

God's Perspective on Work

People are created to work, to enjoy work and to glorify God in their work

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31 NIV) *God was satisfied by His work of creation.*

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28 ESV) *God gave humans dominion (rule, control) over the earth and its creatures. They are to care for the earth and its creatures, and develop its resources, as God's stewards, because the earth still belongs to the Lord*—Exodus 19:5 "...for all the earth is mine" "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it..." (Psalm 24:1 NIV)

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2:8 ESV) ¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15 ESV) *In the perfect world of Eden, there was work to do, and the world was still perfect.*

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19 ESV) *Sin corrupted all aspects of life, including work, which became much more difficult.*

Then the LORD said to Moses, ² "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts-- ⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ⁵ to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. ⁶ Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you: (Exodus 31:1-6 NIV) *God can give not only "spiritual" gifts, but practical abilities by which to earn a living and to enjoy what we create.*

²² So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him? (Ecclesiastes 3:22 ESV)—*God does want us to rejoice in the work of our hands. Solomon spoke of life "under the sun," as if there was nothing more, but then added that God would judge the life we've lived (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).*

Manual work has integrity and transparency

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28 ESV)

God instructs us how to work

But we urge you, brothers, to do this [love one another] more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. (1Thessalonians 4:10-12 ESV)

²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24 ESV) *When we work consciously for God, not primarily for people, we are better able to deal with the imperfections of employers, because ultimately it isn't about them. It's about pleasing God.*

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (2Thessalonians 3:6-12 ESV)

We are to avoid getting high: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18 NIV). The Spirit in us produces a better "high". "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25 NIV).

The husband/father/male must provide for his wife, children and widowed mother or grandmother

God's provision for Israel was like a husband's provision for his wife, illustrated during her unfaithfulness. See Hosea 2:2-8.

God not only provided, but provided abundantly for his "wife" Israel, who became beautiful under His love. See Ezekiel 16:8-13.

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, **he** [the male--masculine in the Greek] has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1Timothy 5:8 ESV) *The Bible simply assumes that the man/husband/father provides for his family. If we don't provide for our family, God considers us to be less than those outside His family.*

³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ⁵ The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. (1Timothy 5:3-6 NIV)

God has clear expectations of both employers and employees

⁵ Slaves [employees], obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ⁹ And masters [employers], treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:5-9 NIV) *Slavery in New Testament times was unlike slavery in America in important ways. A person could have professional status, be respected and be highly skilled. It was not necessarily dehumanizing or designed to create dependency upon the master. It was sometimes the result of too many debts—personal or family. It could even be voluntary in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:5-6; Deuteronomy 15:16-17). Also in the Old Testament, a Hebrew slave of Hebrews was to be released after six years (Exodus 21:2), and slaves had rights (for example, Exodus 21:7-11). This is not to justify*

slavery, but it existed. The apostle Paul encouraged slaves to become free, if possible (1 Corinthians 7:21). The apostle Paul tried to transform the master/slave relationship, where both were Christians into a brother/brother relationship in the New Testament book of Philemon. More important was comprehensive freedom--³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36 NIV).

²² Slaves [employees], obey your earthly masters [employers] in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. (Colossians 3:22-1 NIV) Colossians 4:1 Masters [employers], provide your slaves [employees] with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. (Colossians 4:1 NIV) *A Christian's ultimate "boss" is God, and if God is pleased, that is what ultimately matters, whether or not our human boss is pleased. Please God, and generally the boss will be pleased, but not always. We can endure much realizing that it is our Lord Jesus Christ that we serve, and He loves us.*

ESV 1 Timothy 6:1 Let all who are under a yoke as slaves [employees] regard their own masters [employers] as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. ² Those who have believing masters [employers] must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. (1 Timothy 6:1-2 ESV) *Employers are not "masters," but this is a close parallel. The employer directs what we do, how to do it, and when to do it. We must not take advantage of Christian employers, knowing that they should not be as harsh with us as non-Christian employers. Instead, we are to treat them better than non-Christian, because we are brothers in the Lord.*

⁹ Slaves [employees] are to be submissive to their own masters [employers] in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. (Titus 2:9-10 ESV) *Christian employees who are genuinely Christian are more desirable than non-Christian workers, due to their respectful attitude and because the property of others is safe in their presence. Our work should make God look even better to onlookers. Christian employees are preferred by some in China, for example <http://www.colsoncenter.org/the-center/columns/colson-files/16390-good-for-business> See also *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, by Rodney Stark--ISBN-13: 978-0812972337.*

God can bless our work and give success, especially when we meditate upon the Bible

¹⁹ When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Deuteronomy 24:19 NIV) *When we look out for those more needy than we are, God may look out for us.*

⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8 NIV)

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (Psalm 1:1-3 NIV)

⁵ He [King Uzziah] sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success. (2Chronicles 26:5 NIV)

Work is not an end in itself, but is also a way to glorify God and to help others

We are to work to bring glory to God. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1Corinthians 10:31 NIV). We are to seek first God and his kingdom --"But seek first his

kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33 NIV). If we don’t, we will not prosper in the most important ways, and money can actually become a means to feed sinful behavior, hindering our relationship with God. Work can also keep us from fellowship with other believers, or become a god, so that we have no time even to enjoy money earned.

Balance between laziness and work is necessary: “⁵ The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. ⁶ One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind. ⁷ Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. ⁸ There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never asked*, “And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?” This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. (Ecclesiastes 4:5-8, New American Standard Version)

Here the importance of seeking God first is illustrated: “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 2:26 NIV)

Work allows us to help others (see Ephesians 4:28 above). “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:33-35 NIV)

Our work should and will be tested

¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--

¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1Corinthians 3:11-15 ESV)

² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load. (Galatians 6:2-5 ESV)

ESV=English Standard Version of the Bible, NIV=New International Version of the Bible

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