

Mark 14:16; cf. John 12:3-5). With divine intent the Holy Spirit has the church set aside Barnabas and Saul for his work (Acts 13:2), a work that they completed (Acts 4:26). Needful activity includes working to provide material things such as food, clothing, and shelter, which Paul by hard work had supplied to meet his needs and those of his companions (Acts 20:34,35). Later the friends of Paul do good work in providing for Paul's needs (Act 24:23).

First century A. D. disciples fulfilled God's purpose for them as obedient "under-workers" (ὕπηρέται) by proclaiming the Word (Luke 1:2). Paul as a servant (ὕπηρέτης) worked for God to bring Jews and Gentiles to salvation (Acts 26:16-18), a task which John Mark evidently failed in at first (Acts 13:5; 15:38). The disciples are to pray that God will accomplish his purpose by sending forth more spiritual workers (ἐργάται) into his harvest (Matt 9:37,38; Luke 10:2).

In contrast the Lord warns against useless idolatrous work, such as the crafting and worship of the golden calf (Acts 7:41). That work approved of God in the Gospels and Acts is not only to be purposeful but to be persevering and intensive activity. Jesus' spiritual, mental, and physical anguish (ἀγωνία) in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) is an example of this. Also Jesus indicates that, if he wished, he could have his servants put up an intensive struggle (ἀγωνίζομαι)¹⁴ for him to deliver him from the forces of evil (John 18:36). Equally intensive effort is indicated when the Savior states that those whom he is drawing to himself should "make every effort" (ἀγωνίζομαι) to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24), as though the lure of the flesh (cf. Matt 13:22), and the world (1 John 2:15), and the devil (John 8:44) were bending every effort to influence the individual to continue on the broad "road that leads to destruction" (Matt 7: 13). This is the kind of persevering activity exemplified in the widow who persisted in pressing her case (ὕπωπιάζω) before the judge (Luke 18:5).

Work to be thus accomplished is to be done promptly, in God's allotted time, as Jesus said when he indicated that it was his intent to do God's work while "it is day," not at night "when no one can work" (John 9:4). For God's people it may be early or late when he sends them forth to do his work, but the work is to be done (Matt 20:1, 6).

These works enjoined in the Gospels and Acts are not works for salvation. Jesus' statement, "work (ἐργάζομαι)¹⁵ for the food which endures unto eternal life" (John 6:27) in the context means "take in," "assimilate," "partake of" Christ the bread of life from heaven (cf. John 6:52-26). On the other hand, believers in Jesus are to produce works worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20, "prove this repentance by their deeds," NIV).

These works are to be good works pleasing to God. Such were those done by Barnabas, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" through whom "a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24), and by Tabitha (Dorcas) who was full of good works ("who was always doing good"), and the Lord commands such works to be done by God's people generally (Matt 5:16; 6:33; Luke 19:13 πραγματεύομαι; John 14:15).