We Are Labourers Together with God

I would like us to talk about God's plan and about the interaction between God's work and man. What responsibilities fall to us, and what responsibilities fall to God in this plan of salvation He has made for us? Are we on our own, do we make our decisions alone, or does God take part together with us? Let us look, if you will, at what our part is and what God's part is in this work.

Let us open the Word of God to the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8. We will read verses 28 and 29: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."* Amen.

We know that *"all things work together for good"*. All things means all the things that come from God; they work for our good, for our salvation. *"To them who are the called according to his purpose."*

The first thing God does is to call us. This is God's part. He calls us; this is God's work, because He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

This is God's work: to bring us to the stature of the fulness of Christ. This is God's work. And we will see, we will read about God's responsibility and our responsibility. Let us go first to Deuteronomy, chapter 32. Reading from Deuteronomy 32, verse 3 and the first part of verse 4: *"Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect."* Amen.

God's works are perfect. The question we ought to ask ourselves is this: are we, too, the work of God, which is perfect?

He made the universe perfect, He made the angels perfect, but man is also God's greatest work. People have said that we are, in the superlative, the crown of His creation. We will look in the Epistle to the Ephesians at how we are described as His workmanship, which is perfect.

When we define ourselves as weak and incapable of reaching perfection, in a way we deny God, suggesting that He is powerless. His works are perfect, and the idea that His work in us cannot be perfect is a serious error.

In Ephesians 2:10 it is written: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."* Amen. So we are God's workmanship. The question arises: once He begins this good work in us, does He leave us to fend for ourselves, or does He bring His work to completion?

To go deeper into this idea, we will also turn to the Epistle to the Philippians, where the Apostle Paul declares in chapter 1, verse 6: *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."* This underlines Paul's

faith as an unshakable confidence in things hoped for, an unshakable confidence in God's ability to finish the work He has begun in us.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are reminded that the only thing that can separate us from God is an evil heart of unbelief, but that is not God's part. The part that falls to God, He, in His faithfulness, fulfils perfectly.

The Apostle Paul is confident that God, who called us and began this good work in us, will carry it through. The aim of His work is to bring us to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Many today believe that God cannot accomplish this during the life a person lives on earth.

Let us think of a practical illustration: we are little children, five or six years old. Can we, on our own, get through university without the help of schools, teachers and institutions? Can a shepherd's child, for example, who dreams of becoming a doctor, reach that goal without support and guidance? Is it possible for me to start learning on my own, or do I need a teacher? I have to attend a school, and I need resources.

Who was responsible for the education that came before? As a child, when I was born, was I the one who founded the schools, or were there others before me who had prepared everything? It is a blessing to be accepted into the first grade; it is counted as grace, especially when I know nothing, isn't it?

In the same way, we can draw a parallel with our relationship with God. When we come to Him, what are we? Let us suppose we are an empty vessel. We have given up our self in order to be received into His school. *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations"* – what does this command mean? And what is the role of teachers?

Why do we need to be taught? Teachers are called to watch over us and to help us become like Christ. We all have one aim: to make disciples. Is there a school in this process? Yes, we have the school of Christ, where He is our Teacher and Master.

Let us look further at what God does for us. In 1 Peter 5:10 we read: *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."*

In this passage we see that we are not called only to be forgiven and to suffer; we are called to a high stature. After a season of suffering, God promises to make us perfect. Who will do this? He Himself.

Just as a child who starts learning the piano is not perfect from the outset, yet if he learns from Mozart he has every chance of becoming like Mozart, so God begins the work of perfecting in us. He will establish us, strengthen us and settle us. To Him be the glory and the dominion, for all power is His. We must remember that His works are perfect, and what He begins He is able to finish.

Let us learn more about God's power and read on about how He works in our lives. Reflecting on our lives and on the role God plays in them, we may ask what would happen if we were left only to our own strength and ability, without His involvement.

The devil, as a roaring lion, seeks whom he may devour. But if we are under the protection of God's power, can the evil one really devour us? Even if we are sinners, God's power is greater, unless we are wicked and unbelieving. The Lord Jesus assures us that no one can pluck us out of His hand, saying: *"Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* The only exception is an evil heart of unbelief.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 we are told: *"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you."* These words describe God's nature as faithful; He does not forget us and He keeps His promises. Unlike people, who can be unfaithful, God is always faithful and will do what He has promised, keeping our spirit, soul and body.

Reflecting on the proportion between our part and God's part in the biblical texts, we notice that God's part is presented as the greater. As we grow, our part seems to grow larger, yet God's part still remains the predominant one.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful..."* This reminds us that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, and that in His faithfulness He will also provide the way of escape. Our trust is placed in Him, as we paraphrase from Hebrews: *"I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

This complete trust in God assures us that, whatever life's challenges, we are in safe hands. God is actively involved in our lives; He is faithful and does not allow Satan to tempt us beyond our strength. According to Scripture, He *"will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* This assures us that God gives us the means we need to face temptation.

God is always at work in the world and in our lives. We are His creation, and His work is perfect; what He begins, He finishes. If we find ourselves stagnating in our spiritual life, the responsibility is ours, not God's. As it is written in Hebrews 5: *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk."* God has not abandoned us; He has given us the ability to discern good from evil.

In John 5:17 we read: *"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."* Here we see that the Lord Jesus is the One who works alongside the Father. In John chapter 9 we are shown a miracle performed by the Lord Jesus, the healing of a man blind from birth. This miracle, like the others, had a specific purpose: to display the works of God and to serve the plan of salvation for mankind.

Through these miracles the Lord Jesus was received as Teacher, Lord and Saviour. He did works that no one else had done, thereby confirming that He is the Son of God. As He Himself said, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day."* The Lord Jesus, during His time on earth, entrusted us with a mission, telling us *"Go"*. What does this *"go"* mean? It means to walk with our *"feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace"* and to make disciples. In this way He brought us into His work. But before we go deeper into this part, let us return to God's words.

Let us stay with the Gospel of John, chapter 3. I will read from verse 3. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Nicodemus asks: *"How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"* The Lord Jesus answers: *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* Amen. So we must be born again. This is God's work, not ours. Let us reflect on this.

In God's work, He plants the seed and gives us the Holy Spirit. The Word and the Holy Spirit must work together for new life to appear. God's work is perfect. God's Word is perfect, as Scripture says in the Psalms: *"The law of the LORD is perfect… the word of the LORD is tried."* It is perfect. *"My words shall not pass away,"* says the Lord Jesus. *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,"* because it is the seed of God. God's seed is perfect, and we must be born of the Word and of the Spirit. Everything works together for the new birth.

The new birth, too, is God's work, not ours. He called us and gave us this gift. We are here because He called us. Let us turn to Thessalonians, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, to see what happens with the Word of God. We will read only a few passages, because we cannot cover everything; but in order to understand God's responsibility, His part and ours, when we feel powerless and weak, let us look at ourselves, not at God.

He has done absolutely everything needed for us to reach this high stature. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, I read verses 11 to 13: *"As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."* These three verses carry deep messages.

The first verse, which I will look at later, shows us that one of God's works for us human beings is to place us in the care of others who are wiser. The Apostle Paul says he was with every one of them *"as a father doth his children"*.

This is essential for the growth of a newborn baby. How does a child develop? What does a child choose when offered food?

He will prefer sweets, honey and so on. *"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it."* This is a simple method. Through it, God involves us in His work. The Apostle Paul declares: *"We are labourers together with God."* *"That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory."*

Then comes the part that concerns us: when you received the word, our responsibility comes in. If we do not receive the word, if the word is sown in their hearts and they reject it, God has not begun that good work in them.

The word of Scripture tells us in Hebrews 8:10: *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."* God does this when we too are open to receive these laws, when we too enter into covenant with Him, not merely when He proposes it; He does not force us to enter the covenant.

Ezekiel puts it beautifully: *"Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love… yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine."* This statement puts a question before us: when does God begin this good work in us? The answer is: when the time of our love for the Lord has come.

We are told: *"When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."* This refers to our responsibility to keep the word we have received.

The Word of God is compared to a seed that works. We may ask whether the cells in a grain of wheat begin to work when water touches them. The answer is yes, they begin to work. In the same way, when the word is made to germinate by the Holy Spirit, it works in us. The word *"effectually worketh also in you that believe."*

Let us turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 4, to understand more about the word and to be encouraged. God is at work in His field, and we might ask whether He forgets to work today.

In chapter 4, verse 12, we read: *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

The Word of God is living and active, which means it works in us, like a two-edged sword that divides soul from spirit and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. If we allow ourselves to be judged by the word, it will work in us.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Finally, the Holy Spirit is also mentioned, who takes part in the process of perfecting. We need to ask ourselves whether we truly need God's Word, or whether it is just light reading, to fill ourselves with information and to know where Romans 15 is. Does God only want us to know our way around the Bible, or to let the word work in us? God's Word must work in us like a

two-edged sword.

In Revelation, when the Lord Jesus is described, it says that *"out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword"*. This two-edged sword represents the word, and His name is called the Word of God.

The Word of God is essential in this perfect work. It is the seed of God by which we are born, which takes part in our spiritual birth and works in us to the end. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly* urges us to keep the Word in our hearts so that it judges our thoughts and feelings and keeps us from sinning. The Word works in us continually.

Let us turn our attention to the work of the Holy Spirit. In John 14 the Lord Jesus assures us that He will not leave us orphans, that is, He will not leave us alone. An orphan is someone without a father and mother, but we, as spiritual children, have a Father and a mother who care for us. In John 14:15 the Lord Jesus says: *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*

This is a condition for receiving the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus, while He was on earth, kept the Father's commandments and abode in His love. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God (see Acts 5:32: *"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."*). If we love Him and keep His word, He will give us the Holy Spirit.

The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to give us new birth, as the Lord Jesus promised: *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever."*

How long will the Holy Spirit be with us? Today, and tomorrow, and the day after, to the very end. Whether it is Wednesday or Thursday, the Holy Spirit will be present if we *"grieve not the holy Spirit"* and *"quench not the Spirit"*. If we have quenched the Spirit, that is very serious. We carry a great responsibility in this work God is doing with us. He leads us, He upholds us, He carries us, but we too must obey.

We must recognise our own part in this relationship, alongside God's part. *"He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."*

The Holy Spirit has a particular purpose when He is in us. The Word enters into us, and so does the Spirit. The Spirit and the Word work within us, judging the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In verse 26 we read: *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* The Holy Spirit takes an active part; He is not merely an outward presence but an inward one. He teaches us and reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus. This is a significant work of God. He calls us, intercedes for us, keeps us, enters into us and gives us the

Word.

John 16 speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father, the Holy Spirit played an essential role while the Lord Jesus was on earth. He said of the disciples: *"I kept them… And now come I to thee… keep them."* Their keeping is done through the Holy Spirit. In verse seven we read: *"It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."* It is crucial that the Holy Spirit comes, because without Him we can do nothing. Let us think about this. The Lord Jesus declares in John 15: *"Without me ye can do nothing."*

This means that without Him we are not able to accomplish anything. Yet He promises that if He goes away, He will send someone else in His place. In John 16 it is explained that when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, comes, *"he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."* The Holy Spirit will confront us with our sins and show us where we go wrong, as if He were holding up a mirror that reflects our impurities.

To benefit from this guidance, we must receive the Word of God. John 1:12–13 tells us: *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God… which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* To be born of God is a matter of great importance, because God takes care of His children.

As parents we take care of our children, and God, as the supreme Parent, cares for His children even more. In Romans we are reminded to behold the goodness and severity of God. We continue in His goodness as long as we have a heart devoted to Him; an evil heart of unbelief separates us from Him.

In John 16:13 we read: *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."* This verse underlines the importance of the Holy Spirit's guidance. Just as it is essential to have a guide when we do not know the road to a destination, so it is essential to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit in our spiritual life.

He gives us the right direction and helps us avoid mistakes on our way to truth and fulfilment. It is important to understand the role God plays in our lives. The Lord Jesus promised us: *"I will not leave you comfortless"* – He will not leave us alone, as orphans – *"lo, I am with you alway."* This promise gives us comfort and assurance.

Let us go back to the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8, where we find more teaching about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit strengthens our confidence and helps us resist the temptations of the devil, who tries to convince us that we are alone and helpless. When we face our own weaknesses, we may wonder how we could ever reach perfection, seeing how weak we are. But we are not alone in this struggle; we have beside us the One who is perfect and who can work perfection in us.

In Romans 8:26–27 we read: *"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with

groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."* Amen. It is remarkable how the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. This may remind us of the love of a mother who sighs over her child. These groanings are full of love and longing for salvation.

The Holy Spirit not only intercedes for us but, according to Romans 8:1, He dwells in us: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."* The Holy Spirit is present in us, in our mind; He reminds us of the Lord's teachings and urges us not to sin. There is an inner struggle between two opposing forces, but the Holy Spirit guides us if we allow Him to speak to us and to influence our decisions.

There is a force that urges us to live according to the flesh, whispering how pleasant it would be to enjoy a holiday, to let ourselves be led by the flesh. In contrast there is a spiritual prompting, expressed in the verse *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh,"* as the Epistle to the Galatians teaches us in chapter 5. The Holy Spirit opposes the flesh and urges us to avoid evil.

To be prompted means to be encouraged or counselled, just as people counsel one another, asking, *"Is it good to do this? Is it good to go there?"* In the same way, the Holy Spirit prompts us in our minds, within us. It is essential to follow the promptings of the Spirit. If we do not follow them, we are disregarding them. This also carries a great personal responsibility.

According to verse 5 of chapter 8 of the Epistle to the Romans, those who live after the flesh mind the things of the flesh, while those who live after the Spirit mind the things of the Spirit. Following the flesh leads to death, whereas following the Spirit leads to life and peace, because the Holy Spirit is involved in this process.

Let us explore the role of the Holy Spirit further. In 2 Corinthians we see the great work God has begun with us and how deeply He is involved in it, asking of us only obedience, which is really a small contribution. Compared with what He does, very little is asked of us, and yet we are often unwilling to give even this little, preferring God to do everything in our place. *"Lord, You do what I am supposed to do"* is not an attitude God will take up on our behalf.

Let us read *2 Corinthians 3:17–18*: *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* Amen.

The Holy Spirit is actively involved in our transformation, desiring to change us into His image, from glory to glory. It is a work of great importance in which the Holy Spirit shapes us. But it is important to remember that we too must take part in this process.

Let us go back to the epistle of the Apostle Peter to understand the work of the Spirit better, and to explore other aspects of our relationship with God. And then we will come to the part that falls to us. In 1 Peter 1:2, I read the first part: *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit."* What else does the Spirit work in us?

Sanctification. Is sanctification important? *"Be ye holy; for I am holy,"* Scripture tells us, and the Holy Spirit works to that end. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are at work. It is essential that they work. And for how long do they work? Continually. *"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."*

Labourers Together with God

Now let us focus on the part asked of us, His children: to take part in His work. There is God's part, but we too have a responsibility in this work. Let us turn to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 9; I have already mentioned the quotation from Matthew 28, so we will not go back there: *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."*

This is our task. It is the role of those who have already reached a certain spiritual maturity; to make disciples, you must yourself be a disciple. You cannot be a spiritual newborn and set about making disciples. Verses 36 to 38 say: *"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."* Sheep need a shepherd. *"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."*

What is needed in this work of God? Labourers. How shall they go unless they are sent by the One who speaks through the Word of God? *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace!"* How beautiful they truly are! We must go, because it is our responsibility. God calls, but He does it through us.

So in Thessalonians we read about *"the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."* Therefore we must pass on the Word of God, His seed. And here we are told, *"the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."* We will now go to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 to talk about these labourers the Apostle Paul speaks of.

In this work of salvation and of rescuing souls, we are not alone. Besides God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Word, there are also God's labourers, the brothers and sisters in the church who have reached spiritual maturity.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, from verse 5, we find these words: *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"* These verses show us that Paul and Apollos are servants of God, each working with the ability the Lord gave him. It is also said that *"the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."*

Paul explains his role and that of Apollos in spreading the Word: he planted the Word and Apollos watered it, but the increase came from God. This underlines that neither he that plants nor he that waters is anything, but God who gives the increase. Paul goes on: *"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."* This means that the servants are partners in God's work and that each will be

rewarded according to his labour.

Paul uses the image of a field and a building to describe the relationship between God's servants and the believers: *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* Amen.

God's plan includes people taking part as labourers in His divine project. Let us take as an analogy two couples, one without children and the other with six children, to show how life experiences such as raising children can contribute to a person's growth and maturity. The problems and challenges met in raising children can lead to significant personal growth.

In the end, just as a parent grows into the role by caring for the children, Paul and other servants of God grow spiritually by caring for their *"spiritual children"*. This growth is necessary even for an apostle like Paul. Therefore having *"spiritual children"* is essential for the spiritual development of God's servants.

Paul concludes by saying that the servants are fellow workers with God and that the believers are God's field and God's building. Paul undoubtedly took part alongside God in the work of spiritual building, as he himself declares: *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."* This building Paul speaks of is, in his image, God's field, God's building.

He goes on to explain that we, the believers, are the temple of God, asking rhetorically: *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?"* Thus Paul makes it clear that he was building the temple of God, a great and spiritual work. In verses 16 and 17 he reinforces this idea: *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

Although the church was at the beginning of its life of faith, still carnal and worldly, the Spirit of God dwelt in them, even though their discernment was not yet fully developed. Paul warns: *"If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."*

This teaching is repeated in 1 Corinthians 4:14–15, where Paul writes: *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructers in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."* Amen.

Paul calls the believers *"my beloved sons"*, stressing that although they might have many teachers, they have only one spiritual father, himself, who begot them through the gospel. In the context of the saints' growth towards perfection, Paul raises the question of whether labourers are needed, implying that we cannot grow spiritually in isolation but need the community of believers and guidance. He declares: *"We are labourers together with God."* In verse 16 Paul urges: *"Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me."* He also mentions Timothy, whom he calls *"my beloved son"*, showing that Timothy is a spiritual son to him.

Paul had several spiritual *"children"* whom he guided and raised in the faith, among them Titus, Philemon and Onesimus. His relationships with them are evident in the letters he wrote to Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy) and to Titus, where we see a deep bond between spiritual father and child.

Paul's Epistle to Philemon is short to read but full of meaning. When we read it, we may wonder why such a brief letter is included in Scripture and what relevance the figure of Onesimus has for us today. Yet in this letter we can see a deep relationship, like that between a father and child, as Paul describes Onesimus: *"my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds… thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels."* This shows how God's work unites us and makes us fellow workers in His divine plan.

Next, we turn to ourselves, to those who have been born again. It is essential to ask ourselves whether we are actively taking part in our own spiritual growth, or whether we behave like a pupil who does not engage in the learning process. In Ephesians 4:11–13 we are told plainly that God *"gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,"* with the aim that we should come *"in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

This is a call to spiritual maturity, to be *"henceforth no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,"* but to grow in truth and love, with Christ as our supreme model.

Is it a trivial thing to be part of the body of Christ, to contribute to the growth and perfecting of the saints? Of course not. We are not left to fend for ourselves on this journey. Even if we feel weak at first, like a newborn, we must not doubt our ability to grow and reach maturity. Just as a child develops through the care of its parents, we grow spiritually through what God has placed within us.

We can plant and water, but it is God who *"giveth the increase"*. In the end, all we can do is feed on the Word, pray and live according to His teaching, while God works in us to produce spiritual growth.

Yet it is essential that we do our part of the responsibility. Not enough is said about the role of the church or the contribution of the labourers. I urge you to read a verse from Colossians chapter 1, after which we will focus on the personal responsibility that falls to each one of us. We must remember that if we do not take up this responsibility, nothing will happen.

All the works in God's majesty, all the plans God has made for me, will come to a halt if I do not answer His call. Colossians chapter 1, verses 28 and 29. The Apostle Paul says: *"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."* This is what the Apostle Paul does. He, Paul, not only God, is the one at work. *"Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me

mightily."* Amen.

The Apostle Paul is not the only one who worked this way. Did Apollos do the same? Of course. Did the Lord's disciples do likewise? Without a doubt. *"Go and make disciples. Raise them up. Bring them to the stature of a full-grown man."* This is our responsibility, the responsibility of the Church.

Our Work

Now let us turn our attention to individual responsibility, going to Galatians chapter 5, where we will read verse 6: *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* Here is another example of active work.

Let us remember what James says about faith: *"Faith without works is dead."* Even the devils believe. And the apostle James asks: *"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"* Faith worked together with Abraham's works, and by works Abraham's faith was made perfect.

This is our responsibility. Faith must be active. It is not enough simply to have faith, as some say: *"I believe in the Lord Jesus and I am saved. It's by grace, brother, I don't have to do anything. I just come to the meetings and praise the Lord for the work He is doing in me."*

But my faith must be accompanied by action. Let us now turn to 2 Peter. It is our responsibility to strive with all our strength, as it is written in 2 Peter chapter 1, verses 5 to 11, where we find a whole set of important points. *"And beside this, giving all diligence."* Who must do this? All of us, every one of us.

We have already seen God's part: His divine power has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. This is His contribution, as verse 3 says. Therefore it is essential that we give all diligence to add concrete deeds to our faith. Faith must be active, not passive.

Let us take the example of Noah: his faith had to be accompanied by patience and action. If Noah had only heard from God about the flood and believed it, but had not built the ark, what would have happened when the flood came? He would have had nowhere to shelter. Noah could have said he could not build the ark, that he was weak, that he had no experience in shipbuilding. But even though he had never built a ship and knew nothing about it, with God's help he managed to build the ark, which was about 150 metres long. In the same way, even if Peter had never built the image of Christ in himself, with God's help he could begin the work, but he had to strive hard.

We must add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. This is our share of the responsibility in working together with God. The Holy Spirit works in us, and so does the Word of God.

We must be careful to distinguish between the whisper of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the evil spirit, which can counterfeit God's word. Even when we are tempted to misuse Scripture, as the Lord Jesus too was tempted, we have brothers and sisters more mature in the faith who can guide us and bring us back to the right path, according to God's word. Our part is to give all diligence, *for if these things be in you, and abound,* – the things we have just read – *they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Let us make His calling and our election sure. *For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.*

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What greater promise could we want? We do this, and God does His part one hundred per cent. We are the ones with the problem; we don't do things properly; the problem lies with us. When He tells me to do something – let's say, to hammer in nails – instead of hammering in 100 nails, I hammer in only 90. If He says I must hammer in 100, He knows why.

In fact, when we say, "I am weak and I can't," we are condemning ourselves. *"I'm weak. May the Lord have mercy on me, because I'm weak."* I am weak because I don't do it; that is why I am weak. Not because God has no power. God has power.

Let us also go to Psalm 119 and see what it says about our part. Verse 57. We begin with the part that falls to us. *"Thou art my portion, O LORD"* – listen to how it puts it: *"my portion"*. God's part we have already learned. *"Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words."* Amen.

It says of Noah, in Genesis 6: *"Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* Noah finished the ark because he did everything the Lord had commanded him. The Lord was with him to the end. He built the whole vessel, down to every detail. Everything fitted perfectly.

When he had finished, what did God say to him? *"Come thou and all thy house into the ark."* And in seven days the flood would come. *"Come into the ark."* When I finish my part, what will the Lord say? *"It is done. From now on the crown awaits you."*

That is what the Apostle Paul said: *"I have finished my course… Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."* It is a beautiful statement. My part is mine, and God will never do it for me. If Noah had stopped building the ark at 95%, God would not have completed the missing part. The remaining 5% was not God's to do. That was Noah's part.

God was the designer; He supplied the necessary materials – forests, beams, absolutely everything that was needed. He urged him, counselled him, guided him, told him what dimensions the ark should have. But who had to swing the hammer? Noah. Noah had to hire

people; he probably needed more workers. We had to be labourers together with God. We are labourers together with God. Will God finish the work without us? Let me give a simple illustration: say we take a job at the Dacia car plant in Pitesti, Romania.

The Dacia plant has been producing cars for years. When I get hired, the company will go on producing cars. I am given a post where my task is to tighten the wheels. Am I taking part in the process? Yes, I am. What the Dacia plant starts, it finishes. But now I too am part of that process. I am taking part in the company's great work. It is the same with us now. Everything God begins, everything He began with Abraham, He has completed.

Abraham is now with the Father. Moses? Peter saw him on the mountain together with the Lord Jesus. Did God finish His work with them? Yes. And He will finish it with us too – we just need to come into His "factory". If we work together with Him, if we are diligent and not lazy and unfruitful, will He complete the work in us? Yes. The branch that bears fruit – what does God do with it? He purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Amen.

Source: *We Are Labourers Together with God* — Unmodified Word
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