

## A Theology of Work

### Introduction

Because of sin, work can be either idolized or hated.

How secular work was viewed in the middle ages.

### What the Bible teaches about work

1. Man was created to work, and work is inherently good.

Genesis 2:15 – The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 – and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

2. *Burdensome* work was a result of the fall of man.

Genesis 3:17–19 - And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

-Fighting traffic, printer not working, dealing with guy you don't like named “Ted,” participating in a meeting that could be an email.

-The back-breaking work in Egypt.

3. Christians should be excellent in their work and do it for God.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 – Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might...

Colossians 3:23 – Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

1 Corinthians 10:31 – So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

“In the light of this view of the matter a poor maid should have the joy in her heart of being able to say: Now I am cooking, making the bed, sweeping the house. Who has commanded me to do these things? My master and mistress have. What has given them authority over me? God has. Very well, then it must be true that I am serving not them alone but also God in heaven and that God must be pleased with my service. How could I not possibly be more blessed? Why, my service is equal to cooking for God in heaven!” –Martin Luther

4. Christians should work hard and avoid laziness.

Proverbs 13:4 – The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

Proverbs 21:25 – The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

2 Thessalonians 3:11 – For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

5. Christians should not find their identity in their work but in Christ.

Galatians 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

6. Christians should not cheat or steal when it comes to their work.

Proverbs 20:23 – Unequal weights are an abomination to the Lord, and false scales are not good.

-Are you stealing time from your employer?

7. Christians should not be a financial burden to others but rather serve others with their work.

Ephesians 4:28 - Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

1 Timothy 5:16 - If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

8. You should not overwork or oppress those under your charge.

Colossians 4:1 - Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

James 5:4 - Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Deuteronomy 24:14–15 - “You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. <sup>15</sup> You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin.

Malachi 3:5 - “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

9. You should plan ahead with humility.

James 4:13–16 - Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.<sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”<sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

### **The Protestant work ethic**

- Max Weber wrote a book in 1905 called “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.”
- In that book he argued that the Protestant work ethic was driven by a fear of not being elect. To show that one was elect, one worked as hard as they could to show that they were bearing good fruit.
- While it is true that regions in the Reformation that were Protestant far outperformed Catholic regions, the reason for Protestant work was different than what Weber argued.
- The issue was not a fear of not being elect but a desire to glorify God in all areas of life and a belief that secular work was sacred.

### **All work, even “secular” work, is a form of worship**

-There is no secular/sacred divide.

“No work is menial...Jesus came not as a philosopher or a general but as a carpenter.” –Tim Keller

“There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, ‘spirituals’ and ‘temporals,’ as they call them, except that of office and work...A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.” –Martin Luther

“God gives us this day our daily bread through the vocation of farmers, millers, bakers, and — we would add — the factory workers, truck drivers, grocery store employees, and the hands that prepared our meal. God creates and cares for new life by means of the vocations of mother and father, husband and wife. He protects us by means of police officers, judges, the military, and other Romans 13 vocations of those who ‘bear the sword.’ God brings healing not primarily through miracles but through the vocation of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and the other medical vocations. God teaches through teachers, conveys His Word through preachers, gives the blessings of technology through engineers, and creates beauty through artists. God works through all the people who do things for us, day by day. And He also works through us, in whatever tasks, offices, and relationships He has called us to do.” –Gene Veith

“The idea of a calling or vocation is first and foremost about being called by God, to serve him within his world. Work was thus seen as an activity by which Christians could deepen their faith, leading it on to new qualities of commitment to God. Activity within the world, motivated, informed, and sanctioned by Christian faith, was the supreme means by which the believer could demonstrate his or her commitment and thankfulness to God. *To do anything for God, and to do it well, was the fundamental hallmark of authentic Christian faith.* Diligence and dedication in one’s everyday life are, Calvin thought, a proper response to God.” -Alister McGrath, on John Calvin’s view of work

Doing work for God’s glory doesn’t just mean you are looking for ways to act like a Christian in your workplace. It means when you do any work, even when nobody sees you, that (in and of itself) glorifies God.

### **Other questions about work**

1. Am I working too much? Answer: Are you forsaking something else to which God has called you (time with family, Bible study, etc.)?
2. Is it inherently good to be poor or bad to be rich?
3. Can you work for a company who supports unchristian things if you are a Christian?
4. Can a woman work outside of the home?
  - Single women
  - Married women with children
5. Should I get a new job if mine is really bad?
6. How do I know what job God wants me to have?
7. How do I know if I’m being lazy?
8. Am I working for the glory of God or to build my own kingdom?
9. When not at work am I still working when I should be playing or resting?