

Biblical Principles and Purposes of Work

Goals:

- To help you understand the basic biblical principles and purposes of work.
- To introduce you to the concept of vocational calling and to encourage you to discover and develop those callings in service to God, in the cultivation of civilization, and to the benefit of humanity.
- To challenge you to serve Jesus Christ with excellence in the sphere of your chosen vocation.

I. Biblical Principles of Work

A. Work is a God-ordained activity, an ordinance of creation

1. God is a worker

a. In creation (Gen. 1-2)

b. In sustaining creation (Psalm 104; Col. 1: 16-17)

c. In the work of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*; e.g., Deut. 11: 1-7, etc.)

2. God created human beings, His image and likeness, as workers (Gen. 1: 26-28; Exodus 20: 9-11)

Work should ... be thought of as a creative activity, undertaken for the love of the work itself; and ... man, made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing.... Work is the natural exercise and function of man--the creature who is made in the image of his Creator. — D. Sayers, "Why Work?"

Work is regarded as a necessary and indeed God-appointed function of human life. Since to labor is the common lot of mankind, it is important that men should accept it without complaining and thus fulfill with cheerful obedience the intention of the Creator for human existence.... The basic assumption of the biblical viewpoint is that work is a divine ordinance for the life of man. As such it falls within the sphere of ... natural law.

— Alan Richardson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*.

This is the reason man should work today — not merely to make a living, not to gain luxuries, nor to succeed in the eyes of the world — but

because it is God's plan for man to subjugate the earth.... Such an interpretation of daily work enables us to realize that our contribution, however small it may appear, fits into God's pattern for developing the world. All honorable work, no matter how insignificant before men, offers some opportunity to subdue the earth to God's will.

— Wade Boggs, *All Ye Who Labor*.

3. God created human beings, His image and likeness, to be His co-workers

a. Genesis 2: 8, 15 (Man— the prophet, priest and king of creation)

As **prophet**, man was to receive the Word of God and by it to interpret and explain the creation in which he found himself. Through our work, we explore the creation and develop it. By God's word we understand aright, truthfully what we have explored and developed.

As **priest**, man was to receive his life and the creation as a gift from God, to enjoy it, and then to offer it back up to God as an offering. This includes our work which should be viewed as a priestly offering and service to God. Giving oneself and one's life and one's work to God, man fulfilled the function of priest.

As **king**, man was to rule and subdue the earth under his feet. This is no more better spelled out for us than in Psalm 8

b. Ecclesiastes 5: 18-19

c. Psalm 8

B. As a result of the fall, work has been cursed (Gen. 3)

1. Work is not a result of the fall

2. The results of sin on work

a. Futility (Nihilism; Gen. 3: 14-21; Eccl 2)

b. Idolatry (Careerism; Psalm 115: 4-7)

c. Laziness (Sluggardism; Prov. 6: 6-11)

C. Work has been redeemed from the curse by Jesus Christ

1. "Already" (Col. 3: 22-4: 1; Eph. 6: 5-9)

a. The positive results of redemption on our work

- 1.) New relationships
- 2.) New attitudes and experiences
- 3.) New purposes (see below)

b. The consequences of sin—sorrow and toil—have not yet been totally eliminated from our experience of work

2. "Not Yet" (Rom. 8: 18-25)

II. The Biblical Purposes of Work

- A. Through work we serve God and humankind by developing culture and civilization for His glory and our good.
- B. Through work we become authentic, creative human beings
- C. Through work we provide for our own needs (2 Thess. 3: 6-12)
- D. Through work we provide for the needs of our family (1 Tim. 5: 8)
- E. Through work we earn money to give to the Church and to those in need (1 Cor. 16: 2; Ps. 37: 25-26; Eph. 4: 28)

Conclusion: