

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 50 What Is the Christian View of Work?

*Scripture: Genesis 2:1-2; Proverbs 6:6-11; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Nehemiah 4:6; John 5:17; Romans 12:11; Ephesians 6:5-9; II Thessalonians 3:10-12; Colossians 3:17, 23*

#### INTRODUCTION

Tomorrow is a legal holiday in our land, The Labor Day celebration comes to us largely through the efforts of a man by the name of Peter McGuire. In 1882 he looked on the spirit of work and labor in America as one reason for our becoming a haven for the peoples of the world. He felt there ought to be a day set aside in honor of the working man. At the time Peter McGuire was president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

In 1894 Congress enacted a law designating the first Monday in September as an annual holiday when the working man would be recognized. This action was also taken because there was generally recognized across the country at the time a fantastic work ethic that had remained from the Puritan days. Many times we make fun of the Puritans. We think their dress strange, their demeanor, and their legalistic thinking has a way of offending us. Let us never forget, however, that the Puritans were among the outstanding workers of the past. They did not look upon work as a curse, they saw it as a blessing from God. A man who was regarded as a hard worker was a man who was respected, whether that man was a farmer, whether he was a teacher or a doctor. Regardless of his vocation, that which elevated him in the eyes of his peers was not his particular vocational pursuit, but the intensity, the degree of sincerity and vigor he brought to his work, was the important thing.

We have witnessed an unfortunate phenomena since those days of the Puritans, and even since the days of Mr. McGuire in the late 1800s. We realize that many times the working man has been taken advantage of, but we have seen in our time an evolution of the union principle so that concern for the working man now all but disregards management. The crass unionism which exists today is a key factor having to do with the inflation problem. Now this is not a study in economics or labor unions, it is a study about Jesus Christ. The subject of work falls well within the range of Christian teaching because as followers of Christ we

have to come to grips with the whole concept of work. If we look upon our work as a drag or as something which spoils our lives, something to escape from, we are consigning a very large part of our lives and experience to joylessness and unfulfillment of God's kingdom which is present as well as future. If this whole message of joy and peace is only applicable for certain hours or days and does not apply to 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning when we have to get out of the sack and go to work, then we have a compartmentalized religion or faith. You simply cannot have this if your world view, outlook, and faith is to be significantly meaningful. What we want to do this morning is to understand that God has dignified the work we have to do. There are certain concepts which are Biblical and relate to this Labor Day weekend which is upon us.

**I. WORK IS GOD APPOINTED AND THE HONORABLE DUTY OF EVERYONE:  
Genesis 2:8-15**

The information which the Bible gives us is that the first person who lived in this world became a horticulturist by Divine command. Adam was to *"till and keep it,"* that is the garden in which he was placed. These words in the Hebrew could be readily translated to cultivate and to guard it. This was work. This involved labor. The record is that man in the very beginning was to have dominion over the things around him, and that these things were to be used in such a way as to glorify God and to bring honor to man as he was obedient to the commission. As we look at this chronologically and from the perspective of antiquity, we see that all of this took place before the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world with its dreadful effects. We are able to conclude therefore that work is not the result of sin, work is not the result of man's fallen nature. The pain and perspiration associated with work today are products of sin, but work in and of itself is a God given activity. We might be able to say that work is a way in which God is able to glorify man and place him at the crown of His creation.

I once spoke with a person who had guilt feelings because he enjoyed his work. How ridiculous that is from a Christian standpoint. Somehow his thinking had been influenced by what society says, if you enjoy your work you must be goofing off, and if your work is a grind, then you are doing a good day's work. There is nothing Biblical about that thinking at all. That is the way the world thinks, that is not the way the informed and committed Christian thinks. Work, as it came to man from the Creator, was to have been a pleasant task. That early garden was not to be maintained by automation. Its inhabitant was to be involved in a useful task and he was never-created to be an idler. Work was not a curse, but fell

under the curse because of man's rebellion against God. (Genesis 3::17-19) In both the Old and New Testaments work is seen as God appointed and there is no stigma attached to it. (Psalm 104:23; II Thessalonians 3:8-12; Proverbs 6:6-11; Nehemiah 4:6)

## **II. GOD HAS DIGNIFIED WORK BY HIS OWN PERFORMANCE:**

### **Psalm 8:3-4; John 9:4**

The dignity of work is seen in the performance of a working God. It is interesting to read about the Greeks in pre New Testament times. Their Gods did not work. Their Gods meditated and were given to pleasure, but they were not working Gods. People who became enamored of those Gods tended to be like them, to be thinking people and not to be involved in the work-a-day world. The Greek citizen in contemplating his God spent his time in reflection and pleasure. This in time gave rise to the whole system of slavery where the slave did all of the work.

The God of the Bible, the one true and living God, is a working God. We read in Genesis 2:1-2 that *"God completed the creation of the heavens and the earth and God now rested from the work which He had done."* Imagine the wisdom and intelligence of a God who could call the universe into being out of nothing. You can look at the flowers of the field and take them apart and be amazed at their intricacy. Or you can marvel at the wonders of the human body. It matters little whether you look through a microscope or telescope, or listen through a stethoscope, it is a working God who can be discerned. It is no wonder that the early founders of science were men of God, so that they could look up into the heavens as did Keppler and exclaim, "God, when I think the thoughts of the universe, I am thinking your thoughts after you."

This same God works not only in creation, but in providence and redemption. The God of the Bible is a God who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. He knows about the lilies of the field. He knows about every tear you shed, every smile you have smiled, every laugh, every hurt, every ache you feel is within the bounds of His comprehension. He is active in the daily affairs of our lives, and God dignified work by His own example.

We cannot overlook the example of Jesus. He did not sit around contemplating philosophical problems. Here is the one who was raised in a carpenter's shop and at an early age probably began to hanker around his father's tools as boys still do today. He grew to honor work by His years in that shop in Nazareth. About Him it was said, *"Is not this the carpenter's son?"* We could paraphrase

that question by asking, "Is not this the man who works daily in Joseph's carpenter shop?" I imagine that Jesus saw the joy His father had in making things and this became His joy. The Bible says that *"Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."* A shoddy workman will never have the respect and favor of man. A good workman has no problem in earning that respect. How we respect people who take pride in their work. So it was with Jesus. God indeed dignifies work by His own performance. Spurgeon has well said, "the Savior has a greater respect for work than he has for speculation." (John 9:4) Jesus was born into a working family and He approved of the example given Him by doing a form of manual labor Himself.

### **III. WE ARE TO WORK AS UNTO THE LORD: Colossians 3:17; Ephesians 6:5-8:**

Earlier we used the word "compartmentalize." This has to do with not excluding the Lord from certain areas of our lives. Rather, He is to have a place in our thinking and our conduct wherever we are and in whatever we are doing. This truth is taught in Colossians 3:17. *"And whatsoever we do in word and deed (and this includes our work) do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him."* About the same time Paul wrote words of instruction to believers living in Ephesus. He was a prisoner at Rome, but he was not idle. The Word of God is not bound. Addressing himself to the problem of slavery he writes, *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as into Christ; Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the Servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."* (Ephesians 6:5-8) In this passage Paul seems much more concerned about the quality of work being done, and the relationship which exists between Christ and the servant, then he does about *"masters according to the flesh."* For this reason I believe that there are certain principles which have to do with the way our faith relates to our labor.

#### **1. We Are to Be Sincere in Our Work:**

If a slave in the first century was instructed to be obedient in singleness of heart, how much shall be asked of an employee today? If God forbade secret design at that time in reference to work, surely it is forbidden now. This world ought to be able to take the Christian at face value.

In a certain office where I worked years ago there was a sign which read, "If you work for a man in Heaven's name work for him! If he pays you wages that supply your bread and butter, work for him! Stand by him, and speak well of him. An ounce of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness. If you must vilify, condemn, and eternally tear down, resign your position, and when you are on the outside, condemn to your heart's content. But as long as you are part of an organization, do not condemn it." Paul wrote, "*with good will doing service, as to the Lord.*" Christians are to be sincere.

## 2. We Are to Do What Is Expected of Us:

The Ephesian servants were exhorted to be obedient "*not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*" In other words, If I might paraphrase, "don't work only when your master's eye is on you." Since they were never hid from the gaze of their master in heaven, they were to do what was expected of them even when their earthly master wasn't looking. My, isn't this a lesson for today? I have a friend who is a Christian manufacturer owning a company which employs many people. He commented on one occasion about the people who worked for him. He said, "When I first began in business, I decided that I would try to hire only Christians to work for me. However, I found that Christian secretaries were careless, they were not conscientious, they took time off, they felt they could be late for work and the same condition existed in the shop with Christian workers, and I say very sadly now that I hire more non Christians than Christians because I could not get Christians to do a good day's work." Hearing something like that makes me very sad. What a sorry thing to describe believers in that way. The fact of the matter is that we ought to work harder because we are Christians. We ought to be more conscientious and careful in our work. In terms of honesty and productivity we are to be what is expected of us, whether we are being watched or not.

## 3. We Are to Take Pride in Our Work:

There is one other distinction concerning our work which Paul mentions in these verses. He writes-in verse seven, "*... with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men.*" If we work as unto the Lord, it follows logically that we ought to take pride in our work. This thought comes again in Romans 12:11, "*Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.*" When we feel that we are doing our work as unto the Lord we are caught up

with the conviction that we have a certain calling to our work and that we have been thus qualified in order to honor Him. I realize that there is a difference of opinion among Christians at this point. Some feel that our avocation is not a calling and that the New Testament nowhere refers to secular work as a "divine vocation." The feeling is that God does not call people to be doctors, lawyers, or carpenters. God rather calls doctors, lawyers and carpenters to be witnesses for Him. The secular occupation is incidental to the believer's true vocation. This work is primary and is the furtherance of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 3:6-9; II Corinthians 5:20, 6:1) (Christian Calling And Vocation; Henlee H. Barnette; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan; pp.63) I feel this perspective may rob the workaday world of its vitality and dignity. In Genesis 1:28 man was instructed to have dominion over all creation. Any work which subjugates nature to the will of God and any work that brings nature under the dominion of man and for the service of others, I believe, can be thought of as a divine calling. This was the concept which was lost during the middle ages and rediscovered. The average man had no knowledge that he was called into the service of God in the profession of his choosing. The reemphasis upon the priesthood of all believers reinstated in the working man a sense of divine calling.

#### **IV. THERE ARE CERTAIN KINDS OF WORK WHICH A CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE WARY OF:**

These works do not glorify the Lord nor do they contribute to the wellbeing of others. The early Christians were faced with this problem. There was at the time, work which was associated with idol worship, or the worship of the Emperor, or which related to immorality. (Ernst Troeltsch, **The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches**; Macmillan Co., 1950, Vol.1, pp.123-124)

#### **V. THE KIND OF WORK CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN:**

Through the year various suggestions have been made as to the characteristics which mark the kind of work which **is allowable** for a Christian to engage in. Among these are:

1. work which does a worthwhile job and meets the real needs of others in society;
2. an occupation which enlists the best one has to offer in terms of gifts and skills;

3. work in which human beings are treated as persons and not as things, as thou's. rather than as its;
4. work which requires of the worker integrity, creativity, imagination, love and social usefulness;
5. a job over which one can pray;
6. the criterion of what Karl Barth calls "limitation." The meaning is that man's work is not to become his God, it is not to interfere with a person's relationship to God. (John O. Nelson, **Every Occupation A Christian Calling**; Association Press, N.Y. 1952; **Church Dogmatics**; Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1961, Vol. III, pp551)

**V. WORK IS A GOOD GIFT AND A GRACIOUS PROVISION FOR OUR WELFARE:**

It is interesting to note the clarion call of Communism during embryonic days. It was "Laborers of the world unite! We have nothing to loose but our chains!" The working class was portrayed and seen as being abused by people who had no concern for them. The people responded to this message because they wanted to be liberated from the concept that work was a drag, but it proved to be a false liberation for many. It is beautiful to see work as a delight rather than a drag and the following thoughts, may be helpful in our coming to that place.

**1 Our Work Provides a Way to Keep Our Lives Clean and Pure:**

It was when David was idle that he was tempted and sinned, while he was home and away from the battle against the enemies of God. Honorable toil keeps our minds occupied. The Thessalonian believers were rebuked because they had become busybodies in their idleness. (II Thessalonians 3:11) It is a principle of human nature that those who have no business of heir own gravitate to tending the business of others. Most crimes are committed by those who are idle. Work helps keep our character sound and makes good use of our time.

**2. Work Gives the Day of Rest Its Value and Meaning:**

The person who has a holiday every day is not able to appreciate the Lord's Day. It is the one who toils through the week who is inspired by the thought of the Lord's Day on the horizon. I don't much appreciate the secular acrostic TGIF which stands for the oft repeated expression, "Thank God its Friday."

At least the point is made. Man was made by his creator to enjoy vacations and holidays and the Lord's Day. Such enjoyment is not given to the idler.

**3. Work Provides a Proper Outlet for Human Energies:**

Every person who eats normally and sleeps the proper number of hours and is in good health has certain energy which will be expended in one way or another. Work is a balancing factor in human life and our energies are channeled to construct rather than destructive purposes through honorable toil. Work also brings into our lives the necessary discipline to properly care for our bodies.

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