

Patience Produced By Love

By: Keith Keyser

“So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.” Genesis 29:20

Despite his scheming spirit, Jacob was a first class lover. Even after he was duped into marrying weak-eyed Leah by his new father-in-law, Laban, he still sought to wed his first love, Rachel. Seven additional years of sweat equity is the price that he paid for this honor.¹ Nonetheless, the Bible comments on the strength of his affection for this maiden, saying: “...*they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her*” (Gen. 29:20.) This quality is a worthy description of the spiritual devotion that Christians may experience as they serve the Lord Jesus while awaiting His return.

Worthwhile Work

Some things merit hard work. Parents who migrate to a new nation in hopes of giving their children a better life and more educational and commercial opportunities exemplify this principle well. They toil for long hours in difficult conditions because of their love for their families. In like manner, believers are to live for the Lord, laboring diligently in His service, even if it means suffering hardships, privations, and persecution. Nevertheless, in all of these troubles, they must always keep in mind that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt. 11:30.) This is because Christian work for the Lord is motivated from their possession of salvation by faith in Christ – not as a means of obtaining salvation or favor from Him (as in the Pharisees’ teaching.) Thus, believers do not work to be saved; rather they work because they are saved (Eph. 2:8-10.) Like Jacob’s attitude regarding his work, their service – as fatiguing as it sometimes is – comes from hearts full of loving gratitude towards the God of grace who has given them eternal life.² Additionally, in all of their trials and sorrows they have the assurance of the Holy Spirit’s help and the risen Christ’s abiding presence.

Paul sums up the worthiness of rigorous service for Christ in these words: “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” (1 Cor. 15:58.) The underlying Greek word for “labor” in this verse comes from the root for a beating or a blow³, and the word-group is defined in this manner by two authorities: “To engage in hard work, implying difficulties and trouble—‘hard work, toil, to work hard, to toil, to labor.’⁴ The able classicist Mr. Vine adds: “[It] primarily denotes ‘a striking, beating’ (akin to *kopto*, ‘to strike, cut’), then, ‘toil resulting in weariness, laborious toil, trouble’.”⁵

Someone might ask: “But how do we know that this labor is not in vain?” The context of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 gives the answer: The Lord Jesus’ triumphant resurrection, which opens the way for His people’s resurrection, proves that God will ultimately be victorious over evil.

Work for the Lord will abide for eternity, because the Son of God has conquered every foe. The universe merely awaits His return to reveal the comprehensive nature of His victory.

Ye Fearful Saints, Fresh Courage Take

Imagine the joy of Jacob coming home after a difficult day at work to the one who motivated it all: his beloved Rachel. Similarly, Deck's classic lyrics describe the consummated pleasure of the saints when the Lord returns in the air for them:

*'A little while' --- He'll come again;
Let us the precious hours redeem,
Our only grief to give Him pain,
Our joy to serve and follow Him.
Watching and ready may we be,
As those that wait their Lord to see.*

*'A little while' – 'twill soon be past,
Why should we shun the promised cross?
O let us in His footsteps haste,
Counting for Him all else but loss;
**For how will recompense His smile,
The sufferings of this 'little while'!***

*'A little while' – Come, Savior, come;
For Thee Thy bride has tarried long:
Take Thy poor waiting pilgrims home
To sing the new eternal song,
To see Thy glory, and to be
In everything conformed to Thee!⁶*

In the same vein, the Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks also eloquently depicts Christian hardships in perspective against the backdrop of heavenly glory with God: “Though the work be hard, yet the wages is great. Heaven will make amends for all. Ay, one hour's being in heaven will abundantly recompense you for cleaving to the Lord and his ways in the face of all difficulties. This carried the apostle through the greatest difficulties. He had an eye ‘to the recompense of reward;’ he looked for ‘a house that had foundations, whose builder and maker was God,’ and for ‘a heavenly country.’”⁷ Paul himself puts it this way: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18.) Let the saints then be impelled to labor out of their great love for the Lord who loves them, died for them, and is taking them to glory.

¹ A close reading of the passage demonstrates that he was able to wed her prior to the seven year period, but that was the time that he afterwards labored as his payment for his bride. Additionally, he labored for seven years for marrying her sister Leah and six for his flocks, bringing his total time of servitude to twenty years. See Gen. 29:19-30 & Gen. 31:41.

² Unlike Jacob, believers do not work to **gain** their Beloved. Christ is the prime mover in seeking His church; He secures their place with Him as the Bride through His work on the cross as well as the resurrection, ascension, and coming again that follow it. See Eph. 5:22-33.

³ Friedrich Hauck, “kopiazo/kopos,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich. electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 827.

⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, “kopos,” in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Vol. 1, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), p. 514.

⁵ W. E. Vine, “Labor” in *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Vol. 2. Eds. Merrill F. Unger and William White (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996), p. 349. Brackets mine.

⁶ James G. Deck, “A little while, our Lord shall come” found here: <http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/ss/173> Accessed on 6/9/12. Emphasis mine.

⁷ Thomas Brooks, *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, Volume 1*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; G. Herbert, 1866), p. 76.