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II Cor. 6:1, Mat. 25:19-30

### **“WORKERS TOGETHER WITH GOD”**

In II Corinthians 6:1, we find these words: “We then, as workers together with Him, also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” God is challenging us to be workers together with Him...and to not let all, which He has invested in us, go for naught.

From this idea has come the “Christian Work Ethic,” one of the Biblical ideas which has certainly helped to make our nation great. Work is defined as: “sustained physical or mental effort to overcome obstacles and to achieve an objective or a result.” Work is inseparable from life. And almost every thing does some kind of work.

The sun works. Down through the ages it has provided light and warmth, with unflinching consistency. The moon works. It adjusts the level of the Earth’s waters. It gauges months. It adjusts a host of biological clocks. It follows its pathway around the Earth. The Earth works, giving us water and air and food. It replenishes and nourishes all who dwell upon it.

All of the planets, moons, and heavenly bodies work. Each contributes its own influence toward holding the universe together. All Earthly inhabitants-material, animals, and vegetable-work, and they each make their unique contribution. Even entities, which we feel are worthless or even repugnant, play their role and do their work.

And we human beings depend upon the work of one another. We risk our lives, based on our trust in the dependability of the work of others. We ride on airplanes and trains and boats and cars and bridges and highways, which others have worked to provide. We depend upon computers and guidance systems and prescription medicines, about which we ourselves know nothing.

We enjoy the discoveries and inventions of thousands, whose names we will never know and whose faces we will never see. And we receive knowledge, for which others have worked and even died to gain and to pass on to us. And to more diligently, t more excellently, the more creatively they have worked, the greater has been the benefit they have brought to humanity. And we have been lifted on their shoulders to new levels of well-being and accomplishment.

Therefore, how can we be satisfied to be less than we can be and to know less than we can know and to do less than we do, when we have programmed within us such great potential to accomplish something.

It may also be observed that our bodies are made in such a way that we depend upon the work of organs, glands, cells, muscles, and arteries and most of entities, within our bodies that we literally know nothing about. Yet they consistently work and serve, unrecognized and unappreciated for the good they do to the whole body. And programmed into each of our organs and into each of our glands and cells is the knowledge that it survives and thrives only as it contributes diligently to the well-being of the whole body.

And we today must program into our hearts the knowledge that we cannot truly thrive, while we work and think and labor for ourselves alone. “No man is an island. No man stands alone. Each man’s joy is joy to me, and each man’s grief is my own,” (Donne). We need one another. We are all members of a human race. We are units of a created order. We are obligated to work. We are obligated to contribute. And we can leave the world richer, in some ways, than it was when we came into it. To be

and to work is a glorious privilege, and the results of our work are a glorious product. What we do for God and others, and what we share with others, determines whether our existence is legitimate or not. Our existence will be legitimate only to the degree that we make the lives of others better.

Seneca has said that “it is the duty of a man to render himself beneficial to those who are around him.” Or as the song writer has said: “If I can help somebody, as I pass along; if I can cheer somebody with a word or a song; if I can show a traveler that he is travelling wrong, then my living shall not be in vain.” But may I go a step farther to say that God is a worker! Creation is a result of God’s work. We must understand that we came into a world that was prepared for us. God’s love motivated Him to work on our behalf, like a mother preparing for a new baby.

Women are designed by nature to want to be mothers and to want to have children to love. While the woman is still pregnant with the child, she gets busy preparing for the birth of child. She decorates the little nursery room. She provides the crib. She gets the clothing. With the joy of anticipation, that mother works. In the same sense, God wanted somebody to love. And so God made us. He made man, so He could love man. And while the mind of God was still pregnant with thoughts of us, He began to prepare the universe, because He loved us. He made man in His own image. And that means that it is the nature of man to love. He made man a spirit, so that the spirit of man and the spirit of God could share mutual love.

But because God also made man’s physical body, man also needed a human counterpart, so that he could share human love...and that’s where the trouble started! You see, woman loved man so much that she wanted him to have something, in addition to what God had permitted him. And they chose human love rather than divine love. From that time envy, self-seeking, and animosity have characterized man’s relationship with one another, with creation, and with God. But God was a God of love. And God’s love told Him to go back to Earth for us again. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved,” (John 3:16-17).

Love motivated Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son. He placed divine love above human love, and He said: “Father, not my will but thy will be done,” (Luke 22:42). And God and Father “laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” (Isaiah 53:6).

Oh, God has worked so much on our behalf!

Notice also that Jesus is a worker.

Jesus continued to do the work that His Father had been doing. Jesus said, in John 4:34, “my food is to do the will of Him who sent me and finish His work.” He said in John 9:4, “I must do the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; for the night cometh when no man can work.” Jesus did the work that God had been doing, and He worked like God had been working.

But Jesus went on and said to us that we are to be workers...that we would do the works that He had been doing and that we would work like He had been working. He said in John 14:12: “Truly, I say unto you, the one who believes in me, the work that I do shall he do, and greater because I go to my Father. And whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do, that He might be glorified.”

Love must motivate us to work. We must love God, and we must love one another. And we must work together with our God and His Son! Let’s ask three important questions about being “workers together with God”:

## I. **HOW DOES GOD WORK?**

The Bible tells us how He works.

He makes something out of nothing. Paul said, in Romans 4:17, this is how He works: “He gives life to the dead, and He creates something out of nothing.” God created the world out of nothing.

Someone might as well have said: “God, you can’t do that.” God would have said: “Yes, I can!” One preacher said: “He came out of nowhere, because there was nowhere for Him to come from. He stepped out on nothing, because there was nothing for Him to stand on. He spoke to nothing, because there was nothing for Him to speak to. And he said ‘let there be.’” And the sun started shining. And the moon started glowing. And the world started twirling. Fish started swimming. Birds started flying. How does God work? He uses nothing to do something great. Paul describes it in I Corinthians 1:26: “For you see your calling, brethren, not many wise according to flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put shame to the wise, and He has chosen the weak things of the world to put shame the things are mighty, and the base things of the world and the things which are despised, God has Chosen, and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things which are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

Sometimes God will even bring something to nothing, before He will start working. Do you remember the story of Gideon? (Judges 6)

“Gideon, how many people do you have?” I have 32,000 and there are over 100,000 Midianites. I stand a pretty good chance with 32,000. God said: “If you stand a pretty good chance, then I’ve got to cut you down.” “How many do you have now, Gideon? Oh, about 10,000. It will be rough.

But maybe he can make it.

God said: “If you feel that way, I’ve got to reduce you down even again.”

“How many do you have now, Gideon?” Only 300. Unless God intervenes, we don’t stand a chance.

God said: “Gideon, you can’t do anything with 300!”

Gideon said: “YES I CAN!” And, with God’s help, he overcame the enemy.

That’s how God works.

Then we might ask:

## II. **HOW DOES JUSTICE WORK?**

The Bible tells us how Jesus worked in Matthew 4:15. He uses nothing to accomplish something great. There was a multitude in the wilderness, and they had been with Jesus for two days. And they were hungry. And the disciples came to Jesus and said: “Send the multitudes away, that they may go and find food for themselves.” (How quick we are to send folks away.) Jesus said: “They need not depart. You, you, you, give them something to eat.” “But Lord, we don’t have anything...only two fish and five loaves of bread. You can’t do anything with that.”

Jesus said: “Yes, I can!” He Blessed the bread, and He broke the bread, and He gave it to the multitude...one thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand, five thousand people! Then Jesus said: “Now bring the women and children.” And He fed them also. Sometimes Jesus does not go to work, until there’s not enough. He does not start, until there’s not enough. And, like God, Jesus will bring something to nothing, before He starts.

“Jesus, Lazarus is sick,” He’s not sick enough! (John 11)

“He’s dead now!” He’s not dead enough.

“He’s been dead for four days. By now he’s stinking.” Ah, just right now!

“Lord, there’s nothing you can do about it.” And Lazarus stepped forth, alive and well.

That’s how Jesus works!

Now comes the \$64,000 question:

## III. **HOW ARE WE TO WORK?**

Again the Bible helps us. We are to work:

A-With an understanding of how God can work.

The Bible clearly shows us how God has worked. The Bible clearly shows us that Jesus has worked. There is no question about their abilities. And knowing how they can work should help us to know they could work through us. They can take us, who sometimes feel like “nothing,” to do great and wonderful things. They can take us, who have to come the end of things, and bring something to pass.

That is why the King, in Matthew 25, was so displeased with the lazy servant. His servants knew how he could produce.

They were not ignorant, regarding his determination. And they were not ignorant regarding the effectiveness of his method.

The servant said to him, in Matthew 25:24: “You are a hard man. You are a tough man. You get what you go after, and you do not believe in backing down. You demand that all of your investments make a profit. You demand that they all be productive. And I’ve never seen you fail yet. You always succeed. You are always successful with the methods that you use.”

The lazy servant knew his master didn’t play around. And that’s why he should not have played around and buried his talent. He, too, should have gotten with the program. Jesus went on to say, in Matthew 11:12, that my folks have got to be tough. “The Kingdom of Heaven suffered violence; and the violent take it by force.” We are in a war. And if you can’t stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen.

Only the strong are going to survive. The enemies of God’s kingdom are not playing a game. We are at war. We’d better understand that His Kingdom work is no Sunday School picnic nor childish play!

How are we to work?

B-By getting serious about our productivity.

Jesus had done too much for us, for us to be non-productive. He’s been too good to us, who are in the United States, for us to be “barren and unfruitful.”

In Matthew 21:19, Jesus saw a fig tree. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves. And when He found no fruit, He said: “Let nothing ever grow on you again.” And immediately the fig tree withered and died.

God is not looking for impressive programs. He is not looking at people’s titles. He is looking for productivity.

It’s kind of like the little old lady and Burger King: “Where’s the beef?” He’s asking: “Where’s the fruit?”

In John 15:2, Jesus said: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit.”

How are we to work?

C-By obtaining “hot tips” on our Master’s plans.

In John 15:15, He says: “No longer do I call you servants. For a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends. For all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you.” I have shown you everything I do, how I do it, how I work.

Jesus doesn’t treat us like slaves, who have no idea what their master is doing. No! Jesus treats us like friends. He lets us in on His plans, when we spend quiet time with Him and as we listen for that “still small voice” of His Holy Spirit. He gives us “hot tips” on how to best invest our lives!

Then He says in Verse 16: “You did not choose me, but I chose and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain. And whatever you ask the Father, in my name, He may give it to you.” He chose us to be winners!

The King, in the story, might well have said to the servant: “Yes, I’m tough. But I love you. Yes, I mean business. But if I did not love you, I would have never given you the talent in the first place. That’s why I gave you the potential. And I would have guided you, if you had only gotten in touch with me.”

How are we to work?

E-By refusing to succumb to fear.

The servant said to the master, "I was afraid." Fear is overwhelming, even in this day. Fear of failure holds so many of us back from reaching our full potential.

But my Bible says, in II Timothy 1:7: "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

That servant said to the master: "I've watched you. I've observed how you work. You reap what you have not sown. And you gather where you have not scattered."

The master said: "Yes. Yes. That is the way I am. That is exactly what I do. That's exactly the way I work. You've never seen me fail. The principles I put in action should teach you that 'You can't lose, with the stuff I use.' And I have shown you everything that I have done. And you should have followed my example.

"But because you have not followed my example, you are wicked. You are lazy! You are unprofitable, and I am casting you out!"

The other two had doubled his investment in them. And he said to each one of them: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things. I will make you ruler over many." That's what we all want to hear!

What I'm trying to do this morning is to beg you: Don't bury the investment God has made in you. Work together with Him. Don't be afraid to try. Believe that God is able to do something great through you. God has been too good to you to be lazy and unfruitful.

"We are workers together with Him. I beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain." That is the Christian work ethic which was believed by so many of our founders and which helped to make this such a great nation.

And God wants to do something great through our generation, if we only are not afraid to try. Please, don't let fear of failure hold you back. Let me tell you why you are not going to fail. Because Jesus is your attorney. He says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And if any man sin, we have an advocate (attorney) with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." (I John 1:9, 2:1)

You are not going to fail because Jesus said: "I am able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before His presence with exceeding joy," (Jude 1:24).

The Bible says: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the good things that God has prepared for those who love Him."

We don't need to fear failure, when we work with God!

Now does this outlook work? It has worked multitudes, who have exercised their faith. May I call three or four more witnesses, who worked for and with God, and who succeeded in His power, who will confirm what I am trying to share? Let's call Samson. "Samson, where are you going?" I'm on my way to fight a thousand Philistines. "Samson, what kind of weapon do you have?" I have this bone...this jawbone of a donkey.

"But Samson, you can't fight anyone with that!"

Samson said: "Yes, I can!" And he overcame a thousand by the power of God.

Let's call Moses. "Moses, what are you going to do?" Moses says: "The Lord called me to deliver Israel."

"Well Moses, what do you have?" Just this rod.

"Well, what are you going to do with that rod?" I'm going to stretch it out over the Red Sea, and the Red Sea is going to part. And I'm going to touch a rock with it, and water is going to come out of the rock, so the people will not die of thirst.

"But Moses, you can't do that with a rod!" But Moses said -----Somebody ought to know what Moses said. What did he say? You know what he said: "Oh yes I can!"

And Moses took the rod and God delivered God's people!

"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, what's going to happen?" Oh, we're going into the fiery furnace. The Lord's going to deliver us. (Daniel 3)

"But you can't be delivered from a fiery furnace!" They said: "Yes, we can!"

The king went back to check on them. And listen to his remarks: “Didn’t we cast three men, bound, into the furnace? But not I see four men, loose and walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt. And the form of the fourth one is like the Son of God!”

Finally, let’s call Jesus.

“Jesus, what are you going to do?” I’m going to be crucified. I’m going to die for the sins of the world. Then on the third day, I’m going to rise again from the dead. “Jesus, you can’t do that!”

“Yes I can!”

And on the third day morning, He grabbed death by the collar, shook death until death turned Him loose. He arose from the grave, and said: “All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me. I am He that was dead; and now I am alive forever more!”

“Now I’m enlisting recruits for a ‘can do’ army, and our motto will be: ‘Yes I can!’ People in life and circumstances will tell you that you can’t do this and you can’t do that; but you will answer: ‘Yes, I can!’”

The apostle Paul enlisted in Jesus’ “can do” army. He said: “I’ve found, in whatever state that I am, to be content, I know how to be abased. I know how to abound. I’ve learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me,” (Philippians 4:11-12). My friend, you may feel inadequate. Your resources may seem too little. But you have a raging river of potential in you.

God never starts until there is not enough. He never really goes to work, until there is nothing. And if what you have is not enough and you are down to nothing, then you are right were God needs you to be, that He might do His best work.

We, who are in this room, can make a difference, as we work together with Him! If you look out across our world, if you look into our cities, you will see so much distress, so much trouble, so much crime, so much perversion, so much addiction, so much division. And we might be prone to say there’s nothing we can do about it, but we’ve got to say:

“Yes, we can!” The people of my God can make a Difference.

Yes, we can. Yes, you can. Yes, I can.

Look at your neighbor. Ball up your fist. Tell him, “Yes, I can!”

Now you are ready to be a worker together with God.

(When I heard Bishop Charles Blake, of the West Angeles Church of God in Christ, preach this message, I knew it was what I needed to best explain the Christian Work Ethic. Thanks!)