

Labourers Together with God

One of the finest of the many beautiful spiritual passages written by brother Roberts is found in the *Instructor*, in answer to question 14, "What does the Bible reveal concerning the character of God?" "Answer: That He is kind, yet inflexible in the requirements of His law; loving and compassionate, yet terrible as a destroying fire against the rebellious and the guilty; forgiving towards offences, yet jealous of the dignity, the glory, and the supremacy of His Name. He is holy, and cannot look upon sin. He is wise, and cannot tolerate fools. He is true and faithful, and will destroy all the false and perfidious. He is just and true and perfect—at once the fountain of love and vengeance; the author of life and death; the source of reviving mercy and consuming fire. He is eternal, unchangeable, unsearchable, infinite, glorious in power and majesty—the King immortal, the Possessor of heaven and earth, to whom alone is glory due."

Truly that is indeed a Scriptural answer, as proven by some thirty texts quoted. There is absolutely nothing, in the false gods of man's imagination, that can for a moment compare in greatness to the God of the Hebrews revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. And yet, although He is so great in power and wisdom, He is equally great in mercy — towards the willing-hearted of the sons of men: to those of "broken spirit, and humble contrite hearts" — that He even counts them as His children: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us — to call us *sons of God*." And the fact which we wish to consider particularly is that God's love towards us has even gone beyond making us sons and daughters; He has conferred upon us another relationship—in the keeping of which our worthiness of sonship of God is proven. We shall see, that it is indeed the touchstone to test our professed faith and love.

We recognize the importance of the added title conferred upon us by God—"Labourers together with God"—when we fully realise the magnitude of God's plan to cover the earth with His glory, as the waters cover the sea; to utterly abolish every form of evil, sin, disease and death from the earth. The world now is full of everything contrary to the glory of God. Verily, as Christ said, while he was so busily engaged "about the Father's business," "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."

The apostle Paul styles the Philippians—and that, of course, includes all who so qualify, "my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of Life." To the Thessalonians he wrote of Timothy, "our brother: and minister of God, and our fellow-labourer in the gospel of Christ."

It is sometimes said, by the professors of a Christendom that is far astray of the *realities* of God's plan, that "Christadelphians are materialistic." Just that, we are indeed: we are looking for — what is so plainly promised by God — material, substantial things. Just as the Bible reveals angels with a divine nature far more substantial and enduring than our own (in contradistinction to the winged, shadowy, unreal, immaterial angels of theology), so we look for real, literal, enduring things on the earth, when God's kingdom is established thereupon.

And it is just as true, that if we are at last to attain to those realities — we must be doing, real substantial things now: "labourers together with God" and with Christ. The business in hand is to win men and women from the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of Christ. "They that turn many to righteousness," said Daniel, when speaking of the resurrection and judgment, "shall shine as the stars, for ever and ever." We have a real, practical task before us. Just talking a few generalities will not help at all—to be *effective* we must work with God. And the wise way to accomplish anything is to plan.

On one occasion Christ said that "The children of this world are *wiser* than the children of light." This was in connection with a steward who, while "unjust," was nevertheless wise enough to do some real practical things, in preparation for a coming accounting of stewardship. Just so we, in

our day and generation, can take lessons, if we are wise, from the plans and preparations of the stewards of worldly goods. For example— we might draw an analogy between a great commercial enterprise, in the preparation of its representatives, for the distribution of goods; and the preparations and plans we make, as ambassadors of Christ for the dissemination of the good news, the Gospel of God's coming kingdom on earth. Just as a commercial enterprise prepares its representatives—their salesmen—to carry their offerings to prospective customers—just so the ambassador of the Gospel of God must properly equip himself for the task in hand. First, he must have as complete information of his subject as it is possible for that representative to contain—up to the full limit of his capacity: "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed." And, secondly, the attainment of that knowledge will provide the prospective representative with some of the most valuable, in fact essential, personal qualifications. Through his intimate knowledge of the things which he is to go out and bring to the attention of prospective hearers, he will have obtained that prime requisite: before he can convince others — he will have become thoroughly self-convinced. With the workman for Christ this positive self-conviction will be plainly evident to all with whom he may come in contact; for in his own life men will easily see that here is a man totally different from the *uninstructed* and *uninformed*; for in his conversation, and his acts, it will be obvious that he has "been with Jesus." There will be about that apostle for the gospel a deep sincerity of self-conviction and purpose, able to sweep aside all resistance; able to convince the gainsayers, whether or not they will be willing to accept the prize and the offer of Eternal Life.

All of us—all who have to labour for the bread that perishes, are salesmen: for we are all obliged to sell ourselves first; we must convince our employer of our dependability and worth. We are all obliged to prepare and equip ourselves with knowledge, and with as agreeable and persuasive a personality as we can possibly acquire. And so it is in the work of preaching the Truth. Not all have the same gift. Some of us do not excel on the platform: while some of us may be filled with correct knowledge, we may not have freedom of speech, or ease of presence, necessary to go out boldly to a professed Christendom or an agnostic audience. But there is plenty of work for all; for all have some talents of various sorts: and also all of us will be required to give an account of the manner in which we have employed those talents. We remember an exhorting brother, many years ago—in the old Elks Hall of the Jersey City ecclesia—*comparing* our work for the bread that perisheth, with our efforts to please the Father, who has to give the Bread of Everlasting Life! Brethren and sisters there, who were *willing* to hear the word of exhortation, and profit thereby, were stimulated to greater activity in the Father's business. He spoke, of the insistence on the part of our masters after the flesh, for punctual and regular attendance at work—enforced by them by the time-clock, and other automatic recording devices; of their printed rules and regulations, with which their employees must carefully comply, or suffer dismissal from the service.

Yes, we are in business, brethren and sisters—a work great and noble, and far surpassing in intelligence and purpose anything that mere man has ever been able to conceive — for, as Paul says, "We are labourers together *with* God" And the great difference between service for God and servitude to man is that while flesh-masters pay us only *for results* (sending the weak to the wall, and the sick and broken to the poorhouse), our heavenly Master pays on the merciful basis of effort, and willingness to serve, "*For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath!*" Christ has plainly taught that he does not expect the man with one talent to accomplish the same results as the man with ten talents. He will judge us, at last, on the basis of how much. have we *tried*—
not how much have we accomplished.

Our masters after the flesh have experts continually at work, checking the books at regular intervals: also they have frequent sales meetings, and the conventions of salesmen, to make *quite sure* that everyone is thoroughly informed of the advantages and merit of the commodities offered for sale. All very closely comparable to the frequent and regular Sunday morning meetings which Christ has ordained for the fellow-workers in the Father's business; providing ample opportunity for *self-examination* as to whether we have obtained a thorough understanding of God's offer of salvation — and a very favorable occasion at the Lord's table for self-analysis, as to just how much of our time we

give the Truth—compared with how much of our time we spend gratifying the various (allowable) desires of the flesh. And no accountant anywhere ever rendered a more important statement or balance-sheet than that.

How much of our time do we give to God: and how much do we spend on ourselves? In the first place, are we so busy with things that "perish with the using" that we do not have time for the daily Bible readings? Is it possible that any earnest minded, sincere "worker together with God," *could* spend time at the radio, perhaps at cards, at some sort of club (which would seem the pinnacle of folly), or reading story-magazines, etc.— and fail to partake of daily spiritual nourishment which flows from a systematic Bible reading? To ask that question is to answer it: let us make sure we ask it of ourselves. We are all "leaky vessels," as the apostle explains. It is the part of wisdom to continually replenish our store of spiritual insight—both to make up for the natural leakage, and to increase in knowledge: to mature from the "milk" food of babes in Christ, into the "meat" diet and "full stature" and manhood in Christ Jesus.

Nor is it necessary, or at all advisable, to wait for that one hour at the table of the Lord, for self-examination. As pointed out before in an exhortation, "These, our *present* days, are our judgment days." Each night, as we lie down to sleep, that day's work is done, for good or for ill. There is an oft-quoted verse to the effect that we should "*Count that day lost, whose low descending sun, sees from our hand no worthy action done.*" How true, indeed, is that of our fellow service in the Lord's work. How then shall we better prepare ourselves to serve? All that God asks (nay, demands) of us, is our very best effort. Except that we must make our lives conform as closely as possible to the great Exemplar. God does not demand results in our work of preaching the Truth. We can place much to our account "on the right side of the ledger " in two very important ways. First, by aiding, comforting and exhorting our fellow-labourers—those who are already in the bonds of the covenant; exhorting and being ourselves exhorted; receiving mutual benefit. Secondly, whole-heartedly engaging in that other aspect of "working together with God;" "ambassadors for Christ" among the ignorant, the unbelievers, and those that are "out of the way of salvation." In this last-mentioned service for Christ—"let him that heareth say come"—*everyone*, who is willing hearted, is amply provided with talents.

To sow the seed is a work that every one of us can easily do. And furthermore, if there are any who feel they are not qualified for platform work here is an excellent opportunity to make up the deficiency. Many faithful brethren and sisters have been brought into the Truth through a very simple sowing of the seed: for after all it is God who giveth the increase: our service is to sow plentifully; not all in one place, not trying to cultivate stones, not casting pearls before swine; but always ready to speak a word that will awaken response wherever there is "light," or receptivity.

In our daily association with men of the world in necessary search for the bread that perisheth, we all have ample opportunity to say that word which, "fitly spoken, is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." *Then*, if that word brings no favourable response, we have nevertheless done our duty, and have only to continue carefully seeking further possible hearers of the Word. A few months ago, in Boston, we spent a few days in the company of an active worker for God. We shall probably long remember the delight of listening to his experiences where he uttered a few words here and there: words which, we are quite sure, would produce results if only the ears on which they had fallen were not stone deaf—and yet, perhaps, at some later day those words may prick the memory and the conscience of one of those hearers. As an illustration of what can happen: at the recent picnic of the Elizabeth Ecclesia a very staunch brother from the Jersey City ecclesia related to the present speaker how he came to a knowledge of the Truth. (And, by the way, some of the most soul-stirring accounts to be heard in these probation days, and also in the Kingdom of God, are the various ways by which "aliens" have been attracted to the Truth). The brother to whom we have just alluded worked in an office with a bookkeeper—a sister who is now a member of a distant ecclesia. There had been some conversation that morning concerning the "soul" of a recently deceased member of the office staff. All that sister had to do, after quietly observing the interest taken, was to speak less than a dozen words—to ask whether he would read an article on the subject by a Bible student. She gave him *Christendom*

Astray, and, so far as she knew for ten years, it was just simply one more case where she had done her duty by the word "fitly spoken." It was eight years afterwards before that seed germinated, impelling, compelling that man to search for the Christadelphians: finally securing the Jersey City address by writing to England. How scriptural are the words of our hymn—"Do but sow it, it will grow, though the way you may not know."

Are *we* ready, brethren and sisters, when our opportunity comes? Do we live a life among our fellow employees in office and shop that is "a glory" to the Father, and an inspiration to the perishing among mankind to say, "*I will go with you.*"

How simple and how essential it is that we be always ready to testify concerning God's plan of salvation. And all, even the most backward and shy brother or sister, needs to do (in addition of course to a Christlike life) is to be prepared with a kindly word and a pamphlet. It may indeed prove "a casting of the bread upon the waters"—and, perhaps as with the sister previously spoken of, "it may return to us, after many days," *even at the judgment seat.*

If in times past we have failed to make opportunities to open men's eyes to God's Truth, then we have not been worthy of that title "*workers together* with God": and if we are wise, we shall remedy the deficiency at once. These present days are days of perseverance and labor: it is a condition that will not last much longer. God has provided for His workers, "*a rest.*" "He is not unrighteous, to forget our labour of love." As the writer to the Hebrews exhorts his hearers, "There remaineth, *therefore*, a rest—for the people of God. Let us labour therefore, to enter into that rest." Let us then take up the cross of self-sacrifice and untiring labour; as Paul exhorted his fellow-labourers at Corinth, "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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