, but holds no converse with nature.

We are laborers with God in the sense that "all are yours and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "A Paul may plant and a Paulus may water but God giveth the increase," marks a great truth, but "we are laborers together with God," marks a greater and sublimer truth. Behold we are nothing short of co-partners with God!

We need again and again to catch the inspiration of this "together." We want to look at the God-ward aspect of this work. We are stimulated by the human-ward injunction "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," but no man gets the best out of that text till he gets its climax, "for it is God that worketh in you." Hudson Taylor says, "God's work does not mean so much man's work for God, as God's own work through man." With such conception of the co-partnership of God and himself, Taylor could not fail. In fact if such be the co-partnership of the individual and his God, he can then afford to stand alone, and even part company with the brotherhood. Yea, it may be with him a case of "Athanasius contra mundum." But it must be a God-parting of that brotherhood, as it is a God partnership.

Jesus said "neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, that he should be born blind; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him," and when the blind man heard the announcement that God was working through his blindness to the divine manifestation, we can realize he must have felt in it a compensation for his sad birth-mark. Weary worker if you can get this larger and diviner conception of your service that it is God working through—"together with God"—you will go back to your service thrilled and even be glad to suffer with him that you might also be glorified with him.

(3.) "With." There is something told in this little preposition that is not fully expressed in the word "together." Labors "with God," God not only commends labor as already noticed, but God himself labors. Jesus tells us that too—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And again he says "I must work," and in this respect there is no exemption of the follower. The "come" of Jesus so sweet, is to the laborer—"Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden." When the Master wished a figure whereunto he could liken the kingdom he chose one pertaining to labour. "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard." When the Master issued a prayer it was "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth the laborers into the harvest." And when God issues his call it is "Go work." The first question of the regenerate soul is "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" We are laborers then as to promise as to prayer, as to regeneration as to call and as to response. But we are not to forget that God labours too, and we are only laborers "with God." Who then cannot sing

"My Jesus as thou wilt!
O may thy will be mine!
Into thy hands of love,
I would my all resign;
Through sorrow or through joy,
Conduct me as thine own,
And help me still to say,
My Lord, thy will be done!"

"My Jesus as thou wilt!
Though seen through many a tear,
Let not my star of hope,
Grow dim or disappear;
Since thou on earth hast wept,
And sorrowed oft alone
If I must weep with thee,
My Lord thy will be done!"

(4.) "God." This is the climax of this divine quartett of emphatic words. We stand amazed at the divine incarnation. It puzzles our minds, it excites our admiration, it rivets our devotion. But what of the truth—God with the individual believer, as John says, "If a man love me he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." The incarnation of God is a great truth, and so is this a great truth.

(a). Its all importance. We are disposed to talk of the relative importance of the divine and the human in the salvation of men, so we try to discover where the divine begins and where the human ends. But we need to emphasize the divine side of our salvation. It is "Christ in you the hope of glory" and "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me."

This truth of "laborers together with God" is there-

fore all-important. Men and women are becoming discouraged and falling out of the ranks of Christian service because of mere trifles. If we stopped to ask the reason why, the secret of the fact is this, they have been eliminated God from the problem. Inconsistencies exist. Why? We are sinners not so much because we have passions, Paul said, "We also are men of like passions with you." It is no sin to have passions. We are sinners in that we have low ideals and we yield to our passions in that we have low estimates of our relations to God, in fact, that we forget we are laborers together with God.

Some men profess to get inspiration out of the evolution theory, they are turning back to the monkey and the ape for their genealogical associations. But the believer looks ahead for his inspiration. "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father and ye in me and I in you." Our genealogy is of God and Christ. This is what we need to emphasize. This theory alone is sufficient to guide men through the quick-sands and shoals and quagmires of sin and the flesh. We need high and grand conceptions, yea heavenly, not those that are low and earthly.

(b). Purpose of the Church. Something is told here of the purpose of the church and the individual member thereof. God's church does not exist to make for men a job. Christian work is more than worldly-wise adjustment to conditions and standards of the world. The believer's relation to God is such that like God the business of the church is not to conform to the world, but to transform the world to God. A man not called of God has therefore no business attempting the ministry. The church should recognize the high calling of God and hold her standards and guard her membership and place her work with this sanctified conception of her purpose.

(c). Security. We must remember the laborer together with God is a sacred commodity. He is a dangerous element for sin to attack. This is true for "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." The forces of sin may attack but they shall fall broken and shattered as the angry wave recedes from its attack upon the huge rock shattered and sighing. One of the most marvellous pieces of literature written is the 91st Psalm. As I read it I conclude that the servant of God can disarm hell. He can disembowel the forces of sin. He need not be afraid of being blown into the sky by a parish convulsion. The laborer can satisfy his conscience and still remain on the earth and not be disturbed more than is necessary for his patience and welfare. He is a laborer together with God.

To hold over a man of God the whip of unpopularity is an insult to his Christian manhood and his God. His God created the heavens and the earth. He flung the stars across the sky and the flowers across the earth. His God holds the pulse strings of the universe for "the silver and the gold are his." One with his God is a majority for "one can chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight." The council tried to intimidate Peter and John when they threatened them with the expression of unpopularity in imprisonment. And the insulted manhood of those laborers together with God cried indignantly "whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye." Their popularity with God made them unpopular with men. But it brought to them final victory in spite of all the human inventions to silence the servants of God.

(d). Grace and inspiration. We cannot forget our indebtedness to grace as it is forced upon us by these truths. We have sought to emphasize the fact of the divine indwelling and co-partnership. As we thus do we are forced to ask is it possible that the eternal, infinite and holy God dwells with us.

We are humbled by the fact that we are saved by grace. But are we not still more humbled by the fact that God recognizes us as co-laborers. We are in royal company. And this is why we sing

"O to grace how great a debtor
DAILY I'm constrained to be."

No man ever can be proud that he is in the service of God, as men are proud of the fact that they are in a lucrative position or in social standing with princes. The heavenly emotion is the reverse of the earthly. As we ascend in the scale of the spiritual we have an increasing consciousness of our unworthiness. Who that reads this text and realizes its truth is not disposed to say with the centurion, "I am no worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." We are ashamed that we are as we are—imperfect.

But who before this truth does not feel the call to God-likeness. A man claiming to be a co-laborer with God and yet walking in sin is a monstrosity and is a walking advertisement of scepticism and infidelity. The believer cries in heart and life and he cries anew before this text,

"More like Jesus would I be,
Let my Saviour dwell in me;
Fill my soul with peace and love,
Make me gentle as a dove;
More like Jesus while I go,
Pilgrim in this world below;
Poor in spirit would I be,—
Let my Saviour dwell in me."

This then is the draught that we need to counteract the enervating forces of the world. We need to open the windows toward heaven, and drink in the divine air.

Norway puts a tax on windows. Her citizens thus do with as few windows as possible. To tax windows is to discourage the introduction of light and sunshine. The world to-day is laying a heavy tax on windows open to God. It says duty is convenience and religion is conformity. It calls good evil and evil good. The world does not want divine light. It is unpopular. It burns the soul and glares the eyes thereof. It therefore puts a premium on darkness. But the believer is to abolish the tax and establish more windows God-ward. "We are laborers together with God."