

LABOR THAT IS NOT IN VAIN

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It can be very discouraging for one to labor long and hard in an endeavor, and then discover that his labors were in vain. Many farmers have planned, planted, and cultivated while eagerly expecting a huge harvest, only to have everything destroyed by a devastating hailstorm just weeks before the crop could be harvested. How discouraging! Countless examples could be cited of hard labor which proved to be in vain.

"Vain" denotes that which is hollow, fruitless, empty, and unproductive. *"Vain"* is also a word which often appears in the Bible. The Psalmist said *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain,"* Psal. 127:1. Alluding to false prophets who prophesied *"out of their own hearts,"* Ezekiel described those who had *"seen a vain vision,"* and had *"spoken a lying divination,"* having claimed that *"the Lord saith,"* even though He had *"not spoken."* Ezek. 13:2,7. Paul referred to some who had *"turned aside unto vain jangling,"* I Tim. 1:6; he exhorted Timothy to avoid *"profane and vain babblings,"* I Tim. 6:20, and he mentioned those who would deceive others *"with vain words,"* Eph.5:6. He also said *"I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain,"* Phil. 2:16, and he admonished the saints at Galatia to *"not be desirous of vain glory,"* Gal. 5:26. Referring to the worship of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said *"in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,"* Matt. 15:9.

Yes, in both the Old and New Testaments, *"vain"* is a word which often appears, but the frequency with which it occurs does not diminish the sadness and discouragement it brings. And there could be no greater dismay than to ultimately stand before the Lord in judgment, only to discover that one's labors were *"in vain!"*

However, one's labors do not have to be in vain; they can be productive of much good, and result in a happiness beyond description and which can last for all eternity! This kind of labor is mentioned in I Corinthians 15:58, wherein the apostle Paul admonished the saints at Corinth, saying, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

What delightful news! One can actually have divine assurance that his labors are *"not in vain!"* With this in mind, and with the fervent desire that our own labors will not be *"in vain,"* we shall now more closely analyze this great scripture.

I CORINTHIANS 15:58 ANALYZED:

"Therefore." This word denotes the practical conclusion of what had already been said. In fact, in this case it reaches back over the entire chapter, taking us from the doctrinal truths it espouses, to its practical application. More specifically, Paul began the chapter by referring to *"the gospel"* he had preached to the people at Corinth, affirming that its cardinal truths center in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, I Cor. 15:1-4. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and had thus *"become the first fruits of them that slept,"* v. 20, serves as an assurance that we, too, shall be raised from the dead. Moreover, the faithful Christian is assured that he will *"be raised incorruptible,"* that corruption will *"put on incorruption,"* that this *"mortal must put on immortality,"* that *"death is swallowed up in victory,"* and that God gives us *"the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,"* vs. 52,53,54,57.

"My beloved brethren." They were loved by Paul who risked his life taking the gospel to them. Cf. Acts 18:1-12. They were loved by God who *"so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."* John 3:16. They were *"brethren"* in that, through obedience to the gospel, I Cor. 15:1-4, they were *"added to the church,"* Acts 2:47, which is *"the house,"* or family of God, I Tim. 3:15. Having been baptized into Christ, Acts 18:8; Gal. 3:27, they were truly *"brethren"* in the Lord, wherein is *"salvation,"* 2 Tim. 2:10.

"Be ye steadfast." *"Steadfast"* means firm, fixed, not prone to wavering. *"Be ye"* (*ginesthe*, Greek) is a present infinitive, denoting ongoing, continuous action.

"Immovable." As saints, they were in the Lord's army; they were not to allow Satan, or his servants weaken their stand for truth and righteousness.

"Always" means exactly that, always! There is no let up. They must *"keep on keeping on!"*

“Abounding.” This involves going beyond what may be considered “the call of duty.” It is the antithesis of being lethargic and doing “just enough to get by.”

“In the work of the Lord.” This denotes the work which the Lord requires. We must continuously be engaged in the **Lord’s** work, seeking to promote His glory, and to advance His cause and His kingdom. This world is filled with too many spiritual “couch potatoes” who merely profess to be “Christians!”

“Forasmuch as ye know.” You “*know*” this because you know the revealed will of God; you know you have obeyed the truth of the gospel, and you, like Abraham, are “*fully persuaded,*” that what God has promised He is “*able also to perform,*” Rom. 4:21.

“That your labor.” It is true that we cannot earn our salvation, and that were it not for the grace of God none of us could be saved, Titus 2:11-12. However, “*labor*” is involved; God expects us to be busy. Remember the parable of the householder wherein Jesus likened “*the kingdom of heaven...unto a man that is an householder; when went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard,*” Matt. 20:1. Jesus wants us to be workers, not shirkers!

“Is not in vain.” The “*labor*” herein required is not futile, hollow, meaningless, or fruitless. It accomplishes its desired results.

“In the Lord.” “*In the Lord*” describes the spiritual location of the true Christian; he is “*in the Lord,*” and “*in the Lord*” is where God put “*salvation,*” I Tim. 2:10. He is “*in the Lord*” because he, as a penitent believer, confessed his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and was “*baptized into Jesus Christ,*” that he might receive “*the remission of sins,*” Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-37; Gal. 3:27; Acts 2:38, etc. “*In the Lord*” may also denote the authority upon which he acts. Whatever we do, whether it be “*in word or deed,*” must be done “*in the name of,*” or by the authority “*of the Lord Jesus Christ,*” Col. 3:17. Jesus does not give us permission to “*launch out on our own,*” and do what seems good to us. God has “*put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all,*” Eph. 1:22-23. A popular entertainer of bygone years used to say, “*I did it my way,*” but true Christians don’t “*do it*” their way; they do it the Lord’s way!

CONCLUSION

Indeed, properly understood, our “*labor is not in vain in the Lord.*” But what if one is not “*in the Lord?*” What if one acts on his own as it relates to the plan of salvation, the work, and the worship of the church? His labors will prove to have been “*in vain,*” and his eternity will be filled with misery! Remember, “*the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,*” Jer. 10:23. Friend, are you “*in the Lord?*” Are you doing Bible things in Bible ways? Are you truly “*abounding in the work of the Lord?*” Are you really “*standing on the promises of God,*” or are you merely sitting on the premises?
