

FULLY FURNISHED

or

THE CHRISTIAN WORKER'S EQUIPMENT

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE WORKER'S TOIL

SOME years ago, a sister in Christ said to the writer: "Have you noticed that, the four things which the Shunammite woman provided for the prophet Elisha, are illustrative of the four things which the worker for Christ needs?"

"No," I replied, "I have not."

She said" The four things were a bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick (II Kings 4:10).

The bed is the *symbol of rest* which is found in Christ, by coming to Him, and in being yoked in God's will with Him (Matthew 11:28, 29).

The table is the *symbol of fellowship* with Him, for He spreads a table before us in the presence of our enemies (Psalm 23:5), and bids us '**come and dine**' (John 21:12).T

The stool is the *symbol of instruction* from Christ, for we must sit at His feet, and learn of Him, if we would be initiated into the secrets of His will (Deuteronomy 33:3; Luke 10:39); and

The candlestick is the *symbol of testimony* for Christ, for He says, we are the light of the world, and His witnesses to testify of Himself (Matthew 5:14.; Acts 1:8)."

It seems to me that not only are the four things illustrative of what the Christian worker needs, but the order in which they are given is suggestive too. Rest in Christ by being yoked with Him in the will of God, is essential in order to have fellowship with Him, and fellowship with Him is the qualification for instruction from Him, and the instruction from Him is the precursor of effective testimony for Him. As those who are called to bear witness to our Lord, we esteem it a high privilege to be fellow-toilers with God. "**We are labourers together with God**" (I Corinthians 3:9), suggesting hard labour. There are plenty of workers so called, but few toilers. If anything is to be got first hand, it means hard work, as Ruskin says, "If you want knowledge, you must toil for it; if pleasure, you must toil for it. Toil is the law. Pleasure comes through toil, and not by self-indulgence indulgence and indolence. When one gets to love work, his life is a happy one."

There are six different words in the New Testament which are associated with labour. The first word is descriptive of the labourer himself; the second word is associated with motive in labour; the third word is used in Connection with those with whom we labour; the fourth word is indicative as to how the work is to be accomplished; the fifth word is illustrative of the character of the labour; and the sixth word speaks of the exhaustion which is the consequence of such labour.

I - The Toiler.

The first word associated with Christian labour to which attention is directed, is descriptive of the toiler himself.

The word used, is illustrative of his occupation and the wages he receives; hence, its significance is, one who lives by his labour. Christ employs the word, when he urges us to pray that labourers may be thrust into the harvest field (Matthew 9:37, 38). The Holy Spirit also uses it when He says **“the labourer is worthy of his reward”** (I Timothy 5:18), and when He says to Timothy through Paul, **“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman,”** or labourer (it is the same word) **“that needeth not to be ashamed”** (II Timothy 2:15). The spiritual thought lying under the surface is, the toiler in Christian labour, ministers to his own necessity in ministering to others, even as the workman maintains himself and his home, by his occupation.

As there are four requisite things for health of body, namely, fresh air, good food, frequent ablutions, and temperate exercise; so there are four things necessary for health of soul, namely, the fresh air of prayerful dependence on the Lord, the good food of meditation in the truth of the Lord, the cleansing of the walk by the operation of the cleansing of the Holy Spirit, and healthy exercise by being about the business of the Lord.

Attention is Directed to the last. He that will not work shall not eat, says the apostle. There are a great many of God’s people who are nearly starved spiritually, and it is because they will not work. They complain about their leanness, when they should be confessing their laziness. It is absolutely necessary for our spiritual welfare, that we should be engaged in Christian work. We get in giving. We obtain help in helping.

- The muscular arm of the blacksmith, is obtained by the constant swinging of the hammer.
- The smart appearance, and the skilled display of the soldier, are the outcome of the incessant drill through which he has passed.
- The skill of the gardener, as seen in the prize plant at the flower show, is an evidence of careful attention in the garden.
- The thrilling music from the violin, as the musician handles the instrument, is the result of years of practice in solitude.
- The correct borings of the engineer, demonstrate his careful and minute calculations beforehand.

All the above are rewarded in consequence of their toil.

The blacksmith has gained strength of arm, the soldier has gained his perfect poise, the gardener has won his prize. the musician has obtained his honour, and the engineer has received his certificate, but all as the result of their careful work.

The same is true in the Christian life.

- As we study to feed others with the Bread of Life. we feed ourselves, as the widow found in ministering to the prophet Elijah (I Kings 17:14).
- As we labour in prayer that others may be blessed, we oil the wheels of our own spiritual nature, as Epaphras did in praying for the saints at Colosse (Colossians 4:12).
- As we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, we keep our own minds calm, as Paul did in seeking the oneness of others (I Corinthians 3:3-9).
- As we trim our neighbor's hedge in kindly service, we clip our own, as Daniel found, for it was because of his faithfulness to the king, he was honoured by him (Daniel 6:1-4).
- As we minister the oil of love to make the lamp of another's life burn brighter, we give light to ourselves, even as the lamp in the holy place, for it not only lighted up the other vessels of the sanctuary, but gave light over against itself (Numbers 8:2, 3).
- As we give the word of encouragement to our brother, we banish discouragement from our own dwelling, as David found when he befriended the poor Egyptian, for he befriended himself in the information he got from him, which led to the recovery of his lost property (I Samuel 30:10-18).
- As we lend our being to the Lord's service, we shall find abundant blessing as Peter found, for it was after he had lent his ship to Christ, he received such a draught of fishes through Christ (Luke 5:3-7); and
- As we deny ourselves in lowly following with Christ in death to self, we shall find our life in the "**much fruit**" of the afterward (John 12:24-26).

II - The Toiler's Aim.

As the electric current runs through the wire Connected with the battery, so the spiritual thought of God's truth is found in the words which the Holy Spirit employs in expressing to us God's will. Thus the second word associated with Christian labour gives us the true aim in service. It is found in II Corinthians 5:9, where the apostle says, "**We labour that . . . we may be accepted of Him,**" to be well pleasing unto Him. The same word occurs in two other places in the New Testament.

In Romans 15:20, it is translated "**strived,**" in speaking of the apostle's aim to preach Christ where He had not been named before; and in I Thessalonians 4:11, when Paul exhorts the saints to "**study,**" or to make it their aim, to be quiet.

The meaning of the word is, *to have a purpose in all one does*; hence, it signifies one who labours with an end in view, and, as a consequence, exerts himself out of love to the object. The end the Christian has in view, is, as the apostle indicates, to be well-pleasing unto the Lord. Not to labour as Diotrephes to get a name, nor as Judas to obtain money, nor as Balaam at the dictation of man, nor as Saul to please the people, nor as Aaron to quiet the voice of clamour, nor as the Athenians for some new thing, but as Christ laboured for the Father, namely, because He loved Him.

A lady once said to the late William Burns, the missionary, “I presume you are going to China to win souls?”

“No madam,” he replied, “I am going there to glorify God.”

The man with such a motive and with such an end in view, will take little heed of what men think of him, for it is his aim to be right with Heaven.

It is said the Lacedaemonians used to stir themselves to heroism by the thought, “What will they say of us in Sparta?” Such a spirit will actuate the true labourer. What does my Lord think? What will He say? What does He desire? What is pleasing to Him? What will call forth His “**Well done?**” are questions which arise in the mind of those who desire to honour the Lord.

III - Fellowship in Toil.

One special feature of the boards of the Tabernacle, was, they were closely connected with the foundation, and also with each other. The silver foundation upon which the boards rested is typical of the redemptiveness of Christ’s atonement (Exodus 36:24; I Peter 1:18), and suggests our identification with Him in His death (II Corinthians 5:14); and the boards being united to each other sets forth the fact, that believers are members of each other, by virtue of their union with the Head of the Church (I Corinthians 12:12, 13).

This thought is shown forth in the third word associated with Christian service. The thought of fellowship is distinctly wrapped up in it. The word *Sunergos* is variously rendered, but wherever it occurs, fellowship is brought out. We find it rendered “**Labourers together with,**” in I Corinthians 3:9, in calling attention to the fact that the Lord’s servants are associated with Him in His labour. Paul uses the word in speaking of Ulbane as a “**Helper in Christ**” (Romans 16:9), of Epaphroditus as a “**Companion in labour**” (Philippians 2:25), and of the “**fellow-labourers**” whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4:3).

The words suggest a twofold dependence. Dependence upon God and dependence upon fellow-believers. There is no man who illustrates in such a remarkable manner this two-fold dependence, as the Apostle Paul. Let us ponder the apostle’s dependence on the Lord.

Dependence on God. Paul recognized he was at work for God, and that God Himself was the great Worker. Prayer to God was the habit of his life, and the secret force which propelled him in all his actions; hence, we find him saying, “**I bow my knees unto the Father**” (Ephesians 3:14), and more than once he is found in the attitude of prayer (Acts 20:36; 21:5).

The presence of God was the apostle’s stay. He was independent of man, because he was so absolutely dependent on the Lord. The Lord’s presence was his joy in sorrow, his peace in persecution, his power in testimony, his courage in conflict, his comfort in trial, his supply in service, and his consolation in suffering and loneliness, for when in a time of trial and suffering he had no one to stand with him, he could confidently say,

“All forsook me . . . notwithstanding the Lord stood with me” (II Timothy 4:16, 17).

The power of God was the electric current which charged the being of Paul with such mighty energy, that it made his service to be effective in its influence wherever he went; but it was God’s power, and not Paul’s preaching which was the effective instrument, as he himself confesses, “His working which worketh in me mightily” (Colossians 2:29).

The love of God was the inspiring motive which caused the apostle to move with such glad and quickened footsteps in his Lord’s service. He says, “The love of Christ constraineth us” (II Corinthians 5:14). The love of Christ was an inward fire in his heart, and as an inclosing force in his life; this may be gathered from the use of the word “constraineth,” which is rendered “taken with” in Luke 4:38, in speaking of Peter’s wife’s mother being taken with a fever, and the same word is given “throng,” in calling attention to the fact that the people were thronging the Lord Jesus (Luke 8:45).

The Word of God was always the message which was dropping from Paul’s lips, like sweet smelling’ myrrh. Never does he say “I think,” but always “God says.” Listen to him as he speaks at Antioch: “To you is the word of this salvation sent” (Acts 13:26), and in referring to his ministry at Ephesus he declares, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

His constant court of appeal was to **“Thus saith the Lord,”** and this was the secret of his manifold blessing to others.

The grace of God was the tent of blessing under which Paul sheltered, which we may gather as we hear him pleading that the thorn in the flesh may be removed; and yet he glories in his infirmities when he finds the grace of God is sufficient, for he says “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (II Corinthians 12:9), so that he would be entirely enveloped by it, as the disciples were by the cloud on the mount (Luke 9:34).

The glory of God was ever before the apostle. The pole star which ever guided him was, how he might glorify God. One of the greatest things which brought the greatest satisfaction to Paul’s heart was when he could say, “They glorified God in me” (Galatians 1:24).

Dependence on fellow believers. Now, on the other side, we find the apostle was dependent upon fellow believers.

He desired that they should work with him, and he with them.

There are little touches which bring out his dependence.

- He is glad when he knows others are preaching the truth, although he is not in sympathy with some of the methods adopted (Philippians 1:18).
- He is thankful for the temporal assistance given to him by Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25).
- He is comforted by the fidelity of Timothy, and speaks of him “as dear to me” (Philippians 2:20, margin).

- He is encouraged by those who had helped in the Gospel (Philippians 4:3).
- He is cheered by the presence of Luke, and says Mark is “**profitable to me for the ministry**” (II Timothy 4:11).
- He is dependent upon Timothy for little acts of kindness, and asks him to bring the cloak which he left behind at Troas (II Timothy 4:13). And
- He asks Philemon to refresh him by being kind to Onesimus (Philemon 20).

All these touches go to show how Paul recognized the oneness of the body of Christ.

It was this fact that evidently led him to write those words, “**Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth**” (Ephesians 4:16). The thought in this passage evidently is, while every joint has direct communication with the head, each joint is the means of supplying the other joint; thus while all are supplied from one source, each in turn is a means of mutual communication.

IV - Diligence in Toil.

Among other things in relation to the love of God, we are exhorted to behold the manner of it (I John 3:1). Not merely are we to know the fact of God’s love, but the way of its acting. The same thing may be said of the believer’s service for Christ: we are not only told to labour, but we are directed as to the method and manner of our working.

This is brought out in some measure, when we are urged to “**labour**” in order to enter God’s rest.

The same word as translated “**labour**” in Hebrews 4:11, is rendered “**was forward to do**” in Galatians 2:10, when Paul speaks of his remembrance of the poor; “**Endeavoured**” in I Thessalonians 2:17, when the apostle speaks of his endeavor to see the face of the Thessalonians; and the same word is given “**diligent**” in Titus 3:12.

The meaning of the word is *diligence, earnestness, zeal, to make haste*. The King’s business requires haste, hence, there must be no loitering on the way. Those who loiter on the Lord’s business are sure to meet with some disaster, as the man of God out of Judah found, when he turned aside from the direction of the Lord, at the invitation of the old prophet of Bethel (I Kings 13).

There is a haste which is not after God, but contrary to Him. How are we to know, when we are acting in unison with God? When we obey His word. Paul in writing to Timothy, says, “**Study**” (or *be diligent*, it is the same word as in Titus 3:12), “**to show thyself approved unto God**” (II Timothy 2:15). When the soul is in communication with the Lord, it must do the Lord’s work in a becoming manner, for to be listless where He is concerned, would be to show our want of love to Him.

V - Fervor in Toil.

There are some Christian workers who never get to boiling point in the Lord’s work. They are always afraid lest they should blunder in some way.

Mr. Spurgeon used to say, “A blundering horse is better than a dead one.”

Burns has well said:

“Give me a’e spark o’ nature’s fire,
That’s a’e the learnin’ I desire.
That, though I trudge thro’ dub and mire,
A pleuch and cart,
My muse, thou’ humble in attire.
May touch the heart,”

It is only when our own hearts are all aglow we shall make others so. Burning for God comes through musing upon Him (Psalm 39:3; Jeremiah 20:9).

Thomas Watson says, “Meditate till thou findest thy heart grow warm. If when a man is cold you ask how long he should stand by the fire? Sure, till he be thoroughly warm, and made fit for his work. So, Christian, when thy heart is cold, stand at the fire of meditation till thou findest thy affections warmed, and thou art made fit for spiritual service. David mused till his heart waxed hot within him.”

As we thus muse and become warm, we shall become fervent in prayer, and enthusiastic in service, as is suggested by the next word found in relation to service.

The fifth word rendered “**labour**” occurs in Colossians 4:12, in speaking of the fervency, frequentness, and fulness of the prayers of Epaphras. The word is also rendered “**strive**” (Luke 13:24), and “**fight**” in I Timothy 6:1 2.

It comes from the same root as “*agony*,” which word is used to describe Christ’s sufferings in Gethsemane. The word means *to struggle, to contend with an adversary, to compete for a prize, to endeavor to accomplish anything*.

There are forces all around which are opposed to us, and there are forces within us which would drag us down, but the man of God must be like his Master, and set his face against them, and in the glow of the Holy Spirit determine to rise above them. No one ever yet accomplished anything who was not in earnest about it, and this is especially true with reference to the Christian life. Thank God, it is easy to be saved, because Christ by His death has removed the hindrance (Hebrews 9:26), but it is not an easy thing to live as a Christian (I Peter 4:18).

- There is a battle to be fought (I Timothy 6:12),
- There is a trust to be kept (II Corinthians 5:18),
- There is a talent to be used (Matthew 25:14, &c.),
- There is an enemy to overcome (I Peter 5:8, 9),
- There is a watch to maintain (Mark 13:37),
- There is a ministry to fulfil (John 13:14), and
- There is a prize to win (Philippians 3:14).

And in order to accomplish all these, we must be under the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, and He is only known in power as we look to Him in prayer, and prayer which is fervent and full of faith, as Hamilton says, “No man was likely to do much good in prayer who did not begin to look upon it in the light of a work, to be prepared for, and persevered in with all the earnestness which we bring to bear on subjects which are most necessary and interesting.”

VI - Exhaustion in Toil.

One of the features of Gideon’s faithful three hundred was, they were careless of their comfort, in that they did not put themselves in the same position of ease to drink as the others (Judges 7:5, 6).

Are there not Christian workers, who are so concerned about their Own comfort, convenience, and reputation, that they never go out of their way to do anything extraordinary in the service of Christ, much less become tired in His service?

They have little sympathy with Elijah under the juniper tree, because they have never been strung up to his pitch, nor done so nobly and fearlessly in witnessing for God. All who have done anything for God, in serving Him, have known what it is to be tired out, exhausted. This thought is brought out in the sixth word rendered **labour**.

This word means *to be spent out through hard work, hence, to be weary and faint*.

The word is translated “**weary**” in describing Christ being “**wearied**” with His journey when He must needs go through Samaria and sat on Jacob’s well (John iv.6). The word is also translated “**laboring**” in Acts 20:35; “**laboured**” I Corinthians 15:10; and “**laboureth**” in II Timothy 2:6.

Next to the Lord Jesus, we instinctively turn to the Apostle Paul as an example.

He certainly illustrates in a peculiar manner the truth embodied in the word before us.

Of him it is said he “**hazarded**” his life (Acts 15:36), and when he wrote to the Corinthians he said to them, “**I will very gladly spend and be spent for you**” (II Corinthians 12:15). I want to call attention to the three words, “**Hazarded**,” “**Spend**,” “**Spent**.”

“**Hazarded**” - To hazard one’s life means to give it over to death.

The same word occurs three times in Romans 1:24, 26, 28, and is there rendered “**gave up**,” and “**gave over**.” Every true Christian worker is careless of his own ease.

Lady Edgeworth, in the days of King Charles II, had suddenly to defend the old castle at Lisson, in the absence of her husband. In doing so, she had to go down and fetch powder from the castle vaults. On her return, she said to the woman who had gone with her, “Where did you put the candle?”

“I left it stuck in the barrel of black salt.”

Then did that glorious woman go down to the spot where the candle was burning into the powder, and put her hand round it like a cup, and lift it up and take it out, and so, at the hazard of her own life, saved the lives of others.

Sinners are like that candle, burning into the powder of their own destruction. Who is willing to deliver himself over to death, if needs be, in order that they may be saved? We shall be, if we recognize, Christ was delivered (the same word as rendered “**hazarded**”) for our offences.

“**Spend and be spent.**” The word “**spend**” means to “*consume*,” as is translated in James 4:3. The same word is given “**spent all**” in Mark 5:26, and Luke 15:14, where we read the woman spent all she had in trying to be freed from her disease, and of the prodigal who spent all in riotous living. The word “**spent**,” signifies *to be “exhausted.”* Thus we may paraphrase the apostle’s words, “I am willing to spend all my resources, and I am willing to exhaust myself in order to benefit you.”

Such a spirit should characterize all workers.

The lighted candle preaches a sermon to us, for it says, “I give to others, and I am consumed in doing so.”

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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