



I Want to Be a Worker

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

"I want to be a worker for the Lord." We sing that song. But what does it mean? What does it mean to work for the Lord? We know the Bible describes Christians as laborers, workers. **II Timothy 2:15** talks about workers who are approved by God. In **Matthew 9:38**, Jesus said we should pray for laborers, workers to be sent into the harvest. The parable in **Matthew 20:1-16** pictures the kingdom citizens as laborers hired to work in the Master's vineyard. Being part of Christ's church is not being a member of a country club. The church is not a place for us to come, sit back, relax, and be served. It is a mission. It is a work. It is a place for us to come, roll up our sleeves, put on our serving aprons, and get to work. But if I really want to be a worker for the Lord, what will I do? The New Testament demonstrates that our Lord is the example for us. He does not ask of us what He was not first willing to do. If we are going to be like Him, then we must work for Him in three areas—work on self, work among the brethren, and work in the harvest.

Discussion:

I. Work on self.

- A. Perhaps the most well-known and strongest passage on this is **Philippians 2:12-13**, in which Paul claims you must "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (ESV). The reference to "fear and trembling" is used in only three other New Testament passages (**I Corinthians 2:3**; **II Corinthians 7:15**; **Ephesians 6:5**) and conveys the humility that comes in the face of an immense task. It is a humility that fears being unable to complete the task fully and trembles at the consequences of not carrying the task out properly. In this passage, working out our salvation with fear and trembling is equated with continuing in obedience and is based on following the example of Jesus in **Philippians 2:8** who "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (ESV).
- B. Jesus' example demonstrates the first area of work for us—humility. After all, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (cf. **Proverbs 3:34**; **James 4:6**; **I Peter 5:5**). Only those who are poor in spirit receive the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:3**). In other words, even as we work out our salvation, at no point can we arrogantly claim that we have worked so well that we deserve salvation. Personal boasting is simply not a part of our salvation (cf. **Ephesians 2:8-9**). Though Noah built the ark, it was God who saved his family. Though Moses went in to Pharaoh and led the people out, it was God who delivered Israel. Though Joshua and Israel marched around Jericho and fought against Ai, it was God who brought the victories. Though Gideon and his three hundred rose up against the Midianite oppressors, it was God who vanquished the enemy. Though David slung the sling and wielded the sword, it was God who conquered the giant. Though we work out our salvation, through fear and trembling we recognize it is God who has done the saving.
- C. A second area of work is seen in Paul in **Philippians 3:2-14**. We need to cut off everything that hinders us from knowing and being in Jesus Christ. And through that make every effort to increase our faith in Him, knowing Him, and being found in Him, pressing on for the prize. We suffer loss. We count all that seemed to be gain to us as rubbish. We cut off and excise whatever hinders us and we hang on to Jesus Christ and Him alone. As Jesus said in **Matthew 5:29-30**, even if it is something as important to you as your right eye or right hand that is hindering you, cut it off. And again, as **Hebrews 12:1-2** instructs, let us lay aside every weight and sin that hinders us and run the race, looking again to Jesus as our example. I can't help but think of Jesus' parable of the sower in **Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23**. The seed is sown in our heart, but if it will bear fruit, we must hoe and weed the soil found there. We need to remove the rocks and weeds that will keep the seed from sending roots deep into our hearts and from receiving the nutrition they need.
- D. Perhaps the best passage that describes the work we need to pursue is seen in **II Peter 1:5-11**. Peter says we must be diligent to make our calling and election sure (sounds like "work out your salvation" to me). We accomplish this by working on our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. We are to make every effort to add and increase these things in our walk with Jesus. As we do, we will increase in usefulness and fruitfulness for the Lord, and an entrance to the eternal kingdom will be guaranteed for us.

E. But before we leave this point, let's go back to **Philippians 2:12-13**. Because if we simply stop at **vs. 12**, we might have cause for discouragement, even despair. If we are right, Paul has instructed us to work on ourselves for the Lord with the mindset that we will never actually get it done or do it completely right. It is my experience that few of us have the problem of thinking we can ever get it right. In fact, most of us are so humbled by our failures we are certain we'll never get it right, and, therefore, we give up. Thus, Paul includes the encouragement of **vs. 13**. It is true, we will never complete it. We will never get it right. But we are not alone. When we work, God works. And His work is the effective means of our salvation. Noah could never have saved his family. Moses could never have delivered Israel (he even tried once and fled in fear). Joshua could never have defeated Jericho and Ai (the initial defeat at Ai proved that). Gideon could not throw off the oppression of Midian. And David could not defeat the giant. But God could and did. We can never truly work out our salvation, but God can. More than that. If we are in Jesus Christ, He is working it out. God's work does not set us free to sit on our backsides, lazily waiting for Him to do His thing in us. He hasn't saved us so we can be free to live in sin. He has saved us and worked in us so we can do the good work He has created for us (**Ephesians 2:8-10**). Jesus has redeemed us from our lawless deeds to be a people zealous for good works (**Titus 2:14**). You may not be able to truly work out your salvation, but God is working in you. In all your fear and trembling, don't give up. God is working on you. God is working in you. God is working through you. Hang on to Him and keep working.

II. Work among the brethren.

- A. In addition to the work we are to do for the Lord, the New Testament demonstrates we must work on behalf of one another, our brethren. In **Philippians 2:3-7**, Paul said we must look out for the interests of others, in so doing we follow the example of Jesus who left heaven and came to earth to serve us. In **Galatians 6:1-2**, he said we must renew and restore each other and bear one another's burdens. The Hebrew writer explains in **Hebrews 10:24-25** that we must stir up one another to love and good works, encouraging one another. We are to love one another (**Romans 12:10**), honor one another (**Romans 12:10**), welcome and receive one another (**Romans 15:5-7**), care for one another (**I Corinthians 12:25**), restore and comfort one another (**II Corinthians 13:11**), serve one another (**Galatians 5:13**), be kind to one another (**Ephesians 4:32**), forgive one another (**Ephesians 4:32**), edify one another in song (**Ephesians 5:19**), submit to one another (**Ephesians 5:21**), bear with one another (**Colossians 3:13**), encourage one another (**I Thessalonians 4:18**), build up one another (**I Thessalonians 5:11**), do good to one another (**I Thessalonians 5:15**), confess to and pray for one another (**James 5:16**), and show hospitality to one another (**I Peter 4:9**). And this list simply looks at all the directions given that actually use the phrase "one another." It doesn't include other responsibilities like the emotional support found in **Romans 12:15** as we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.
- B. There is plenty of work to be done in and among one another. Some is spiritual, some is emotional, some is material. But in any event, we are to work with one another. We are to work for one another. Rather than trying to define all of the individual good works we need to do among one another, let's look at a wonderful example of work done among brethren and see what we can learn about how we can work.
- C. Let's consider Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, in **Acts 9:36-42**. While her specific example was service in material ways, making garments for widows, the principles we learn from her work can apply to any aspect of the work we need to be doing among one another.
1. *Tabitha was full of good works and charity.* Notice "full of." Tabitha did not do the occasional good deed. She was covered up with them. She was full of them. Working among our brethren is not something we mark off the checklist every once and a while. It is something that must become second nature to us.
 2. *Tabitha sacrificed for others.* Who paid for the material Tabitha used to make those garments? What other things could Tabitha have bought instead? Whose time was spent making those garments? What other more enjoyable experiences could Tabitha have had instead? I don't know how much money Tabitha had, but I do know that she didn't waste her time talking about what she would do if she had more. Rather, she used what she had to serve others.
 3. *Tabitha did not do everything, but she did what she could.* The text doesn't tell us of home Bible studies, Ladies classes, meals cooked, children babysat, houses cleaned, letters written. Oh, I'm sure Tabitha did more than just make clothes. But she had her one thing that she excelled at, and she did it. Too many Christians lament all that they can't do, and so they don't even do what they can. Not Tabitha. Even if she could only do one thing, she did it.
 4. *Tabitha did not work for everyone, but she worked for those she could.* All the widows stood by and showed their garments. The minister didn't show any garments. The young mothers didn't show any

garments made for their daughters. The elders didn't show any garments made for them. It wasn't that Tabitha didn't care about all these other people, but one person can only do so much. And she did what she could. Too many Christians lament that they can't serve everyone, and they end up serving no one. Not Tabitha. She simply worked for those she could.

5. *Tabitha did not wait to be asked, but did what she could, when she could, for whom she could.* I think this is the most important lesson for us to learn here. Tabitha was not simply one part of the Joppa church's widow care program. Certainly, a local congregation is authorized to care for widows. But that is not what was going on here. This was Tabitha's work. The headquarters was her own home. The oversight here was her own. Too often Christians see work needing to be done and wonder when the elders or deacons are going to do something about it. Not Tabitha. She saw someone who needed serving, and she served. She saw work that needed doing, and she worked. She saw something she could do, and she did it. And she didn't wait to be asked. She didn't wait for a church program.
6. The amazing thing about Tabitha's story to me is that in **Acts 7** the evangelist and deacon, Stephen is stoned. The disciples mourned but simply buried him. In **Acts 12**, the apostle James will die. The disciples will mourn, but simply bury him. But in **Acts 9**, Tabitha dies, and the disciples mourn and say something has to be done. We need her back. Apostles and evangelists come and go. But real workers among the brethren can't be replaced. We need to be workers like Tabitha.

III. Work in the harvest.

- A. Finally, the third area of work is demonstrated by Jesus' statement in **Matthew 9:37-38**: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (ESV). God has a harvest in this world. There are others who will hear the Word and respond. Our job is to get to work and find the hearts of good soil. We are to be the sower of the seed in Jesus' parable in **Matthew 13:3-8**. We must cast the seed everywhere. Please note that we are to be sowers of the seed, not testers of the soil. In fact, the only true way to test the soil is to sow the seed and see what happens. We must remember what **I Corinthians 3:5-9** says. It is not our responsibility to cause growth. It is simply our responsibility to plant and water the seed. Just like when we are working on ourselves, when we work, God works. When we consistently sow the seed, He'll cause the growth.
- B. Look again at the context of **Matthew 9:37-38**, starting in **vs. 35**. There we see Jesus' example of working in the harvest. He went throughout all the cities and villages. Everywhere He went, He proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. He taught and He healed (because He had that power as well). But there are two keys in this passage that we need to understand if we will work like Jesus in the harvest. If we want to do what He did, we must see what He saw and feel what He felt.
- C. What did Jesus see?
 1. *He saw sheep without a shepherd*: Unlike the sheep of **Psalms 23**, He saw people who had no one to lead them and feed them. No one would lead them beside quiet waters. No one would restore their soul. No one would protect them in the valley of the shadow of death. No one prepared a table for them. Oh, sure, they had self-proclaimed shepherds in the priests, scribes, and Pharisees. But these were more like thieves and robbers who had only entered the fold to steal and kill (**John 10:8-10**). These men thought themselves true shepherds, but while they traveled land and sea to make one proselyte, they made him twice as much the child of hell (**Matthew 23:15**). Do we see people this way around us?
 2. *He saw people who were harassed*: This term primarily meant skinned, flayed, rent, or mangled. It was a picture of sheep who had no one to protect them and so the enemy was ripping them to shreds. Wolves, lions, and bears might attack them. They might be caught in thorn bushes. They might be stolen by those who only intend to kill the sheep. The people Jesus saw were like these sheep. They were harassed by the daily troubles of sickness, finances, stress. They were harassed by trouble on the job. They were harassed by loneliness and discouragement. They were harassed by poverty. They were harassed by false-teaching wolves. They were harassed by the oppressive weight of religious restraints placed on them by the scribes and Pharisees. Do we see people this way around us?
 3. *He saw people who were helpless*: In the context of sheep and shepherd, this is a pregnant word picture. It described a sheep which had gone astray and gotten entangled in a thorn bush. The sheep would wrestle to free itself, but only succeeded in entangling itself even more. The sheep worked harder and harder, but its situation only got worse and worse. Finally, the sheep, utterly exhausted, unable to stand, dropped to the ground. It became downcast or helpless. Unable to revive itself, the sheep would die in this state. This is what Jesus saw. Do we? Do we see people who are trying harder and harder to solve their own problems? Do we see people who are trying harder and harder to save themselves from

themselves? They are failing. All their work accomplishes is their own exhaustion until they are finally cast down, helpless, given up. Do we see the people around us this way?

D. What did Jesus feel?

1. *Jesus did not feel contempt.* Regrettably, that is all too often what we feel. We see people pursuing their sins or their false religion and we are like the Pharisee in the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector of **Luke 18:9-14** or like the older brother in the story of the prodigal in **Luke 15:11-32**. We look on them with contempt because they aren't working on themselves like we are. They don't go to our church. They aren't following our code of ethics and morals. They don't dress how we dress, speak how we speak, vote how we vote. And we hold them in contempt. Why would anyone act the way they act? Why would anyone do what they do? Because that is how sheep without shepherds act. We must remember that is how we acted before we had a shepherd (cf. **Titus 3:3-7**). We don't behave differently because we are so different. We only act differently now because we have the gracious Shepherd.
2. *Jesus did feel compassion.* **Matthew 9:36** plainly states it. What is this compassion? Compassion is the motivating force to help those in need. It was compassion that motivated Jesus to raise the widow of Nain's son in **Luke 7:13**. Further, it is an undeserved motivation. In **Matthew 18:27**, it was compassion (pity) that prompted the king to forgive the servant's debt. The man didn't deserve forgiveness. If he had deserved it, it wouldn't be compassion; it would be wages.

E. When we see others who are ensnared by the devil, rather than feeling contempt that wants to keep them at arm's length, we need to see sheep in need of a shepherd, and we need to feel compassion. When we do, we'll work for the Lord and as the Lord worked striving to introduce them to the Good Shepherd.

Conclusion:

I want to be a worker for the Lord. So we sing and so we claim. Were you aware what you were singing and claiming? I hope so. Let's make good on our commitment in that song. Let's get to work on ourselves, among our brethren, and in the harvest.