

(Service for the King) 5. PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD

by A.B. Simpson

Transcript

"We are laborers together with God" I Cor. iii. 9. The members of an English publishing firm recently sat down together to their annual dinner in Exeter Hall. There were more than two thousand partners at the table. It was a strange sight to look at that immense crowd of men and realise that they were one firm. They had adopted the plan of making all their employees partners, and it had worked most successfully.

That picture leads our thoughts to a higher relationship. Our work for God is a great partnership. "We are laborers together with God." When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He always declared that His work was done in partnership with His Father. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "The Father that dwelleth in Me He doeth the works." And He taught His disciples that their work must be in similar partnership with Him. "He that believeth in Me the works that I do shall he do also." And when He left them, Mark gives us this last picture of His ascension: "He was received up to heaven and sat on the right hand of God and they went forth and preached everywhere the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

Let us look at the two sides of this partnership:

I. HIS PART

1. He pays our debts and establishes our credit.

He finds the firm insolvent and ruined, and not only so, but also criminal. And He pays all the old obligations and puts all His own credit to its account, making our standing as good as His own, even in the sight of God.

A friend of mine once told me of a business man of his acquaintance who had a dishonest clerk. The man embezzled considerable sums of money from him, but at last was brought to repentance and became a true Christian. He came to his employer, after a great struggle, to confess his wrong, expecting not only dismissal, but perhaps also severe punishment. The merchant heard his story and was deeply moved, for he knew that he might easily have escaped detection; and, when the contrite clerk closed by saying, "Of course I cannot expect that you will ever employ me as a servant again," he replied, "No, I never can employ you as a servant again. But," he added after a pause, "you shall be a partner in my business, for I know the worth of such a testimony as that you have just given." Not often does man act so nobly, but this is just what God has done. He has assumed our liabilities, has cancelled our crimes, has even suffered

their consequences Himself, and has also taken us into His own complete fellowship and made us joint heirs in all His riches of grace and glory.

2. He supplies all the resources and capital of the business. He does not send us, like Pharaoh's taskmasters, to work without materials, but He invests all the resources that we need, Himself. He does not even limit our capital, but says to us, "God is able to make all grace abound to you; so that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work." We often see after the titles of business corporations the word "Limited." But there is no such condition upon our incorporation in the service of God. It is all grace, always, with all-sufficiency in all things, and unto every good work. Our service is not to be measured, therefore, by our natural talents, our narrow sphere, or any condition. We can draw of Him to any extent for His work. A wealthy merchant said once to a dear servant of God, "Draw on me any time you need, for it will be honored." So God says to His workers, Where natural strength fails, and natural talent is insufficient, His power and His wisdom meet all demands. When you have to cry, "We have no might against this company, neither know we what to do," then remember, "the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding," when nature cries, "We are not sufficient even to think anything as of ourselves," faith can answer, "But our sufficiency is of God; who hath also made us able ministers of the New Testament."

3. He entrusts to us the chief work of His kingdom. He does not do it Himself and leave us simply to gather up the fragments, but He Himself does all that is difficult and trying, and leaves to us the joy of harvest.

Down into the wild wilderness He came and cleaned the ground and prepared the soil with toil and pain; and then to us He left the delightful task of rearing the fruits and harvest of His husbandry. He is the strong vine, sending out its roots into the deep places of strength and life and supporting all the branches, but to us, the branches, He gives the joy and riches of bearing the fruit. He spent thirty-three years amid the shame and toil of the workshop, the judgment hall and the cross, and when it was over He had less than a thousand followers in all the world. And to His disciples He gave thousands of souls in the first month after His ascension. "Greater works than these shall they do," He says, "because I go to My Father." To us He has given these greater works. Angels would be glad to do them, but mortals are privileged instead.

4. He prepares the workers. All true workers must be prepared. And the learning of a valuable business or art is no small advantage in secular affairs. For His service our Master Himself prepares His workers. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." We are made with a special view to this very thing, that we may be adapted to good works. Adaptation is necessary in everything. Without it the fish is lost on the land and the fowl in the sea and the quadruped in the air. Each has its natural element and action, and this is easy and spontaneous. The organ is adapted for music, and the orange tree for fruit bearing, and the rose for sweet perfume. To try to make a rose grow oranges, and an organ act as a locomotive, would be foolish and idle business. And so, to expect an unregenerate soul to do Christ's service is vain. It succeeds as well as a blacksmith would at a surgical operation, or a ploughman at a fresco painting. Therefore, Christ prepares His instruments. He makes them for this very end. He puts into them the instincts, impulses and endowments that will lead them to choose, to love and to accomplish the results intended. And He especially fits each one for the service assigned. Fitly framed together, they severally fulfil their respective relationships and spheres. Each of us is created, regenerated and divinely educated for the very place we are called to fill. The great Author of our spiritual training and the source of our power is the Holy Ghost. He is promised to every true servant of Christ as a "Spirit of power, of love and a sound mind." Without Him and His gifts we can do nothing acceptable to God or effectual with men. He must open to us the Scriptures, by which "the man of God is thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

He must lead us into the separation and sanctification in which we shall be "meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work." He must reveal to us the things of God which are spiritually discerned and speak through us "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," or our words shall be idle and vain. And He does prepare His "chosen vessels" and his "polished shafts," and make them "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

5. He not only prepares the instruments, but He also prepares the works. Let us quote again from St. Paul: "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them." Our works are prepared for us, and we have but to walk in them. This is an unspeakable comfort. We have not to make them, but to receive them and wear them as habits and garments. Just as in the drama the actors may have to wear a great many different costumes, but they do not need to make them. They are provided for the piece; they have only to put them on and wear them in the proper place. At one time it is the part of a workman, at another a merchant, at another a prince; but the proper robe for each is provided, and they have only to put it on and wear it. So the Lord Jesus prepares our work for us. At one time we need the garment of love, at another power, at another wisdom; now we must understand a human heart, again we must weep with a mourner, again we must warn a hardened heart, now we must cheer a depressed one; again we must lead it to the Saviour, or the Sanctifier, or the Healer; or yet again we must meet some perplexing issue or decide at some great turning point in life. But all is ready, laid up for us in Christ our Lord, and only needing to be transferred into our life in action and experience. So that in the service, as much as in the experience, it is not I, but Christ; not our works, but His works in us; we being but the pen, and He the Hand that guides it; we but the voice, He the Word that speaks by it; we but the vessel, and He the precious Living Water that fills it. This makes our work so easy. It is spontaneous service the overflow of the heart. John Bunyan says of his book; "I wrote because joy did make me write." So Jesus says of true service in the Spirit: "Out of His belly shall flow rivers of living water." Most persons find their work a burden. The true servant of Christ finds the Lord carries both him and his burden, too. We begin our work for the Lord with great zeal and try to help the Lord and His cause. We feel at last that He needs not us or our eager impetuosity, and we are glad to lay the burdens of His work on Him. A little child insisted on carrying an armful of his father's books upstairs. The father told him the load was too heavy, but the little fellow insisted and started with his load. By and by they came tumbling down in confusion, and he burst into tears and stretched out his tired hands to his father for help. The father took him to his arms, and then lifted the books and carried them, too. So He takes us and our service, and we serve Him best when we rest upon His breast and just let Him use us as He needs us and fills us. The disciples thought they could keep and manage Him when they took Him from His weary toil and put Him on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship to sleep. But they were glad to put themselves in His care ere long and awake Him to save them from destruction. And such service is as strong as it is calm. It moves with the mighty tides of heaven. "I labor," Paul says concerning it, "according to His working which worketh in me mightily."

6. And He rewards the work and shares the recompense with us as fully as if we had done it all. "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal." I cannot tell you what that reward will be. But you and I know something of the joy of bringing a soul to Jesus even here. We know something of what it means to have someone meet us in after years and tell us how some word or prayer of ours had once helped or saved them. O, what will it be, there, to find them coming from the East and the West, bringing the souls they have won, and recognising us as the instrument of all their blessing, while he shall say: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto these, ye have done it unto Me." "He shall make them sit down to meat, and shall Himself come forth and serve them." "They shall shine as the stars forever and ever."

They shall be rulers over many things and shall enter into the joy of their Lord. They shall share His kingdom and His throne and be promoted to grander service through the millennial years. O, then we will not regret the nights of watching and days of toil, but wish we could have done and suffered more for so great and far-surpassing a recompense.

II. OUR PART

1. To recognise the work as His.

A great deal of Christian work is our work, and He only is consulted and asked to help it. True Christian service is given to Him, and done as His and at His bidding, and under His absolute responsibility and ownership. It is not, What am I doing for the Lord? But, What is the Lord doing through me?

Let us consecrate our work as well as ourselves. Then we shall not hear so much about our church, our connection, our cause, and our work, but like the men of old, shall "dwell with the King for His work."

2. To recognise the necessity and obligation of our co-working.

God could do without us. He could, by His direct omnipotence, Himself, do all He uses us to do. But He has appointed human agency in the salvation of men. He has arranged for the supply of the world with the Living Water by the pipes and channels of our hearts and hands. And, therefore, if we fail to do our part, there is a failure in the supply. What a grief it must be to Him to know that there is enough in the resources of redemption for all mankind, and that it cost Him His life-blood; and yet, through the unfaithfulness of His servants, so many are left to perish without it. We are members of Christ, and just as we have seen a large and generous heart and a gifted head hampered by a debilitated body, and hindered in carrying out its noble aims and purposes by paralysed limbs, so often Christ looks in vain for hands and hearts to carry out His merciful and mighty plans for a lost world.

He has so ordered it that His grace must reach others through us, and it is a great crime against His love as well as against the souls of men to fail to work together with Him. It is as great a crime as it would be for a generous benefactor to leave a large inheritance to the poor children of the city and deposit it with certain trustees for this end, and these trustees, instead of giving it to the persons for whom it was intended, should spend it on themselves and let the children starve in neglect. O, do we realise that we are His trustees, His representatives, His agents, His body, His hands, and feet, and voice, through whom He has condescended to work; and shall we not be true to our glorious Head and the trust that He has given us?

3. To work in His way and plan.

Much work is destroyed by being done in our way. He demands that if we build in His temple, we must build on His plan, on the foundation He has laid according to His specifications and with the materials He has supplied. "See that thou make all this according to the pattern showed thee in the mount." "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." We often hear of some new religious "enterprise" being started. The Church is not an "enterprise," but a divine temple, built of divine materials by the Holy Ghost through consecrated men and women. There is too much of man's "enterprise" about it. Instead of the simplicity of the Gospel, the power of the Spirit, the agency of truth, faith and prayer, the personal holiness of a consecrated membership, the testimony of people separated from the world, the power of personal work for souls, an open door for the poor and lost, an aggressive work to

reach the outcast and hopeless, the free and voluntary gifts of God's children, a full Gospel for spirit, soul and body, and a church of which a living Christ is the Life and Lord we have smart preachers and fashionable people, operatic choirs and ungodly trustees, church fairs and Sunday school theatricals, religious concerts and charity balls, splendid church edifices and vast religious endowments, pew rents which exclude the poor, philosophical essays which exclude the Gospel and the Saviour, culture and scholasticism which leave out the Holy Ghost, and a mass of man's machinery which leaves little room for the supernatural operation, or the power of the Living God. The work of the apostles was under the direction of the Holy Ghost. Natural gifts were not despised, but all was fused into the living fire of the Spirit of power and consecration. The planting of Christianity in the continent of Africa was wholly due to the obedience of Philip to the Holy Ghost, bidding him leave a great work in Samaria and go down into the desert. The result was the conversion of the Prince of Ethiopia, and the first spread of the Gospel among the Gentile nations. The planting of the Gospel in Europe was also due to the obedience of Paul to the guidance of the Holy Ghost, forbidding him to preach in Asia and Bythinia, and calling him to Macedonia. The same God is with us still, and if we would let Him lead us, we should see the same glorious results.

4. To work in His strength. The reason why civilised nations are in advance of barbarous people is because they have learned the secrets of nature and know how to use the hidden forces of God. The savage needs a hundred men to drag the load which an American engineer can carry with a touch on the valve of his steam engine. The one uses his own strength, the other the hidden forces of nature. The mighty forces of electricity and steam are only God's power taken into partnership with man for his secular work. So we can take His power into partnership for spiritual work; and, instead of the toil and strain of our own wisdom and skill, we can put on His strength and use His omnipotence. A touch of God's hand is worth a million human hands. A company of engineers were lifting an immense and costly obelisk to its pedestal in Alexandria. They had raised it aloft, almost to the level of the base. But it needed one inch more to clear and swing in upon its pediment. The ropes had been strained to their utmost tension and nothing more could be done, without lowering the whole pulleys and mechanism and commencing over. There was a moment of intense disappointment. Man's power could do no more. Suddenly a sailor's voice rang out clear and sharp: "Wet the ropes." In an instant the engineer understood the simple hint. The ropes were saturated with water from top to bottom. In a few moments the immense obelisk began to rise, slowly, surely, silently--it has reached the level of the base--it has passed it--it is swinging clear, it is settling in its place, the cords are loosed--it stands firm and steady on its foundation and a shout of cheers goes up from a thousand voices at the simple touch of power, that came forth from nature at a word. So is the work of God; there is a limit where all our strength comes to an end. The might of a million men cannot go farther, but there is a secret place of power, and one whisper of faith will bring omnipotence so simply, so silently, so easily, yet so victoriously, that earth and heaven will shout the glad notes of praise forever. This is the secret of the work. "Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto Me to the uttermost part of the earth." It is the same old Gospel. Let us put it into our work as well as our souls and we shall find that He is All in all.

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