

# A Biblical Worldview of Work

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## **Work and Who God Is**

Work is not a result of the fall. It is a part of God's created order for humanity (Genesis 2:5, 15), and it is patterned after God Himself (Exodus 20:11; Hebrews 4:3-4; Revelation 15:3).

Jesus accomplished the works of His Father during His earthly sojourn (John 4:34; 5:17; 5:36; 10:32-37; 14:10-13; 17:4).

The Father gives us work to accomplish during our earthly sojourn (Acts 13:2; 1 Corinthians 16:10; Ephesians 2:10).

God has appointed us over the works of His hands (Genesis 1:27-28; Hebrews 2:7).

We are called to please God by bearing fruit in every good work (Colossians 1:10; Hebrews 13:21).

Our work will be tested and rewarded by God (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

We must work for the food which endures to eternal life (John 6:27-29).

## **Work and Who I Am (Heart)**

When work is done in and for the Lord, it benefits others and honors God. It is in creative activity that we externalize our identities as people made in the image of God.

Our identity transcends our work, and if we do not derive our identity from our relationship with the Lord, our work will tend to shape and define us.

True importance is not found in position or prestige, but in the manner in which our work is done and the Audience for whom we do it. Significance is not determined by wisdom, power, or wealth (Jeremiah 9:23-24; Philippians 3:8), but by our relationship with God. Because of this, it is always a mistake to compare ourselves with others.

If we look to our customers and clients rather than the Lord as our source of provision, we will be far more inclined to manipulate and use them than to minister to them.

There should be no secular/spiritual duality regarding work. God has promised that the product of our work will ultimately perish (2 Peter 3:10). It is not the fruit of our labors but the focus of our heart that gives value to our work in the sight of God. Thus, "secular" work becomes spiritual when it is done to please God, and "religious" work becomes secular when it is done to please and impress people.

We are called to do our work as unto the Lord instead of seeking to impress and please people (Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:23-24). Employers should see themselves as accountable to Christ for the way they treat their employees (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1).

### **Work and How I Think (Head)**

The fall affected the character of work in such a way that it became associated more with toil than with joy (Genesis 3:17-19).

Work becomes idolatrous when it becomes an end in itself (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11, 18-23; Luke 12:16-22), and it can become a means of exploitation and oppression (Exodus 1:11-14; 2:23; James 5:4).

Work hard, but do not overwork. The sluggard is reproached in the Old and New Testaments (Proverbs 6:6-11; 12:27; 13:4; 20:4; 21:25-26; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16; Matthew 25:24-30; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12; 1 Timothy 5:8, 13). But when work becomes the source of our significance and security, we swing to the opposite extreme and become consumed by our work. It is God who gives us our ability (Romans 12:6), our intelligence (Daniel 2:21), our wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18), and our promotions (Psalms 75:6-7).

We do not work to provide for our needs. Our culture associates work with the quest for success, significance, provision, esteem, and purpose. By contrast, Scripture teaches us that it is God, not our work, to whom we should look for these things (1 Corinthians 4:7; Philippians 4:19). Believers must come to see that God is their *source* of provision, and their work is *a means* He uses to supply their needs.

We cannot contribute to the work of God (Esther 4:13-14; Psalms 115:3; 127:1-2; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Isaiah 46:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:5), but we can participate in it (John 4:34; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). If we think that we can add to the work of God, our work becomes so inflated in importance that it can overwhelm relational commitments. We take ourselves too seriously when we think God needs what we have to offer. When leaders attempt to build ministry empires by using people to serve their visions, they make the mistakes of trying to measure the ministry and of basing their significance upon their accomplishments.

Working harder does not necessarily lead to greater prosperity. There is certainly a correlation here, but not a fixed causality. In many occupations (e.g., farming, real estate, technology), the ratio of productivity to time invested can vary dramatically. We may suppose that we can out-earn our needs by working harder, but income is only one of several components that can affect our standard of living. If we miss these truths, we will be inclined to sacrifice other priorities (our relationships with God and others) when business is less productive.

## **Work and What I Do (Hands)**

Scripture rebukes idleness and sloth and affirms that work has genuine value (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18).

All honest professions are honorable, and there is dignity in manual as well as mental work, as is evident from the occupations of the characters of the Bible.

When we seek to glorify God in whatever we do (1 Corinthians 10:31), we will pursue excellence in our work, whether others notice or not. (Consider the superb craftsmanship of Bezalel and Oholiab, the men who constructed the tabernacle in the wilderness; Exodus 35-40. Also imagine the quality and workmanship of the wooden articles that Jesus crafted during His years as a carpenter.)

Work embeds us in a natural environment in which we can exhibit kingdom values and hope in a temporal arena. It provides a context in which we can represent Jesus Christ by building relationships; by demonstrating character, conviction, and integrity; and by doing our work with care and quality.

God is not impressed by or dependent upon our abilities or accomplishments. But if we do our work for His sake, it pleases Him in the same way the drawings children make for their parents decorate the refrigerator. These drawings are not valued because they qualify to hang in an art gallery, but because of the parent's relationship with the children who made them.

There should be a rhythm between work and leisure in our lives so that we can enjoy periods of refreshment, renewal, restoration, and relationships. Work and rest are equally legitimate in God's economy, but most of us have a tendency to overvalue work. Leisure can be a mode of worship (Leviticus 16:29-31; Deuteronomy 14:22-26) and an expression of contentment with the will of God in our lives. From a biblical standpoint, rest is not so much the absence of activity as it is the presence of God (Exodus 33:14; Nehemiah 8:10-12; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 6:31; Romans 15:32; Hebrews 3:11-4:11).