

CHAPTER 5: Our Worldviews and Work

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Col. 3:23-24

It would be rare for someone to go all the way through life without working in some way or another. Some work is easier than other work, but whether we are farming our own land, running our own business, putting in set hours at a job paid by someone else, or taking care of a household, most of us are working at some time on something. If not, we probably have worked in the past or want to work now or in the future. We are going to look at “work” now in the light of the different worldviews for how we understand work is vital to our growth as believers and the role that we have in seeing God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

Secular & Animistic Worldviews

Both the secular and animistic worldviews believe that work is a curse. Work is done in order to survive, rather than something done joyfully. In a poorer country, the goal will most likely be to provide food, clothing, shelter and education. In a richer nation, one might be wealthy enough not to worry about basic survival needs so the goal of work may be to work enough to earn an early retirement. Whether the nation is rich or poor, the belief is the same: work is a curse and if one had a choice one would either not work at all, or, at best, find some other work that is more fulfilling, pays more, or is easier to do.

In both worldviews a person’s identity and/or status in society is measured by his/her occupation. Often this also determines a person’s value as well. Thus, some roles are more revered than others. “If only I could be a _____, then I would be more respected.” What occupation belongs in the blank will greatly vary from one culture to another, so fill in the blank with whatever is most appropriate in your society. It might be a politician, successful sports player, pop star or actor. Or it might be the chief, medicine man, pastor or evangelist. In Liberia I met many a self-declared “evangelist.” These young men would put on a badge, preach around town and expect to receive respect and support. Often the only difference between them and the other Christian unemployed young men in town was the “evangelist” badge they wore. Africa is not alone, however, in this attitude; in richer countries young people often refuse to take jobs below their educational level. This is a consequence of relying upon our occupational role to define our value and status.

Biblical Worldview

From the Biblical perspective, work is not a curse; it is a gift! How can that be? What about when Adam and Eve sinned and God cursed the ground and told Adam “through painful toil you will eat of it” (Gen. 3:17)? Sound rather negative? But we need to go further back, before sin: God gave work as a gift to Adam and Eve. Genesis 1:28-30 says that “God *blessed* them” and then told them what they were to

do: be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue the earth and rule over all the creatures—fish, birds, animals. Genesis 2:19-20 tells us that God also brought to Adam all the animals in the world for Adam to name. That sure sounds like work to me! I like to think of the roles listed here as Adam's "job description." All of this was *given* to Adam before sin entered the world. Man was designed to work. It is not something made up as a result of the fall. Of course, work got harder because of sin and like everything else in creation, work was also affected by sin. Remember, He told Noah to have dominion over the earth, to work it and care for it—this was after the fall, after sin entered the world, after the ground was cursed. Surely, God would not tell us to do something that is evil.

Work is a very big subject in the Bible. There are nearly 400 verses with the word "work" in them, and that does not count all the verses that deal with the subject, but use a different word. Let's look at a few verses in Proverbs:

Prov. 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

Someone who is diligent is one who is active and determined in their work, but also decisive and eager. In other words, this is someone who is excited about what they do and wants to make sure they do their absolute best.

Prov. 12:11 He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.

I knew a pastor in Liberia who was also a university professor. During the war, he and his family escaped with only the clothes on their backs. They lost absolutely everything else. He found a temporary place to live and he noticed there was fertile ground near them that was not being tilled, so he asked his neighbors if he could grow some things on their land and borrow their tools to do it. They said, "Sure" and loaned him everything he needed. A year later, this pastor was again driving around town in a decent car, sending his children to school and providing for his family. The neighbors whose land and tools he borrowed were exactly in the same poor place they had been when he started.

Prov. 12:24 Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.

It is those who do their work with diligence that get promoted to better positions. Those who relax in laziness will always work for other people for less profit.

Prov. 13:4 The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

A friend of mine in Liberia needed to support his family. Instead of sitting around talking about it, as most of his friends did, he borrowed enough money to buy a few things to carry around on the street to sell. Soon he was making enough money to provide for his family. Then, based on the record of his diligence, he easily got a loan to pay for him to attend secretarial school. It took about a year of selling on the street and studying the rest of the time, for him to get the education necessary to get a good job to support his family. I'll never forget the day he came to proudly report that he now had a good job

and was able to easily support his family. He was talking about other ways he was going to continue on to better their situation, as well.

Prov. 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

Anyone who has worked with someone who is lazy or just does not care about the result understands this principle. Work that is poorly done is often worse than not done at all and can cause a lot of destruction in a farm, business or office.

Prov. 22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before Kings; he will not serve before obscure men.

We had an honest mechanic who serviced our car in Liberia. He only fixed things that were really broken and often gave us advice on how to manage things more inexpensively. Often I used him as an example of a diligent worker when I taught this subject in Liberia and usually the pastors present were anxious to know who this amazing mechanic was. Eventually, this man went on to become the president's mechanic. He no longer serves before "obscure men" but God blessed him and gave him honor for his integrity in his work.

Maybe you are thinking that I have only used Old Testament verses so this does not apply to us today. If so, check out II Thessalonians 3:6:10:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."**

And if that is not enough, look at what Jesus told us in John 5:17: "My Father is always at his work to this very day and I, too, am working." Philippians 2:13 tells us that "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." I, for one, am glad that God is still at work! Otherwise, why bother to pray? We need to realize that God cannot be under a curse. Therefore, work itself, is not a curse but the means God has given us to affirm our dignity and glorify God.

Secondly, work, itself, is a sacred task; it is important and it matters. From Colossians 3:23-24 we can see that our work is a service to the Lord:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

In God's Kingdom, it is not *what* the particular work is that is important, but rather, *how* we do it. In other words, it is our heart attitude that is important to God as we work, not the type of work we are doing.

A young woman told me her testimony: “When I was a young adult I went to Israel to work on a kibbutz as a volunteer worker. A ‘kibbutz’ is made up of a group of people who live in community together, sharing the work and the fruits of their work. Each kibbutz combines agriculture and some kind of industry. It was this system that enabled Israel to develop very quickly. The kibbutz I worked on grew cotton and had a Styrofoam form factory. All the meals were provided for everyone in a big dining room and served buffet-style with everyone coming through a line to get their food. On this particular kibbutz we changed jobs every week so if something was particularly bad, at least we had the consolation of knowing we would have a different job the next week. One week I finally got assigned the one job all us volunteers hated: working in the dining room to keep the bins of food filled so everyone always had a full choice of food as they went through the line. Believe me, this was not as simple as it seemed. If I was a few seconds late in getting replacement food into the bin, people screamed in my face. If a bin happened to go empty when I didn’t notice, then I was really in trouble. Because of the personalities involved, it was a high stress job. No one liked this job.

“I patiently endured my week of working in the dining room. I worked hard not to get angry (at least on the outside) with all those who were screaming at me. At the end of the week I was feeling pretty good about myself because I had exercised such good self control even in the face of all those others losing their self control. I thought I deserved a pretty good pat on the back. What a good Christian witness I was being. So I went to the bulletin board to see where I would be working the following week. At least I knew it wouldn’t be as bad as this week had been. I found my name on the sheet next to the dining room again. What?! How can this be? No one gets the same job two weeks in a row, even if they had requested it. Immediately, I thought, “God must want me to learn something here. I better work on my inner attitude more.” So I prayed and asked God to help me to have the right attitude. I must say I did much better that week, both outwardly and inwardly. I managed to fill up the bins more cheerfully and quickly so I didn’t get yelled at quite so often, and when they did scream I didn’t get angry or offended inside. At the end of the week I went confidently to the bulletin board, sure that I had learned my lesson now and would be released from the job. I was shocked to again see “dining room” next to my name. Impossible! Again, I went back to the Lord and prayed. This time I realized that an even deeper work needed to be done in my heart. As I submitted to the Lord and realized that I was doing that work for Him, not for the grouchy people around me, something changed inside me. Things went even more smoothly, both inside me and in the work so that by the end of the week I liked the job and hoped to keep it. What changed? It certainly wasn’t the people I was working for and the tasks, themselves, were exactly the same. No, the only thing that changed was my attitude. As I shifted my focus to the Lord, everything else got less important.

“I learned a serious lesson in those three weeks that I have carried throughout my life: It is not *what* we do that matters, but *who* we do it for and *how* we do it. No matter what we are doing, whether it is being a car mechanic, a teacher, a doctor, a farmer or housewife (or all 5!), if our minds and hearts are focused on God as the One we are doing it for, then we are pleasing God. Somehow it also sets us free inside to enjoy those tasks we are doing. Even unpleasant, difficult tasks can glorify God if we are doing it with the right attitude.”

Going back to before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve were created to work. We have been created in God’s image and He is at work to this very day. Work was meant to be something that gives us fulfillment. Furthermore, we need people to work in every area of life. Remember that in Figure 3 (Chapter 3), we saw that physical, biological, economic, political, social and cultural areas of life are interconnected. We will not eat if we do not have farmers or fishermen; we will have no homes without builders; we will have no way to communicate with people around the world without postal systems and telephones. All of these jobs are important and can bring fulfillment to a person who knows for Whom he or she is working. I believe that as a part of our role in filling, ruling and subduing the earth, God intended us to create those systems we need to run our societies and He meant for us to do those things to His glory bringing us a sense of pleasure and satisfaction well done. Sin has clouded the issue and made work difficult, but it has not robbed us totally of what God intended work to be. He has given us back the key: whatever we do, if we do it diligently to our best ability and for God, rather than for man, then we will find contentment and purpose in our work.