

## **The Work that Refreshes**

Joseph Herrin (1993)

If you were to examine Christians today to determine their mental state you would be struck by how much depression there is among them. Many Christians today are fatigued, weary, worn-out, burned-out, and despondent. Many of those in this state are some of the most earnest and sincere of God's children. Many have been, or are now, involved in Christian ministry. Many of the saints of God, who desire with all of their hearts to be found pleasing to God, are suffering from this wasting away of their spiritual vitality. What is the cause of this? Certainly this existence is not the "overcoming" and "more than conquerors" description given of Christians in the New Testament.

The book of Hebrews, in chapters 3 and 4, speaks of "entering into God's rest." Hebrews 4:9, 10 states, "There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." This *rest* is what the children of God so badly need today. Notice the verse which says, "For the one who has entered His rest has *himself* rested from *his* works." Herein is the key to finding rest.

Christians today are experiencing fatigue and depression in droves because they have not ceased from their own works. You may ask, "Are Christians to sit and do nothing? Are we not to be doing some kind of work?" Certainly, Christians are to be working. Christ said, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming when no man can work" (John 9:4). The question is not, "Should we work?", but, rather, "What work should we be doing?"

There are two main areas of Christian work. The first area, and probably the one in which Christians wear themselves out the most, is in the area of salvation. Many Christians today are wasting themselves away in a vain effort to either establish their salvation or maintain it. There is only one work that will purchase and forever maintain our salvation, and that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Our only part in this is to believe it; Jesus did everything else for us. John 6:29 states, "Jesus answered and said to them, '*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*'"

The only work left to us regarding our salvation is clearly shown in this verse, "that you believe in Him whom He has sent." Even this believing does not originate from within us, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8, 9 "For by grace you have been

saved through faith [in Jesus]; and that [faith] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

Even the faith to believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ that purchased for us our salvation does not come from within us, it is the gift of God. Why then do so many Christians wear themselves out trying to earn or maintain their salvation? Such striving is all wasted effort. The only work of salvation on our part is to believe that Jesus perfectly and eternally purchased our salvation for us on the cross, and even our faith to believe is given to us by God.

Hebrews 3:19-4:3

And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest.

(NAS)

Do you believe in the good news of Jesus Christ, that He has once and for all paid the penalty for sin? Do you trust in Him alone for your right standing before God? This belief is your only work in regard to salvation, and, as we have seen, even this faith to believe is given to you by God. There is no need to wear yourself out by trying to achieve salvation.

But, some might ask, “What then about maintaining my salvation? Don’t I have to do certain things to stay saved?” I will let the Apostle Paul answer you as he did the Galatians.

Gal 3:1-3, 11

You foolish Galatians [Christians], who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "***The righteous man shall live by faith.***"

(NAS)

Having begun our life in Christ through faith, can we now maintain it by keeping a set of laws? God forbid! Our only work in regard to salvation from start to finish is “that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”

This striving to achieve or maintain salvation by keeping the Law or performing certain duties is wearing out many Christians today. Also, it is a slap in the face of God. It is saying, “Christ’s work was not enough, I must add to my salvation.” Galatians 2:21 declares, “*for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.*” Galatians 5:4, “*You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law.*”

If Christians today would lay hold of this truth, that salvation comes by faith, then much fatigue and depression caused by wearing themselves out through vain effort would be erased. By this act of believing, many could “enter into God’s rest.” There is, however, another area of works where Christians are failing to enter into God’s rest. This area is in our service to God.

Our service to God is distinguished from the work of salvation in that it has no bearing upon salvation. Service has to do with our fruitfulness as Christians. Whether we bear little fruit, or much fruit, we are still Christians, but God desires that we bear much fruit. Many Christians are wearing themselves out in their service to God and have failed to enter into the work that refreshes.

To understand how to serve God without growing weary, we must first understand what constitutes true service to God. Our service is something that we render to God because we are rightfully His. You work for your employer because he pays you wages. We work for God because we have been purchased with the blood of Christ.

God paid for us with the life of His Son. The purchase price has been paid up front and in full. I Corinthians 6:19b, 20a, “*You are not your own. For you have been bought with a price.*” We are no longer our own masters (we never really were). We belong to God. God is not only our rightful owner, He is our Creator and Lord and Master. We are totally under His authority.

**Because we are under God’s authority, it is He who determines what our service will be.** It is at this point that many Christians stumble and consequently exhaust themselves.

If a grocer hired you to work in his store, you would expect him to tell you what your duties would be. If he hired you to stock the shelves, he would not be too pleased to come back and find that you had spent your time cleaning the windows. You could argue that you were indeed working, but he would not be impressed because you failed to do what he hired you for. By ignoring his authority, you have become useless to him. In the same way, many Christians fail to remain under God's authority and they do not wait for His Spirit to lead them into their activities. Rather, they choose for themselves what their service will be and they end up walking in the power of the flesh and are soon discouraged and exhausted.

**To live and serve under God's authority we must allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God.** "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). God does not intend for us to bring our reason to bear upon what our activities should be. Man's mind can justify many things and our reasoning will not lead us to obedience. Only by being led by the Spirit of God can we know what the will of God is and be able to walk in it. The life under God's authority is by necessity a life in tune with God's Spirit.

Matthew 7:21-23 reveals what the outcome is of doing good works apart from the authority of God.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

We see in these verses that it is not enough to simply do good works. We cannot reason as a Christian, "I must do good works, therefore I will do whatever is at hand." This is action without obedience. First you must allow God's Spirit to guide you to those things He wants you to do. Jesus said, "He who does the will of My Father will enter the kingdom of heaven."

We must place ourselves under the authority of the Father and only move at His command. To move without command is to remove oneself from God's authority and this is lawlessness. **Therefore, to be involved in a work apart from the clear direction of God's Spirit is to practice lawlessness.** This is why Jesus told those who were doing things in His name, but not by the will of the Father, "Depart from Me; you who practice lawlessness."

Jesus' own example was always to do the will of the Father. He says in John 5:19, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing." John 5:30 likewise records, "I can do nothing on My own initiative... I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Again, in John 6:38 we read, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

We see from Christ's example that doing the will of the Father is of the ultimate importance. Nothing else constitutes obedience. Jesus did not decide for Himself who He would preach to, or who He would heal, or what miracle He would perform. He did not act on His own initiative, but always did the will of the Father. Likewise, we as children of God must not determine for ourselves what activities are worthy of our labors.

We must not mistake a need for a command. There were many needs in Jesus' day, but Jesus only addressed the needs the Father commanded Him to address. There were great needs among the gentiles, but Jesus said the Father had not sent Him to the gentiles. There were great injustices in government, but God had not led Him to address these injustices. Jesus did not heal every leper, nor did He feed every person, or cast out every demon. He only did what the Father showed Him to do; anything else would have been lawlessness.

Satan's tempting of Jesus in the wilderness dealt with this very issue. Satan tempted Jesus to do something that would meet a very real need, but he wanted Jesus to do it of His own initiative. Jesus' need for food was very real. He hadn't eaten in forty days and He was hungry. Satan tempted Jesus to turn the stones into bread and so to meet His need of food. Jesus, however, waited on God to meet the need in His own timing. He said in another place, "My meat is to do the will of My Father." **If Jesus had of His own initiative acted to fill a need, He would have missed the will of the Father.**

We cannot choose to pour ourselves into activity or ministry simply because there is a perceived need. Only when the Spirit of God directs will God also provide the power to accomplish His will. To act without command is to commit oneself to striving in the flesh and we will miss "entering into God's rest."

Before the fall, Adam could work tirelessly, even effortlessly. Adam could work from sunrise to sundown without fatigue. Only after choosing his own way was

he cursed to work by the sweat of his brow. Today, if we will refuse to choose our own way, but will wait upon the Lord, we will have the promise of Isaiah 40:31, “Yet those who wait upon the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings as eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.”

Yes, our bodies will still require rest, but our spirit will be renewed within us. We will not experience the depression that results from following our own course and striving in the power of the flesh. We will be built up in our inner man as the Spirit of God “gives life to our mortal bodies” (Romans 8:31). As we cease from our own labors we will be able to “enter into God’s rest” and truly know the work that refreshes.

To sum it all up, we must be sure in any activity that we engage in that we are being led into it by the Spirit of God. Do not mistake a need for a calling. To work without God’s command is to practice lawlessness because we have removed ourselves from under His authority. To be led by our reason leads to fatigue, depression, and burn-out.

Let us allow God to lead us into the paths He has ordained for us to walk in. Then we will bear much fruit and our way will be prepared before us. Let us have this same attitude that was in Christ Jesus, who never sought His own way, but always did the will of the Father. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*” (Ephesians 2:10).

Hebrews 4:11

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone should fall through following that same example of disobedience.