

WORKING WITH GOD

"For we are labourers together with God." I Corinthians 3:9.

The ancient city of Corinth in Greece was one of the most famous ports in Europe. When Paul went there, he found a population of five hundred thousand. Ships from every nation were in the harbors, and the streets were crowded with tourists from every country. But the reputation of the city was bad. The nights and days were filled with drunkenness and revelry. Sin was rampant among all classes. If someone in the Roman or Grecian world wanted to say that a man was leading a low and sinful life, he would say, "He behaves like a Corinthian."

Paul went to this godless, heathen city to show them a "more excellent way of life." He said, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months preaching the gospel of Christ and teaching the Word of God. He won many people to Christ and established a strong church. He then went on his way to other places and established other churches. Soon the news of divisions in the Corinthian Church began to reach him. These people were following men instead of following Christ. Paul wrote and rebuked them, telling them that he and Cephas and Apollos were very insignificant in comparison with Christ, the all-important One. Then he told them that Christians "are laborers together with God."

This truth needs to be taught today. We are not just working for ourselves, we are workers with God. Some people are working for a living, some are working to pay for a home, some are working to educate their children, but comparatively few people can truthfully say, "I am working with God." Every day Christians should be living for Christ, witnessing to others about Him, and introducing them to the Savior.

The manner in which Paul dealt with the members of the church at Corinth is a masterpiece of both strategy and wisdom. He reminded them that their difficulty had arisen because of three things chiefly. First, they had not learned how to live together; second, they had not learned how to work together; and third, they had forgotten that they must reap together. Life holds no greater problem than the fine art of living together. That is the basic principle of society. It is the cord that binds the home together. It is the underlying principle of institutions, of business relations, of municipalities, and of governments. Until individuals learn how to live in peaceable relations with each other there cannot be much hope of joy and progress.

The words of our text teach us that:

I. God Is A Worker.

God is ever working. Creation declares and illustrates His labors. The works of providence give emphasis to the same fact. His works of redemption give further proof of His ceaseless activities. From the birth to the death of each individual, God works constantly for the benefit of His children. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." He also said, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

II. We should Be Workers.

Paul said, "For we are labourers together with God." There is a great dignity in toil and honest labor. Right-thinking people do not respect an idler, but they

honor a person who works hard. History has been made by workers and not by shrinkers. The greatest advances in science through the years have been made by those who toiled. Christianity has been advanced by those who worked with their Lord. The biggest tragedy that befell our nation in the decade of the thirties was the teaching that men did not have to work -- that the government or someone else would support them. One man said, "If the government cuts down on my allotment, I will be forced to take one of the jobs that have been offered me."

That is not the Bible way. The commandment of God is "Six days shalt thou labor," and it has not been abrogated. In Second Thessalonians 3:10 we read, "This we commanded you, that if any man would not work, neither should he eat." It is right to support those who cannot work, but charity is no substitute for honest toil, and it is wrong to support those who can but who will not work.

Corinth went into oblivion because her citizens ceased to work and plunged into debauchery. Rome waxed great in wealth and power, but became a people of idleness. Men everywhere today are crying out for less work and more pleasure. The great masses of our people have lost their initiative, ambition, and incentive. We are fast becoming a nation of idlers. It is a serious condition when large numbers live upon the toil of others. This condition breaks down morale and makes worthless citizens.

Nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished without work. The world has applauded Daniel Webster's famous reply to Hayne as a masterpiece of thought and eloquence, but it is not always remembered how much labor it cost. For nearly a year Webster had expected the debate. He had sent to South Carolina, Mr. Hayne's home, and secured a copy of all of Hayne's printed speeches he could get, had studied them carefully, learning the arguments and mental strength of his antagonist. Thus most of Webster's speech was prepared months before its delivery. He sat in the Senate ready for the attack. When it came and Webster responded the nation marvelled at the resources of a man who could make so masterly a speech on the spur of the moment. But it was not on the spur of the moment. It was the result of much hard work. This principle is just as true in matters of religious enterprise. Nothing of value can be accomplished for God without work. Nothing will take the place of work.

There is so much work to be done and we have such little time in which to do it. The fields are white unto harvest. Do you have a place of service in these fields?

A great man said, "You must learn two things in order to be successful -- you must learn to work and you must learn to work with others." When Solomon led the people in building a great temple for God, he employed seventy thousand burden bearers. Off in the mountains there were eighty thousand hewers of stone who never came near the temple. Hundreds of skilled men worked with gold and silver and brass. There never would have been a temple in Jerusalem unless the people had worked together.

A man who was visiting an insane asylum asked the keeper this question, "Aren't you afraid these people will unite and hurt you and others?" The keeper replied, "Crazy people never unite on anything." But sensible people work together, and that is the kind of people God wants. Having been saved by Christ, and led by the Holy Spirit, and given a common task and goal, let us work together in the vineyard

of our Lord.

III. We Should Be Workers With The Lord.

Frequently, when in lovely homes, you will see certain articles or pieces of furniture which were not made for use, but for ornaments. The only purpose which they serve is to add to the pleasure of their viewers by their beauty. Other articles and pieces of furniture as readily show from their mechanism that they were made for use. They may be beautiful also, but their beauty is only incidental, for they were designed for service.

When we look at man, we see that he was designed to be a worker, or to be useful rather than ornamental; although some seem to think themselves exceptions to this rule. They think they were born to be an ornament to society, but they are sadly mistaken. Men and women were intended to be workers.

From observation and experience we also learn that man is truly happy only when he is employed. The most restless and discontented are the people who have nothing to do. The idle, for lack of other occupation, often set themselves to the task of "killing time," but the real victim of their murderous action is not time, but their own happiness.

Furthermore, we learn that man finds his highest happiness only when engaged in the highest labor of which he is capable. This is a very important truth. Because many have not learned it, or do not believe it, many are unhappy. Often we see people working side by side in the same work, one is contented and happy, while the other is sour, morose, and miserable.

God is gracious and good to give eternal life to those who receive Christ as their Saviour. But He does more than this. He gives every Christian the blessed privilege of working with Him in the accomplishment of His purpose and will. What a wonderful privilege it is to join hands, heads, and hearts with the God of the universe and to work with Him! What a privilege to labor with Him in His church!

What an honor, and what a privilege, to be God's fellow-worker! What a title! That is the highest tribute that can be paid to us. How august the dignity! What distinction it confers upon us! We are workers with Him in His field. He furnishes the soil, the seed, the sunshine, and the showers, but He expects us to do the cultivating. God will not do anything for us that we can do for ourselves, but He will do everything for us that we cannot do for ourselves. God made the stone, the clay, and the wood, but man will never live in a house unless he puts these together and builds the house. A church never grows without human beings using God's gifts. Church work is hindered because some members try to do things without God's help, and others sit around and wait for God to do everything. If we work with God, He will work with us. When we work together success is certain.

We always fail when we are not linked with God. Someone has said that, if you want to make a success of life, you should link yourself to some great cause and give your best to it. Surely, we are on the road to the highest happiness and success when we link our lives with God and give our best in service with Him. Why does the world remember, Wesley, Spurgeon, Moody, and Bunyan? Many other men have been just as able and have worked just as hard. But we remember these men because they linked

their lives with God. It may be a fine thing to work for General Motors, Ford Motor Company, United States Steel Corporation, or the Standard Oil Company, but how much more blessed to work with God. How wonderful to have Him as our senior Partner!

In recent years men have learned to work with God in a material way. The forces of electricity have been here all the time, for God put them here, but it was left up to men to harness this great power. God puts rich soil upon the earth, but He leaves it up to man to cultivate this soil. He puts coal in the bosom of the earth, but He leaves it up to man to find it and dig it out. The radio waves have been here since the days of Adam, but God left it up to man to tune into these waves. The component parts of the airplane have always been here, but God left it up to man to invent this flying miracle. We have always worked with God in such a way as to find the power wrapped up in these atoms.

When Andrew Jackson was elected President, it took him twenty-two days to go from Tennessee to Washington, D.C. His inaugural address was heard by a few hundred people. But today the president can cross the country in a few hours, and he can be heard and seen by millions of people. The forces that are used today have been here all the time, but it was only when man worked with God that these forces were made useful and valuable.

We have the matchless privilege of working with God in spiritual things. Christ's sacrifice for sin purchased a complete redemption, but God uses us to tell the story of His love. It is the things that we do in partnership with Him that will live on through eternity. As we work with Him and He uses His mighty power through us, lives can be transformed. We can have a part in the biggest work in the world. If we work with God and He works with us, we can never fail. Here then is our task—living in conformity to His will, living faithfully in His service, working with Him to help others, using our influence and our money to introduce others to Christ. Let us link our lives with God, work with Him faithfully to the end of life, and He will reward us for what we do.

Jacob was the keeper of a lighthouse on a lonely shore. He was a good and faithful man. He loved a fine woman by the name of Martha. When they were married she came to live with him in the lighthouse. He said to her, "Martha, remember this above all things—we must keep the lens clean and the light burning brightly." As the years went by this couple remained faithful to their trust and no vessel ever went down near that shore, because there was always a bright light shining to guide them. Then one day Jacob contracted a cold which developed into pneumonia. They brought a boat from the mainland to take him to the hospital. The last words he said to his wife were, "Martha, remember to keep the lens clean and the light burning brightly." Each evening a boat would come out to the lighthouse to bring news of his condition. Always the messenger brought the same message to Martha. It was, "Keep the lens clean and the light burning brightly." One day the boat was late and Martha became very anxious. When the messenger finally arrived, she sensed that something was wrong. "How is Jacob?" she asked the messenger. And the man hung his head in sorrow and told her that her husband was dead. "Did he leave any message for me?" asked Martha.

The man said, "Yes. He said to tell you to keep the lens clean and the light burning brightly."

Friends, Christ Jesus sends that message to you and to me. He tells us that we are the light of the world. We must keep the lens of our lives pure and clean and the light of our faith burning brightly. God help us to keep the light of faith, hope, and good works burning until at last He takes us home to be with Him.