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## **A Biblical Theology of Work**

### **Ephesians 6:5-9**

**PowerPoint Presentation: None**

**Keywords: Employment, Labor, Work, Servants, Masters, Work Ethic**

**SermonAudio blurb: none**

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Read passage.
- B. We transition today from two key relationships, marriage and family, to another huge part of our existence. It is that of work.
- C. Next week I plan to take us through this passage in detail but today I want to do what I have done with the other sections we have encountered in Ephesians, create a basic theology.
- D. Why a theology of work?
  1. Everything we do is a result of our theology whether we are conscious of it or not.
  2. Work is a major part of our lives and through it all of the other connections in our life are affected in some way.
  3. Because for many there is no clear theology of work and it results in many decisions that end up hindering your reputation and witness to those who don't know Christ and to your relationship with other believers.
  4. Because work is part of the life God has ordained for us in this age and therefore it is part of the drama in which we take part. A drama where God proclaims his victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ and it is proclaimed in and by His Church.
    - a. This war is one that is played out every moment of every day.
    - b. This goes all the way back to the beginning, when sin entered into this creation. God said to Satan, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Gen. 3:15)
    - c. The battle line is drawn between what is good and what is evil.

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- (1) This begins in our own hearts and desires as we resist the temptations to give into this age and rather count ourselves blessed to honor Christ's name.
  - (2) It is in our marriages as husbands and wives determine that they shall not allow the values of this age be their guide. They will take up their holy calling to live out their respective roles.
  - (3) It is in our families as parents raised up their children to know and to love God and the children are raised to reject this age and its values.
  - (4) It is found in our relationships in society where we are called to stand for that which is holy, righteous and just. We are to be a beacon of integrity even though this age sees it as weakness and folly.
  - (5) It is found in our work places, whether it be a small plot of land in which we toil or a massive corporation with mazes of cubicles. Be it in the office of the CEO or a laundry room filled with discarded clothes of your family. God calls us to stand and fight with the true weapons of righteousness.
5. All of this is to say that in every part of our daily existence we are in a battle. At times it is obvious but most of the time it is subtle.
  6. Too often it is because we have given up ground to the enemy in how we live out our testimony and faith. And work is one of those areas that we too often fail to properly understand.
- E. So for the next couple of weeks I will give us a basic theology of work that I hope will create good discussion and hopefully a bit of repentance for us all.

## **II. A Theology of Work.**

- A. How do you view work? Honestly?
1. For some it is a necessary evil.
  2. Many Christians think that it is part of the fall, the reality of sin in our world and lives.
  3. For many others it is merely a means to an end. You work so you can eat and have fun. If you do it well you can retire, which means in too many minds the absence of work.

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- B. God created work (Genesis 2:15).
1. This resolves on major misconception about work, that it is a result of sin.
  2. But Genesis 2:15 and 18 makes it clear that God placed Adam in the Garden to "cultivate and keep it" and then created Eve as his helper in the task (Gen 2:18).
    - a. Notice how they are placed in the garden keep it and cultivate it.
    - b. This is important because it helps define what work is to be in its most basic level. It is a care and a development of what they have.
    - c. They were to see themselves as stewards of what God has given them. It did not exist to be exploited but to be cared for.
    - d. But also it was not to remain as it was. It was to be developed and cultivated. It was designed to be worked in such a way as to create more and more of it until the whole earth was this living paradise.
  3. This call to work is seen also in Genesis 1:28 and is part of the cultural mandate that is part of being human.
  4. But this is even not sufficient. We need to note Genesis 1:1 where we see that God Himself is working. And then, for these next two chapters God is creating and commanding.
    - a. Work is something God does.
    - b. And because God works it is intrinsically "holy."
  5. So work is part of who God has made us to be; it is part of the original created order that God designated as "very good."
  6. And work is one of the major ways we reflect the fact that we are image-bearers of our Creator.
  7. Luther's good words on this subject,

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the "spiritual estate"; princes, lords, artisans and farmers the "temporal estate." That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. . . . All Christians are truly of the "spiritual estate," and there is among them no difference at all but that of office. . . . To make it still clearer. If a little group of pious Christian laymen were taken captive and set down in a wilderness, and had among them no priest consecrated by a bishop, and if there in the wilderness they were to agree in choosing one of themselves, married or unmarried, and were to charge him with the office of baptizing, saying mass, absolving and preaching, such a man would be as truly a priest as though all bishops and

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popes had consecrated him. . . . There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, “spirituals” and “temporals,” as they call them, except that of office and work. . . . A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and everyone by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.  
(<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-03.html>)

C. Sin messed work up (Genesis 3:17-19).

1. Another thing that stands out is that the man and woman are not specifically cursed.
  - a. The serpent is.
  - b. And the ground is.
  - c. When you consider what is occurring with Adam and Eve, what you find is a disruption within their roles as man and woman. Things have changed for them.
2. The woman.
  - a. With these judgments we find a glimpse into the mind of God.
  - b. He has chosen them in such a way that women really can't escape them. For all time these judgments are found to be true and they bring to memory (for the thoughtful at least) the judgment of God.
  - c. We see a justness in what God does here. Notice verse 6 (good, delight, and desirable).
    - (1) The woman sought to gain sweet delights in the forbidden fruit. She had be deceived into thinking that it would be good.
    - (2) Now, she discovers that the reality is that there is nothing but sorrow and pain.
  - d. What once was to be a thing of joy, now is pain. Child-bearing now carries the judgment of pain. There is misery involved.
    - (1) From the first morning sickness to the pain of the actual birth. All of this is to serve as a reminder.
    - (2) Children are still a blessing, but the judgment takes some of that joy away for a time.

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- e. Her desire shall be for her husband.
  - (1) Gen 4:7.
  - (2) The reality is that now there is fighting within the home.
    - (a) The wife seeks her way. She seeks to manipulate and control.
    - (b) And the husband is now made to fight back.
    - (c) When you see the conflict within the home, it is again the reminder of God's judgment.
    - (d) When a wife is sullen and irritated that she didn't get her way, she is experiencing the judgment of the woman.
  
- 3. The man.
  - a. Here we see God place a curse upon the ground.
  - b. There will be insubordination in his labors. The ground will not cooperate, rather, it will resist.
  - c. You see, it is not acceptable that sinful man dwell in a perfect world. That is not right. There must be consequences (a note to parents).
  - d. We see at the end of the chapter that they are even driven out of the garden. The one place they had known since their creation was now not open to them.
  - e. If they wanted to eat, they no longer could just go to the trees and pick the fruit.
    - (1) Now bugs and disease would be involved.
    - (2) Now weeds would thrive.
    - (3) If they wanted to eat, the man had to labor and labor hard.
    - (4) What is interesting to me, and something for you to think about, is the rise of women in the workforce. These curses seem to show the roles designed for them. One of the things I note is that when women enter the workforce, they double the judgments upon themselves.

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4. If you think about it, much of man's efforts is related to making this curse less burdensome.
- D. Work is to be a means to honor God and advance His kingdom rather than to define us.
  1. Genesis 4.
    - a. Note that Abel and Cain have jobs.
      - (1) Cain was likely seen by Eve as that "seed" based on her comment in 4:1.
      - (2) Abel's name is interesting because it is *hevel*.
    - b. But what stands out is how they then offered worship to God out of their labors (4:3-6).
      - (1) Important to note what God accepted and rejected. Notice it was not merely the offering, it was the person.
      - (2) One man came to God properly in worship and one did not. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abel come in faith while Cain did not.
      - (3) Cain may have thought his sacrifice was something special but his heart canceled that out.
      - (4) This subtle arrogance infects our work and labors even today. We think we are doing something far more important than another. We think our offerings are greater because they are bigger.
      - (5) But we fail to see that God is not the focus of our labors. His name is not what we desire to promote.
    - c. Bitterness and hate of both God and man resulted in murder (8) and this brought both a loss of blessing in his labor (12).
    - d. We can learn that man, because he still carries the image of God can accomplish much even with out God.
      - (1) Note that the development of ranching (20), music (21), and even metallurgy (22) came out of Cain's offspring.
      - (2) But it was without God. It is no different than now. Music for music's sake. Business for money's sake. Industries,

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research, inventions, all fine in their own right, but of no value without God.

- (3) We even see it in Lamech.
    - (a) In verse 19 he takes two wives, Adah (pleasure, ornament, or beauty) and Zillah (shade, indicating rest and relaxation perhaps). Zillah's daughter was name Naamah (loveliness).
    - (b) It seems that Lamech was a man who typified the culture of Cain. It was a culture pursuing comfort and physical pleasures.
    - (c) It appears that they were not about the work of pursuing the Lord, growing in the fear of the Lord, putting on the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. They had the outer expression of beauty and that is what they exalted.
  - (4) And Cain taught his children well, and when we look at the one God brings out for us, I believe we see again the mind set of this age we live in.
    - (a) Lamech expresses arrogance and pride.
    - (b) In verse 23 we have him crafting a song.
    - (c) What he is doing is boasting of his violence in killing a man who merely wounded him.
    - (d) But the point that is so striking about the message of the song is that he is better able to take care of himself than God was able to take care of Cain. He doesn't look to God, he looks only to himself and his ability.
    - (e) This is the glorification of revenge.
    - (f) For Lamech, personal protection and glorification was all there was to life. His was a life that said, "Take care of number one."
2. 4:25-26 speaks of a change.
- a. There is a play on words here where Seth is seen as the substitute for Abel.

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- b. They had thought that salvation would come through Cain, but they were wrong. He was of the seed of Satan. But now the one killed was graciously replaced and she named him in such a way as to remind her constantly of that fact.
- c. Enosh.
  - (1) “to be weak, sick, frail” the basic emphasis would be on man's weakness or mortality.
  - (2) This word is used throughout the OT not as a proper name but as a descriptive one reminding mankind of its transience, its lowly position in contrast to the greatness of God.
  - (3) In fact, the Messiah is described as being like the son of man (‘šnôsh Dan 7:13) a term which describes his close relationship to the human race. That he truly would be one who took on our weaknesses and frailties.
  - (4) Seth was of a different stripe than Lamech.
    - (a) Lamech loved his own power. He trusted in himself. He would not fear, he would destroy.
    - (b) Seth, however, looks at this son and he gives him a name to be a constant reminder of humanities need for God. We are frail. We are fallen. We are but dust.
    - (c) And do not see this as a pessimistic thought. It is a biblical one. It is one that is the simple, unvarnished truth. We are frail and weak.
    - (d) But notice in connection to the naming of his son as Enosh, what happened?
    - (e) “then....” Out of that reality came worship. They began to call out to the Lord.
  - (5) So you see one line building stuff and another line calling out to God in worship.
- 3. However, all of this falls apart quickly so that by Genesis 6 worldwide judgment is upon mankind. And out of all of humanity only Noah and his family is spared.
- 4. Fast forward to chapter 11.

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- a. Even after a worldwide flood the hearts of man are unchanged. Sin is still the dominant force.
  - b. Vss 1-4 describe humanity as seeking to establish and build. This is all quite good. But note also what was driving it in vs 4. Their ultimate purpose in their labors and building was themselves and their legacy.
5. I want you to grasp this for it is important. In the garden before sin it was all about the glory of God, but through sin it becomes twisted and it becomes all about making our own name.
6. Israel was called by God to be a witness of what it looked like to live for the glory of God. “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5).
7. Paul makes this abundantly clear:
- a. 1 Corinthians 10:31 when he commands us, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
  - b. Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.”
  - c. 1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12, “But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
  - d. 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”
- E. Christ models for us what it looks like to work.
1. John 1:29.
  2. John 5:5:19-21.
  3. John 6:38-40.
  4. John 17:4
  5. John 19:30 at His death he utters the words, “It is finished.”
- F. We are called by God to work in a manner that is consistent with our calling. This we will consider next week.

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- G. Finally, all of creation is eagerly awaiting the end when sin and death and Satan are destroyed.
  - 1. Romans 8:19-22.
  - 2. This is seen in Revelation 20:10, 14; 22:1-3.
  - 3. There is no reason to see work ending in eternity. Rather what we should expect is that work, like everything else, will finally be restored back to its glorious original purpose.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. My goal in this short series is to get each of us to see that our places of vocation are really missional outposts for the sake of the gospel and the fame of God.
- B. How you view your work is going to be reflected outward to those around you watching you.

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### ***Community Group Questions***

- 1. What are the temptations you face in your workplace to conform yourself to the values and purposes of this age? How are you resisting these? (Be careful here to not give patent answers with little thought. These questions are far more subtle if you give it careful thought.)
- 2. If Jesus joined you each week and worked alongside you in your activities/work would that make any difference to the way you do your daily work? What sort of difference?
- 3. Here is a little exercise for your group to do:
  - a. Read through the first two chapters of Genesis, highlighting all the verbs (“doing” words) that describe activities engaged in by God. Make a list of them. Describe the range of God’s work.
  - b. Now read through the first two chapters of Genesis again, highlighting all words that talk about human work. How are these tasks related to God’s work? What similarities or connections can you see between these tasks and the work you do?
  - c. Look back over the list of work you made. How might you see any of the activities engaged in by God, reflected in your work?