

Labour Day

Here in North America, we have a fall national holiday called Labour Day.

In the ragged remainder of the communist world, the people observe their Labour Day in the springtime on May 1st. But here in Canada and the USA, Labour Day always falls on the first Monday in September, as the summer begins its transformation into autumn.

The Labour Day holiday originated in Toronto, Canada in 1872. The first observation of Labour Day in the USA came ten years later in New York City in 1882.

Labour Day is the holiday that many school-age children dread – and many parents look forward to – all summer long... because on the day following labour day, the kids – or most of them, at least – return to school.

By the way, I use the word “holiday.” But it is not, of course, a holy day in any sense. It is, and always has been, a purely non-religious observance.

Most of us overlook the reason for this holiday and just enjoy it and its associated barbeques as the last holiday of the summer. The basic purpose of the holiday, however, is simply to say “thank you” to our nations’ workers for all the efforts they put in from day to day. I don’t think there’s anything inherently wrong with that. Yes, they receive their hard-earned wages each week. But an annual pat on the back is always a worthwhile additional incentive for workers to do a good job.

Think of all the jobs that people do out there that you and I would not want to do. What about the people who work in sewage plants? What about the people who work at boring, repetitive factory jobs each day? What about even the doctors and nurses who work long, hard hours – some of them being on-call for nights and weekends, having to deal with all kinds of nasty bodily fluids? I’m sure you could think of many other examples.

In this article, which will be in a Bible study format, let us concentrate on the subject of Labour. And because of time and space limitations, just for now at least, let us concentrate on the New Testament mentions of the word “labour” and its derivations: labourer(s), labouring, laboured, labours, etc. Perhaps we can come back and take a look at the Old Testament mentions on some future Labour Day weekend.

Physical labour

First we see that physical labour certainly is an honourable pursuit:

Ephesians 4:28:

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

This is an example of the term “labour” in its purest physical sense. It is not referring to spiritual labour. Nor is it referring to maternal labour. Paul is commanding those who were former thieves to repent of their sin of stealing, to get a job, and to earn the money they need to live on through honest labour. Let’s now see what James has to say about it:

James 5:4:

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

James is here crying out a warning to the rich – not all the rich, but the dishonest rich... who had withheld fair wages from their workers.

Moonlighting ministers

I Corinthians 4:12:

And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;

Paul says here, and in other places, that he and his fellow-ministers are not afraid to participate in manual labour... to help the brethren, but also to earn their keep.

Many of the Local Elders of God's church today are either retired workers, or are still working at their day jobs. More on this from Paul:

I Thessalonians 2:9:

For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

II Thessalonians 3:8:

Nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

Twice more, Paul implies that he and his fellows partook in at least two types of labour:

- i) Physical work – by day? – to earn money to live on, so that they would not be a financial burden to the local congregation.
- ii) The spiritual work – by night? – of preaching the gospel to them.

Acts 20:35:

"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul was talking here to the elders of the Ephesus congregation (see verse 17).

He reminded them of examples of his own hard work:

Verse 18:

And when they had come to him, he said to them: "you know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,

19: "Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;

20: "How I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,

21: "Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ...

Verse 24:

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

25: "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, will see my face no more...

Verse 31: "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears...

Verse 33: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

34: "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

He told them that he would not see them any more after that particular visit... and, this being the case, they must follow his example of labour in order to support the weak. Both spiritual and physical labour seem to be implied here.

Let's apply this to ourselves. Imagine if your pastor came to your city or town and told you that this was the last time he would be able to visit you! And then told you that you must do your best to follow his example and to support one another... especially the weak. On a weekly and daily basis, we all need to be labouring for one another... and especially for the weak among us.

God's Labourers

Matthew 11: 28

"Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Once we become God's labourers, we all have some hard work to do. Not just God's ministers and deacons. But every member is to participate. And we should all be glad to participate – and without complaint.

But is God's work like some unbearable burden? Not at all! Continuing in...

Verse 29:

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Lots of rest breaks when we're doing God's work! Many more than before we were hired on as his labourers. One every seventh day, and seven more throughout the year! Who else do you know who receives such benefits?

But what about the work itself? Is it hard graft? Jesus answers:

Verse 30:

"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We're called to pull one load – hence the use of the yoke – and to carry another – the burden – on our backs. This sounds like hard work. But Jesus says that it is easy and light.

John 6:

26: Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

27: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

The people of the Galilee area had witnessed, heard about, or participated in the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 on the previous day. They came to find Jesus again, but what were they hoping for? Another free meal? Another miracle? Jesus told them that these are the wrong goals and the wrong reasons for human labour. He tells us here that it is right that we should be labouring – but not merely for the physical – for food, clothes, housing, luxury items, etc.

His brothers and sisters should be expending their labour and effort in order to obtain spiritual food “which endures to everlasting life.” And He is the One who has this “food” to give to us.

I Corinthians 15:10:

But by the grace of God I am what I am [i.e. an apostle] and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all [i.e. all the other apostles], yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Paul was not vainly bragging here when he says that he expended more labour than his fellow-apostles. The record of his accomplishments in the book of Acts and his epistles attest to the fact. But he attributes the glory for his efforts to God and his grace. Later in this same chapter, we read Paul’s words, encouraging his fellow-members in the Corinth congregation to abound in God’s work:

Verse 58:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

In other words, we need to be working really hard at it. He adds that our labours for God’s work are not in vain, implying that some of our worldly labours are just that.

II Corinthians 6:1:

We then, as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Paul didn’t put himself up on a pedestal above the brethren. He counted himself among the workers. He counted himself as a co-worker with Christ.

Verse 4:

But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses,

Paul counted himself as one of God's ministers. But when he writes that "we commend ourselves as ministers" he is not vainly saying that others should wait upon him. On the contrary, the Greek word he uses here is "diakonos" from which comes the English word "deacon." It means a servant; an attendant; one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master; the servant of a king; a waiter; one who serves food and drink.

Verse 5:

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

So we see that God's ministers are to be labourers – serving God and His people – willing to suffer hardships. The list format of this verse reminds one of **II Corinthians 11:23** in which the same words for labours and ministers are used:

Are they ministers of Christ? —I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

The Greek word for "labours" here is "kopos" and means trouble; weariness; beating ones breast in grief or sorrow; intense labour united with trouble and toil; to cause one trouble; to make work for another.

II Corinthians 10:15:

Not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,

Paul is saying here that he and his fellows were not taking the credit or the glory to themselves for the efforts of others – for the labour that others had performed.

Philippians 1:

21: For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22: But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

Imprisoned in Rome, Paul was here telling the Philippi church members in his letter to them that he was not afraid to die. He would be happy if he were to die because he would no longer be aware of the passing of time, and so, the next thing he knew, he would be with Christ. But he was also happy to continue in his human life, because by doing so he could continue in his labour for God and His children; and from this labour, additional fruit would be produced.

I Thessalonians 5:

12: And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

13: And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Is this just talking about the ministers? Those who are “over you in the lord”? Not exclusively so, I don't think. Rather, I think that Paul is referring to every member – whether he or she be a minister, deacon, deaconess, regular member, young not-yet-baptized person, or whatever – who admonishes others or exerts himself or herself for his or her fellow-members.

Hebrews 6:

10: For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

11: And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,

12: That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

God will remember and reward the loving efforts of the Hebrew brethren who were not sluggish, but who diligently cared for their fellow-members.

Spiritual agricultural and harvest labour

In the gospel accounts, we see what Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, has to say about the subject of labour.

Matthew 9:

37: Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

38: "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

Who are these labourers? And what is the harvest? It is interesting to me that they are ultimately one and the same. The labourers represent the members of God's church who are doing their part in His work.

God gives the increase. He performs the miracle of conversion and growth. But he uses human beings to do His planting, watering, and reaping:

I Corinthians 3:6:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

The indication in Matthew 9 is that the harvest is already growing and God wants more workers to come and help with the reaping.

But isn't it interesting that, in this respect, once the individual fruits or grains are reaped, they are transformed into labourers?

John 4:

35: "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!

36: "And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.

37: "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'

38: "I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

Here are those crops again; and those sowers and reapers!

The "crops" that Jesus was specifically referring to when He said this to His disciples were a group of people who were (at least in the minds of the disciples) most unlikely to be converted – the Samaritans – who were much hated and despised by the Jews.

Jesus told the disciples that they were beginning their part in the labour on this crop (the Samaritans are implied) at the end of their growing cycle – that other labourers had done all the sowing and the other main, hard work, and that the disciples' part was merely in the reaping – the final conversion.

We can learn a lesson from this. Please never discount God's ability to convert *any* human beings He wishes to – whether they be Israelite, Gentile, mixed-race (as were the Samaritans and as most of us are!), native Indian, East Indian, black African, or even Afghan or Iraqi!

Some of our most faithful members are physical gentiles, living in places like the Philippines, Trinidad and Zambia! Please welcome them all to share in God's harvest work.

Matthew 20:

1: "For the Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

2: "Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard..."

Verse 8:

"So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.'

It is not my purpose to go into this parable in fine detail. You all know the story very well. A land-owner hired some labourers at the beginning of the work day for a set wage. He needed some more towards the end of the work day, and hired them at the same wage as he did the earlier workers. Some of those who were hired in the morning complained that the others received the same wage as they did.

God began His main hiring program approximately 2,000 years ago in 31AD. Yes, He had hired a few labourers scattered throughout the years before that date, but not too many. Some of his best labourers – Stephen, for instance – only served for a very short time. Others, such as the apostle John, served for most of their adult lives until they died at ripe, old ages.

Do you think that John ever complained that Stephen “went to his reward” – the same “basic reward” (salvation and eternal life) as John was to receive – without doing an equal amount of work as he did? Highly unlikely!

In our generation, God called some of our members as far back as the nineteen-fifties. There was a large spiritual harvest in the Sixties and Seventies; slightly less so in the Eighties and Nineties. And conversions are still taking place.

If Jesus Christ were to return next month, and were to give a newly baptized person the same basic reward – the same salvation – as the long-timers, would those long-timers have any reason to complain that the newly baptized member “got away with” much less labour than they? Of course not!

Like me, you know of people who have been in the church for many years, but who may be spiritually less mature than others who have only been in for a few years. Time is relatively unimportant to God. A zealous, fervent, hard-working attitude is what is important to Him.

I Corinthians 3:8:

Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Still with agricultural symbolism – Paul had already told the Corinthians (verse 6) that he was the planter and Apollos was the waterer. They were two separate men. Paul’s point was that they had unity despite their different job functions; also that their functions were inferior to that of God who, miraculously, provides the increase – the growth.

But there’s something else worthy of note here – something of note for those who say that we humans don’t have to do anything and say that God and/or Jesus Christ have done it all for us.

Paul says that every one of God’s children will receive his reward according to his own labour. Do you want a big reward? Then labour as hard as you possibly can, doing your part in the work of God.

I have referred to God’s gifts of salvation and eternal life as the “basic reward.” But this verse and the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27) reveal that God will give additional rewards depending on the efforts we expend in this life. If you slack off and do nothing, your whole reward will be taken away and given to another.

God's labourers worthy of wages

Luke 10:7

"And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages.

We may ask the question, "Are we being respecters of persons?" by laying on a nice pot-luck meal when one of our ministers comes into town? Not according to what Jesus says in this scripture. As we have already seen, we are all God's labourers. But God also has a few full-time workers. It is to be hoped that the full-time ministers and other church employees really do work hard for their pay. The ministers are always on call – 24/7. If you are sick you can phone them at 3:00am and they will not complain. They are putting together sermons, Bible studies, sermonettes, articles, essays and such on a daily basis. They are constantly thinking of what to write or speak about next. Some travel thousands of miles each year to be with the various congregations. For a young man, all this travel may sound like lots of fun. But when you're getting up in years and you're travelling a lot, car and air travel can soon become stale.

I Timothy 5:

17: Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

18: for the scripture says, "you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "the laborer is worthy of his wages."

In verse 17, one would think that all elders would be labouring in the word and doctrine. In verse 18, we see that the hard work of a full-time, paid minister makes him worthy of a decent wage. Surprisingly, there are some who disagree with this concept.

Maternal labour

Now here is a different kind of labour – Maternal labour!

Men – even you big guys who do heavy work each day, those of you operate road rollers, bulldozers, backhoes and other heavy equipment, even those of you who drive Ford F350 diesel trucks – please do not discount this kind of labour as somehow inferior.

Yes, women may be the weaker vessels, physically (I Peter 3:7) – please note – not spiritually or mentally. Also, they are not inferior vessels! Yes, men, the women are the “dainty tea cups” and we are the “big plant pots” – a comparison that one notable minister made some years ago.

But please ask any mother if her child-bearing labour was real work and, without exception, I am sure they would all answer in the affirmative. I have heard that a mother in labour uses muscles that God created for no other purpose. I have also heard that if men had to give birth, we would have a nation full of “only-children”!

Maternal labour is frequently used symbolically in the New Testament. The strange thing, though, is that each time it seems to be used in a symbolically different way!

John 16:21:

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

Jesus was making a point here. He was telling his disciples that he was soon to die and to leave them; but that their sadness would soon be turned into great joy when they saw him after his resurrection. He likened His suffering and death to the “maternal labour” of His disciples who He, at another time, likened to His mother” (Luke 8:19-21).

His resurrection was His second birth. Yes, Jesus Himself was born again! He was the Firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18).

We can look at this example in another sense too. The lives of the people who make up God's church may be – no, must be – lives of labour. That labour will result in us being born again at the time of the First Resurrection – a time of great joy.

Now, here is an account of another “expectant mother” in labour, waiting for the delivery of her children:

Romans 8:

- 19: For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.**
- 20: For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;**
- 21: Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.**
- 22: For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.**
- 23: Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [*sonship*], the redemption of our body.**

Paul, writing to the Rome congregation, again using the symbolism of maternal labour, tells us that the whole of creation – the world and the whole universe – are groaning like a woman in labour, and yearning for us to be born again so that we can help our Elder Brother solve the problems which have historically caused that groaning.

Galatians 4:

- 26: But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.**
- 27: For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband."**

Unlike our self-centred societies today where so many choose not to have children, in “Bible times,” it was an embarrassment not for a woman to be able to bear children. Here we see that “the Jerusalem above” – the church of God – is the mother of all true Christians.

She was virtually barren for many centuries – bearing hardly any children – i.e. any true Christians; only a very few (e.g. Abraham, Moses, David, etc.).

But since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the coming of His Holy Spirit, the formerly barren, desolate “church” brings forth hundreds – even thousands – of children. And without the physical pains of labour.

However, this does not mean that the conversion process is not without effort and potential difficulty or even danger – as we read a few verses back in:

Verse 19:

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

Paul had laboured for the Galatian church members to bring them to a converted condition. He had laboured like a mother in childbirth. But now, because of their backsliding, he felt that this labour would have to be repeated over again.

I Thessalonians 5:3

For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Here is yet another antitype of maternal labour – sudden destruction in the end-time falling upon people who erroneously expect peace and safety.

And yet another antitype of the symbol of maternal labour:

Revelation 12:

- 1: Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.**
- 2: Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.**
- 3: And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.**
- 4: His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.**
- 5: She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.**

I don't want to get into too much detail here; but I would like to ask you to think about these questions: Who is the male child mentioned here? Jesus Christ? Yes, of course. But who is the mother mentioned here? Mary? Israel? Both of them?

Name-dropping

Paul was a name-dropper – in the right way, of course. He drops names in his letters in order to cite their positive examples which he expects his readers to follow. God and His servant Paul both made a special point of recording the names of those who expended much labour for God and His children:

Romans 16:6

Greet Mary, who labored much for us...

Verse 12:

Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.

Please note, you F350 drivers, that all four of those mentioned here are women! Four excellent female examples to us. Four women who laboured hard, doing their part with zeal, so that God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I Corinthians 16: 14:

Let all that you do be done with love.

So we *do* have to *do* something then! Paul tells us so. God tells us so!

Verse 15:

I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints—

Paul gives another example – that of Stephanas and his family who devoted themselves to the ministry. What does this mean? Were they members of the ministry? Or did they devote themselves to the support of the ministry? We don't really know; but we do know that they worked at it hard enough that God and Paul thought their efforts important enough to record here.

Verse 16:

That you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.

So then, Paul recommends the example of the Stephanas family labours to the rest of the Corinth congregation – and, by extension, to us.

Philemon:

1: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer...

Verse 24: As do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

Here is Paul name-dropping again! – referring to Philemon, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke as his fellow-labourers.

Colossians 4:12:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

Here, Paul mentions the Colossian member, Epaphras. What was Epaphras' good example? He was willing to be virtually a slave of Jesus Christ. What was his specific slave-like labour? Fervent prayer! God tells us in other places that we are not all the same; that, as we are different parts of Christ's Body, we all have different functions. And those functions may – and probably will – change as we get older.

Perhaps in his younger days, Epaphras was on the set-up crew. I don't know, but maybe he had an accident and dropped a trestle-table on his foot. Or maybe he just got older and became unable to join in with the heavy work. Perhaps "all" he was able to do at this time was to pray fervently for his fellow members. But God and Paul have recorded his efforts as a good example for us today.

Philippians 4:

2: I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

3: And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

We don't know who Paul's "true companion" is. Although the letter is written to all of the members of the Philippi congregation, it is likely that it was mailed to one individual – perhaps their local elder or deacon – in the same way as we might make an individual reference if we were sending a letter to all our British brethren through Jamie McNab.

Anyway, Paul asks this companion to give certain help to his Philippian fellow-workers; but more especially to these female fellow-labourers. So much for those who tag Paul as a male chauvinist!

I Thessalonians 3:

- 1: Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,**
- 2: And sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,**

There are those, I imagine, who think that the work of a minister is easy, when compared to physical labour out in the world. I have been ordained a local elder for a very short time (only six years) and I am here to tell you that I have quickly discovered that a minister's responsibilities are far from "a walk in the park"! I am not complaining, of course, but I don't think I have ever, in all my life, been so busy.

Labour, works and patience

I Thessalonians 1:3:

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

Here Paul reprises his trio of faith, hope and charity (love) – the trio that we know so well from I Corinthians 13 – and credits all three to the Thessalonian church members. It is interesting that these three things really do take some real effort. Hope requires active patience; faith takes work; and true love takes real labour! God's work really is a labour of love – not just for the ministry, but for us all.

Revelation 2:

2: I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

3: And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary.

These are the encouraging words of Jesus Christ to his Ephesus church. Like Paul in I Thessalonians 1:3, He lists *patience* along with works and continuing, tireless labour.

Labouring in vain

Galatians 4:

- 9: But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?**
- 10: You observe days and months and seasons and years.**
- 11: I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**

Some or all the members of the Galatian congregation were returning to some of their old, heathen, sinful ways – to their worldly traditions, even to astrology and perhaps to occult practices! Paul was concerned that the labour he had expended on them may have been in vain. Yes, he was concerned that his efforts for their spiritual benefit may have been valuable time wasted. But, more than this, he was afraid for them – for what their end would be if they did not repent of these things.

Philippians 2:

- 14: Do all things without complaining and disputing,**
- 15: That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,**
- 16: Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.**

This is interesting. Paul was again asking the members of another one of the churches to do certain things so that his – Paul’s – efforts would not be wasted. To some extent, he seems to have based the success of his own spiritual “race-running” and labour upon whether or not *they* did *their* part. They would benefit from it, of course. But Paul would also feel a secondary benefit from it. Their success was *his* success.

I Thessalonians 3:5:

- For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.**

Again, we see how Paul attaches importance to the continuing faith of the brethren; how he would feel hurt if they would have been lured away by Satan; how, if this happened, he would feel that his labour and that of his fellows would have been in vain – wasted.

Christian labour: A means to an end

Colossians 1:

27: To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28: Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

29: To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

Notice how poetic Paul's writings are – how he teams up similar words, such as “labour,” “working” and “work.”

Paul's labour was a means to end. He says so here in verse 29. And that end was to teach, preach, to warn, and to ultimately present every human being perfect to God.

I Timothy 4:

8: For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

9: This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

10: For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

Here is Paul saying once again that his labour and that of his fellows is a means to an end. To what end? A godly, spiritually-profitable, physical life now, and a tremendous eternal life in the future, made possible through our living God and our trust and belief in Him.

And now, in conclusion:

Revelation 14:13:

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "That they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Each Sabbath, we, God's people, rest from our week's physical labour. In the sleep of death, we will rest from our lifetime of works and labour. But then comes the resurrection and the Millennium. Yes, a time of relative rest for the world and its peoples – relative rest from six thousand years of hard labour. But, for God's born-again children – the resurrected, born-again brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, with our brand-new weariness-free Spirit bodies, here begins a time like we have never experienced before – a time of wonderful, productive **labour!**

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