

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORK

1Thessalonians 4:11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

During the conference in Stockholm last year, I touched on the topic of the Christian and work. The fact is that we all spend most of our working hours, for much of our adult lives, working. Hence, surely, the Bible has something to say about this all-pervasive and encompassing aspect of our lives. Indeed, the Bible has much to say about the subject because the Lord Jesus Christ is also Lord of our jobs. God gave us our first jobs, regulated the number of days we should work and even adopted the trade of a carpenter for perhaps 20 years of his earthly life. The scripture above tells us that the Lord gave commandments about the Christian and work to the apostles. This would mean that the command to work is also an apostolic command, not just Acts 2:38. Let us unpack these and other scriptures that govern the working lives of Christians.

Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

It was not uncommon for boys to start working from the age of 10 in the days of the Lord. Our Lord came to save and seek that which was lost, and yet he spent about 20 years working with something that appeared altogether different from his main mission in life. However, this proves that God ordained and blessed work through his own example. As God, he knew that one day he would be crucified on a beam of wood. Our jobs may be intricately linked to God's plan for our lives. We can be sure that for 20 long years the Lord did his work diligently. The maker of the universe now made chairs and tables for customers – I like to think that the Lord's customers were very satisfied with his workmanship. I believe he charged a very fair price and took every complaint seriously. Here is a lesson for us: the Lord woke up every day at a certain time to start work – every morning when we go to work, we can take comfort from the fact that we are doing what our Lord Jesus did. When the days are long and hard, we should also take heart from the fact that the Lord worked long hours and was patient. Whatever call God may have on our lives, we first must submit patiently to whatever employment we are called upon to perform. Today carpentry, tomorrow preaching the Gospel, is the lesson from the Lord's life.

Gen 2:15 *And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

The word for “dress” is “work”. Paradise was not complete without some work for Adam and Eve. How long does it take to accomplish the task of dressing and keeping the Garden of Eden? The answer is forever! Here we ought to grasp an important truth: God could have made the creation so perfect that it didn’t need any dressing or keeping, but God invited humans to play a role; God purposely gave us a role which would give us a sense of purpose and fulfilment. How gracious is the Lord God Almighty! This demonstrates once again that work was an integral part of God’s creation. It pleased the Almighty to give Adam and Eve the task of working in the Garden, hence work is a vital component of the creation of God. In fact, it was when Adam and Eve communicated with the Devil and stopped working the Garden that they fell into trouble. This is one reason perhaps that the apostle Paul was concerned with those who did not work in the church of Thessalonica.

2Thess 3:10 *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

2Thess 3:11 *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

2Thess 3:12 *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

Why should we work? Why spend so many hours of our lives doing something which does not appear to be connected with God on the surface? In the beginning, Adam and Eve worked because, as was noted previously, God wanted to give them a sense of usefulness and accomplishment. Karl Marx famously noted that the industrial revolution alienated the worker from his or her occupation. The ironsmith who took pride in his skill and oversaw the entire production of an item was now reduced to playing a tiny role in a mechanized system. He was alienated from his work in the factory – humans were reduced to being pawns in the hands of owners who abused their labor and replaced them when convenient. Adam and Eve were both owners and laborers; they found fulfilment in their work. However, today, there is another reason we work – because almost all labor is for the benefit of our neighbors. Next time you purchase something at your local grocery store, please consider where a fruit or vegetable is produced. Spend some time appreciating the intense labor that has gone into the product. We live in a global world where what is made in China or the USA is picked, shipped and transported within a day or two to Europe or South America. Our modern societies are a testament to the power and dedication of working individuals across the world. So we work because work is part of fulfilling the great command, “And the second is like, namely this,

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:31).

Work also instils discipline. Consider the giants of the Bible – all of them were people with a good work ethic. Abraham was a chieftain, cattle herder and prophet; Joseph and administrator in Egypt; Moses was a shepherd and so was David before the first became a prophet and the second a king; Elisha was a farmer; Daniel an administrator; Amos was a gatherer of sycamore fruit; the apostles were fishermen, tax-collectors and Paul a rabbi. In fact, the Lord caught the attention of the apostles through their jobs. For instance, he demonstrated his divinity in demonstrating his supremacy over the fish, for example. Believe that Jesus is Lord over your job also. In the Old Testament, Moses was just doing his job following the sheep when he saw the burning bush – you could say his job led him to God. God respects the labor we do in that he chose nearly all his ministers while at their jobs. Work induces discipline, patience and character – all virtues that are essential to the work of salvation, which we turn to next.

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

Notice the Lord said, “and I work”. This is in the present tense and implies an ongoing work. The Lord is still working. The greatest work is the work of salvation and God is looking for hard workers to send into the field. “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (I Thessalonians 2:9). We see how the apostle Paul worked extremely hard to persecute the church before the Lord called him. He, too, was very diligent and hard working in his former job. The Lord knew that Paul would work even harder for the Gospel. May God n\make us the best workers in this world so we will work even harder for his Gospel! The Bible also has several examples of lazy and slothful people that are reprimanded. “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets” (Proverbs 22:13). Indeed, the Bible has several warning for the slothful, and the verses below are apt. Being poor is not wrong, but being poor on account of laziness is wrong.

Proverbs 6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:

Proverbs 6:7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,

Proverbs 6:8 Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

Proverbs 6:9 How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

Proverbs 6:10 Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:

Proverbs 6:11 So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.