

Our Work Must Be Our Living

- 1 The overflow of life is work,
The work should be our living!
What we experience e'er should be
The message we are giving.
When living and the work are one,
The work will be effectual;
When message and the life are one,
The word will be successful.
- 2 The work must be the fruit of life,
Born thru the Spirit's flowing;
As branches of the Lord, the vine,
Fruit bearing, life bestowing.
'Tis Christ Himself thru us to work,
Himself as life expressing,
And all the riches of His life
To others manifesting.
- 3 'Tis not a movement borne of man,
But by His power moving;
'Tis not the deeds done outwardly,
But inward action proving.
'Tis not the work of enterprise,
But 'tis His life confessing;
'Tis not to toil for our success,
But 'tis Himself expressing.
- 4 Our plans, our aims, our energy
We must abandon wholly,
That He may work His plan thru us,
His aim and object solely.
Ourselves, with all we are and have,
To death we must surrender,
That Christ may live Himself thru us
With riches and with splendor. (*Hymns*, #910)

Witness Lee wrote this hymn concerning the believer's labor in the Lord. Such a labor should purely and simply be the overflow of the divine life. Whatever is not produced through our intimate fellowship in life with the Lord is not acceptable to God as true labor in the Lord. All genuine believers possess an innate desire to labor for the Lord, the unique One who has redeemed, forgiven, and regenerated them. This is an appropriate and commendable aspiration, but obscured within this noble determination there often lies a misguided thought that self-directed service to God is a requirement, an obligation, that must be performed zealously in order to fulfill some requisite duty as Christians. Consequently, many believers are frustrated

in their Christian walk; they live their Christian life with the hope of validating their salvation through dutiful and zealous efforts to labor for the Lord. Our mind needs to be renewed by the operation of the Spirit who has been freely given to us through faith.

When the Lord spoke to the crowd that had been fed with five barley loaves and two fish, He said, "Work not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you; for Him has the Father, even God, sealed" (John 6:27). As typical religious persons, they asked, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" (v. 28). The Lord's reply astounded and disappointed the majority of the people:

Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up in the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him. (vv. 53-56)

As a result of the Lord's word, many of the disciples went away. The Lord clarified His teaching by pointing out, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (v. 63). Thus, in the Lord's explanation to His disciples, He unveiled the central factor concerning the working out of the divine economy—the life of the Lord must be received and lived out by His disciples; this life is in and comes out from the Spirit of God embodied and conveyed through the word of God. The working out of God's New Testament economy emanates uniquely from eating the Lord to receive life and live because of Him; it can never be the product of man's labor from his natural life. We need to see, realize, and enter into this fact in the divine economy. God's purpose can never be accomplished by human effort.

Even though human effort and zeal cannot accomplish or work out God's New Testament economy, there still remains an indisputable necessity for the believers to labor for the working out of God's purpose. A number of verses in the Scriptures confirm that we are ordained to walk in good works and that we are to labor in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10, 58; Col. 1:29). For example, Titus 2:11-14 says,

The grace of God, bringing salvation to all men, has appeared, training us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in the present age, awaiting the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify to Himself a particular people as His unique possession, zealous of good works.

In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says “We are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them.” We have been created by God in Christ Jesus through regeneration; that is, we have been born of God by receiving His life and nature to become His genuine sons! God created this masterpiece with the view that we would walk in good works.

What are the good works ordained for us by God? On the one hand, based on the entire revelation of the New Testament, we know that the good works are not things that are according to man’s ideas and concepts, things worked out by man’s plans and energies. On the other hand, according to the Scriptures there are good things that God has prepared for us to walk in, things that can be worked out only by the energizing source of the indwelling God Himself (Phil. 2:13). These good things are unquestionably very different from the works of power of zealous men whom the Lord spurned:

Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness. (Matt. 7:22-23)

The Lord did not deny the works, but He repudiated the workers, calling them lawless. The Lord’s word indicates that doing the Father’s will is an indispensable requirement of a proper worker. As we review the above hymn, we will see that doing the will of the Father is intrinsically related to His life being received by us, growing in us, and overflowing from our inner being. Our labor must be guided by, restricted to, and worked out by the operation of the indwelling Spirit as the Son with the Father. It is the mingling of the Triune God with and in His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated believers that actualizes the labor that works out His economy.

Our Work as the Overflow of Life

The Bible emphasizes that the divine life, which is being dispensed into those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is a flowing life. In an incident recorded in the Gospel of John, the Lord spoke with a woman of Samaria who was drawing water from a well. When He requested that the woman draw water for Him to quench His thirst, she

entered into a philosophical discussion with Him concerning the merits of the religious traditions of the Samaritans versus those of the Jews. His reply to her questions quickly arrested her attention:

If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water... Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. (4:10, 14)

The life of God is a flowing life. It is not static. The flowing fountain of living water never ceases, and it never fails to satisfy: “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever” (v. 14). The life of God is dynamic; it is moving, growing, developing, maturing, ever new, fresh, and living. The life that we have received through faith in Christ Jesus not only abides in us; it overflows from us, just as it overflowed from the Lord in His work on earth. When the Lord Jesus was on the earth in the flesh, His works came forth from the Father through Him by the power of the Spirit. He was one with the Father, who was always with Him. He never did anything of His own volition or for His own purpose. Similarly our works must proceed from the Spirit as the Son with the Father who is now indwelling us as our life. This is a profound principle. All our labor must come out of the overflow of life. This is the central point of this hymn.

Our Work as Our Living

The life that we have received produces a living that, in turn, becomes our work. Stanza 1 declares that our working and our message should be the expression of our experience of God in our daily living. Our living and our work are one. For our living to be our working indicates that what we do should flow out of what we are. Put another way, the important aspect of our work is not so much what we do but who we are. We cannot merely adopt another world view. Neither can we rely on our efforts to improve our behavior. We must walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). In order to walk in newness of life, we need to learn to walk according to the spirit (8:4) and to set our mind on the spirit (v. 6) in order that our living may become our working. The word *spirit* in verse 6 refers to our regenerated human spirit and the Spirit of God joined together as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The two spirits are mingled together to have one life and one living to produce one expression. This living is our working.

Our Work as the Fruit of Life

The first half of stanza 2 is based on John 15 in which the Lord referred to Himself as the vine and to His disciples as the branches. The vision of the vine with the branches

unveils the deepest principle concerning our work of bearing fruit in God's economy—fruit-bearing is altogether a matter of the multiplication of life. The Lord as the vine demonstrates the organic aspect of the propagating work of the Triune God. The Father as the husbandman is the source of the divine life. The Son as the vine has come to bring the divine life into God's created and chosen people. The Spirit is the flowing life that causes the growth in life of the believers and produces the fruit of life through them. The vine is the organism of the Triune God, an organic entity, one corporate expression coordinated and harmonized by and in life. The vine has an expression that is produced by an internal, dynamic, and imperceptible source—the nourishing, beautifying, and energizing divine life. This life is the Spirit's flowing.

The flowing of the Spirit produces fruit, not by the endeavor, capacity, and power of the branches but by the living and working of the life of Christ through each member. Consequently, the second half of the stanza points to the laboring Christ within each believer: "Tis Christ Himself thru us to work, / Himself as life expressing, / And all the riches of His life / To others manifesting." The complete salvation of God is initiated, accomplished, and consummated by Christ. He is the unique One who is qualified and capable of carrying out the divine economy. Hence, it is Christ Himself working through us that produces the fruit of life.

Our Work Expressing Christ, Not a Movement Borne of Man

Stanza 3 contrasts our labor in the Lord with a movement borne of man. We need to be deeply impressed with what the work of God is not in order to fully enter into what it is. It is not a movement. Christianity is filled with many movements carried out by the plans and efforts of man. It is not outward deeds done in the name of God or for God. It is not a work of enterprise—the ventures, projects, activities, or endeavors of enterprising men. It also is not the achievement of some success, as though accomplishments alone can validate the genuineness of our labor.

The work that is approved by God is the move of God in and through man. It is, as well, the proving of inward action—*proving* in this stanza alludes to Romans 12:2: "That you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." The Greek word for *prove* is *dokimazo*—to prove by testing, indicating that we need to experience and express the will of God by living it out. In the same manner, according to this hymn, we need to labor in a way that demonstrates the reality of the Christ within us, living by and according to the inward prompting of the Spirit in our spirit. Further, our service to the Lord is through confessing, that is, acknowledging,

the presence and effect of His life within us. It is His unique life that functions effectively according to the will of the Father. Finally, our approved work is the very Christ Himself living His life through us as His chosen, redeemed, sanctified, and overcoming saints who, in turn, live out His very life in our daily living.

Surrendering to Death So That Christ May Live through Us

After presenting a brief yet comprehensive review of the work of a true servant of God, which is unadulterated, authentic, and approvable by God, the final stanza turns its attention to what we must do in order to become a part of God's economic move on earth. First, we have to "abandon wholly" all of our plans, goals, and energy; this means that our capacities, our efforts, with our great ideas and good intentions, plus all our goals concerning the outcome of our labor must be forsaken, left behind, and thrown away. This was the apostle Paul's realization after he had the life-changing experience of meeting the wonderful person of Christ as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there (Acts 26:9-19). When we see the supreme worth of our dear Lord, then to reject and discard all our plans, our aims, and our energies will no longer seem a sacrifice but a welcome relief from the distracting items that usurp and rob us of the real riches of Christ. Even after abandoning our plans, goals, and energies, there is still another level of dealing: "Ourselves, with all we are and have, / To death we must surrender." In order to fully coordinate and labor together with the Lord, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow the Lord. To deliver to death all that we are and have is not a once for all experience; it is the daily experience of coming to know, love, and enjoy Christ—to gain Him—by seeking to be found in Him, to know Him in the power of His resurrection and in the fellowship of His sufferings, and to be conformed to His death (Phil. 3:7-10).

To be called by God to enter into and participate in His labor is the greatest privilege that can be afforded to redeemed humanity. But we cannot coordinate with God in our natural man; it requires us to be regenerated with His life and then to pay the greatest price—to surrender ourselves and all we are and have to death. Christ is the center and the circumference of all that God is doing and will do. Only His life is able to carry out His economy. When we surrender ourselves to His terminating death, we will be able to apprehend, become a part of, and bring to fruition the eternal purpose of God. Oh, may He grant us the grace to see this great principle that we may fully and absolutely surrender ourselves and everything we are and have to death so that "Christ may live Himself thru us / With riches and with splendor"!

by Gary Kaiser