

Church Live Re-Visited: Session Three - Part 3

by Ron Bailey

Ron Bailey emphasizes the importance of labor and quality in the Christian life, highlighting that our efforts should be rooted in Christ to fulfill God's purpose.

Duration: 15:39

Topics: "Faithful Service", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Paul emphasizes the importance of laboring in God's work, highlighting that while God gives each person different abilities and responsibilities, it is crucial to actively pursue and work towards what God has entrusted to us. He stresses the need for effort and diligence in serving God, using strong language like striving and agony to convey the intensity required. Paul also discusses the quality of our work, comparing it to gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, and how it will be tested by fire to reveal its true nature and worth.

Transcript

Paul talks here about Apollos and himself and he says, I have sown and Apollos has watered, but it's God who gives the increase. That's the increase, that's chapter 3 and verse 6. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither has he planted anything, neither has he watered, but God gives the increase.

And then he makes this point that he's not saying that he and Apollos are in any way opposed or in tension with one another. There are one in this, but everyone shall receive his own reward, it says in verse 8, according to his own labour. This is why I wanted to talk a little bit about labour and rewards.

God does not hold us responsible for what we don't have. He doesn't hold us responsible for not having discernment if he hasn't given it to us. He doesn't hold you responsible for not evangelising the whole of South America if he hasn't given you the gift to evangelise the whole of South America.

But God does give to every single one of us something and then we are expected to pursue it. Again, it's interesting, she comes back to that again, there's Hannah Ball. She used this phrase and she said on one occasion that when God gives you a good intention, you are responsible for the consequence of it.

That's to say you are to pursue it, you are to do something about it. You're not just to say, oh that's a nice idea, you actually are to put some labour into it. And Paul, throughout his letters, he uses very, very strong

language about labour.

He talks about striving. And I've said this before, I think, when we've been gathered together, that the word that's used for striving, and you'll get it in places like Colossians, it comes to mind. If you look in Colossians chapter 1, verse 29, he says, verse 28, And this striving is the word that we get agony from.

It's agonising, but agonising in the old Greek didn't really mean, the emphasis wasn't on pain, it was on effort. It was the word that was used of people who were engaged in the Olympic Games. Someone who wore every sinew, everything is concentrated on one, this tremendous intensity of effort to get something done.

And it isn't pain-orientated, it's effort-orientated. And you get this again and again through Paul's letters. And you get it coming at the end of Colossians.

You've got it here again in verse 12 of Epaphras, this man who preached the Gospel of Colossians. Epaphras, who was one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes you always, labouring is that word again, striving fervently for you in prayers. And there is prayer as effort, and the Gospel as effort, and pastoral work as effort.

And we're not to pretend that it isn't effort. You really do have to put everything you've got into it, because actually we shall be measured according to our labours, not according to our successes, not according to our natural talents that we have, but according to what we did with what God had given to us. So there's no place in the New Testament for kind of sitting back.

Yes, there's inner rest, yes there's that kind of rest. But it's interesting that, as you know, it kind of says in Hebrews that we are to labour to enter into rest. Do you know that phrase? Actually it means be diligent to enter into rest.

In other words, you don't get your rest by kind of sitting back and saying, Yes, here I am, come and get me. But because you engage. There's lots of things like this about Christian life that aren't... There's a mystical way of doing things, which is very passive, and you wait until you get something.

But that is not the pattern of the New Testament. The pattern of the New Testament is that you actively meditate on God's Word, you actively wait upon God. Waiting upon God is not passive.

Waiting upon God is intensely active. It's the picture of a servant, poised with his eyes on his master, ready to rush to his master's bidding, as soon as he sees what his master wants to do. So I suppose the angels are still, I suppose, the greatest example of those who serve God.

He makes his ministers of flame, his angels are his ministering servants. There's a verse in Ezekiel which describes angels, and it says, they go and return as a flash of light. Have you seen this? And maybe you've heard me say it's about the purest sense of humour.

I think angels are the fastest thing known, because I think they go at twice the speed of light. Because they go and return like a flash of light. And I'm just playing with words.

What I'm really saying is that it's a picture of these angels, and here they are, they're waiting before God, with their attention on him, they're poised, and as soon as they see what God wants, and they're back and they say, OK, God wants the next one. It's this tremendous givenness to the work of God. There is a

peace, there's a rest in our hearts, but in our labour there's effort, and it's costly.

And you'll see, that's one of the things that comes out here, in what Paul has to say about what we build on the foundation. The foundation is laid, it's Christ. No one can relay that.

It is the only foundation. Paul says he's laid it in people's lives, it's Christ who is the foundation. And then 1 Corinthians 4, and verse 11 he says, But other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus.

And then he says this, Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, paint, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so is by fire.

And there is a lot of energy in that, isn't there? But notice this division that you have in verse 12. If any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones. What is common to these three elements that are used here? Well, I think one of the things that is common is that fire is part of the production of all of these things.

Gold and silver need the purifying of fires, precious stones have no intense fires and pressures in the bosom of the earth. These are costly things. These are things which are not easily available.

The next little list of stuff, wood, paste, stubble, well, you can get that anywhere, and it doesn't cost you much, and it doesn't really worth much either. But these are the things that are going to cost. It says here that every man's work is going to be made manifest, for the fire will try it of what sort it is.

Not the quantity, but the quality. The fire will test it, and you see there it says in the end of verse 13, the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. What is the quality of this? How much of our work is actually not of this quality, because it hasn't had this fire in it.

It hasn't had this energy of the spirit. When Paul talked in Colossians, maybe you saw that, he actually says he works according to that that works in him. In other words, he is cooperating with what God is doing.

Well, to answer Labor's striving according to his working, which works in me, my time. I'm conscious of the time now. If verse 14, I'm back in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, If a man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so is by fire. I still find these things very challenging. There's the prospect that we could do great amounts of work, but because they haven't been in the right spirit, we haven't done it according to God's energizing, God's working in us.

It doesn't have the quality of gold and silver and precious stones. I suppose if you submit gold and silver and precious stones to fire, what you're left at the end of it is actually a gold and silver and precious stone, because there isn't anything to burn in those things. But if I come to God on this last day, I come to a place where fire is something, and the fire touches it, and it's actually been made of wood here in the stubble, it will all be gone.

There'll be none of it there. The only thing that will be there is that which is actually already known as fire, as I said, gold and silver and the precious stones. I'm not saying these to frighten us, and I don't think Paul is.

That's why he says he himself shall be saved. He's not talking about eternal loss of salvation, but he is saying that there are consequences to this. If a man's work is burned, well, that will be his loss.

But he himself shall be saved, so is by fire. I'm going to go now, quickly now, to the last verse in chapter 3. I'm not going to talk too much about the other things that he has to say, but in verse 22 and 23 he says this. 21.

Let no man glory in men, for all things are yours, whether poor, or apostles, or keepers of the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours. That's really quite a way of saying it. All these things are yours.

Life, death, things present, they're all yours. But then this is where it comes to the real bottom line of verse 23. And you are Christ's.

And Christ is yours. And that's the point that in one way or another, Paul will make right the way through to us. You are not your own.

You are Christ's. Everything else can serve you, everything else can work for your benefit in fulfilling the purpose of God, but ultimately this is the bottom line. You're not your own.

You're Christ's. And if you live as Christ's, then it makes it possible for the Church to be what God really wants it to be, which is that now it should be a demonstration of powers and principles and manifold wisdom of God. It's a glorious prospect.

And one that we can challenge so that we don't turn back on it. That stuff, that's practical. I know all that you don't want is to kind of wear ourselves to a frown, and that's not the kind of energy that you need.

But I know more that you put things into our hands. And you trust us. And you commission us.

And then you're always responsible for the things that you trust us to protect. On that day, Lord, we want to have your soul in precious stones. And what about crowns that have been cast at your feet? I'm not interested, Lord, in commendations that will draw people's attention to us, but we want to serve you.

We want your name to be glorified. We want your will to be perfectly worked out in the Church. Lord, will you help us to be in tune to what you're saying, lest we should judge ourselves and be discouraged, lest we should not judge ourselves and become complacent.

Lord, teach us how to live in communion with you. To hear your word and to know, Lord, what we should do and when we should do it again. Not be held ransom by any other voice or any other judgment.

No mood, no passing thought. For we are judged. Lord, we are yours.

You are the Lord. You are the judge. And we are yours.

Day by day, Lord, judge us. Day by day, instruct us. Day by day, discipline us.

Day by day, Lord, help us to have senses which are exercised to discern between good and evil. Take us on, Lord, from the baby days when everything revolved around us. And take us on, Lord, to a sense of sonship where we seek to do another's will for another's good.

Amen.

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