

The Christian and Work

There are 168 hours in every week, most work between 8-10 hours a day, for 5 days a week, spend up to an hour travelling to work and sleep for nearly 8 hours each night. So most of us will spend at least 50% of our waking life engaged in work. And yet so often we fail to spend time thinking about what the bible says about the world of work.

Starter questions:

- What are some of the joys and blessings of work?
- What are some of the challenges and difficulties of work?

What's the point of work?

Read Genesis 1:26-31

What do these vs teach us about God?

- God is a worker - He is busy in the great work of creation - and having created, God doesn't sit back and do nothing - He is still at work upholding and sustaining the world He has made. Jesus says, 'My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working.' John 5:17
- God takes delight in His work, He looks at what He has done and says, 'it is good'.
- Jesus himself worked - manual work in Nazareth

What do these vs teach us about humanity?

- Not only is God a worker, but He made humanity to share His work 1:27-28 and 2:15. We are made in the image of God, and one of the things this means is ruling over creation as God's stewards.
- As humans we were not made to be creatures of leisure; rather we were designed to work. There is work to be done both in the world (subduing the earth and taking care of it) and in the home (being fruitful and raising families).

What do these vs teach us about work?

Work is good

- Work is good. This means we shouldn't view work merely as a means to an end - in other words we work simply to pay the mortgage, to pay for nice holidays or whatever else. No - we work because we were designed to work. Work is a good gift from God - that is why unemployment is such a trial, it results in restlessness and dissatisfaction - we were created to work - work is good.
- Work in the Garden of Eden was perfectly fulfilling and satisfying.

Work is necessary

- We are commanded by God to rule and work under him. This is a delegated task, given to us by God, and therefore we are answerable to god for the manner in which we undertake it.
- Genesis 1:29, 'Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."'

- Adam and Eve must work to sustain their life. Paul picks up on this idea in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11

How should Genesis 1&2 affect the way we view our work?

- We should appreciate work - we were made to do it
- This means there is no sacred/secular divide. Sometimes in our thinking as Christians we create a hierarchy of work. It goes something like this. Christian work is the most valuable and worthwhile work, especially if you're a missionary or a minister. Then there are those jobs with less value but which are still worthwhile; maybe being a Dr or nurse or perhaps being a teacher. This is followed by everything else - those jobs we think of as purely secular, with no real value to them. And then at the absolute bottom of the pile are bankers!
- God is equally concerned with what we do at work on Monday to Friday as with what we do at church on a Sunday. This is a tremendous encouragement. God is pleased when a home group or Sunday school teacher leader carefully leads a Bible study helping people understand the Bible better and delight more in Jesus. But God is also pleased and glorified when the same home group leader or Sunday school teacher works diligently and to the best of their ability to re-wire a house or to perform a surgical operation.
- This challenges our 21st century middle-class Christian snobbery. All work is good and dignified and necessary. To believe we will only fulfil our potential if we pursue a professional career and anything else would be 'beneath us' is an ugly lie.
- God is far more concerned with how we live where he has placed us than with what particular job we do.

What's the matter with work?

Read Genesis 3:17-19

What are the consequences of humanity's rebellion against God in the sphere of work?

- Our place of work is cursed 3:17a - although work is good, work has been spoiled by our rebellion against God
- The pain, frustration and difficulty of work 3:17b-19
- Broken relationships - difficult and awkward work colleagues

How do we see this in our daily working life?

- We must have balanced expectations of work. As we've seen we were created to work - in God's original blueprint work was to be fulfilling - providing perfect job satisfaction. But of course work is not like that today. Perhaps as I'm speaking you're already dreading returning to work tomorrow. Because we all know that work is frustrating, it can be mundane, exhausting and a huge source of stress and anxiety.
- Work will no longer be the delight God intended. Instead work will be a 'painful toil'. We see this 'painful toil' in the exhaustion of working with difficult colleges, or the weariness of trying to control unruly children, the frustration of computers crashing at the worst possible moment, the boredom of the factory floor, or the pressure of management.
- Yes we're to appreciate our work and rejoice when work is good - but at the same time we shouldn't be surprised when work is difficult and stressful. It's not just your job - it's any job.

- To look to our job for ultimate fulfilment and satisfaction is both wrong and foolish - it won't deliver. We know this in our heads - but slow to believe in our hearts

What does it look like to work as a Christian in a fallen world?

Our culture tells us:

what we do (our work/job) → identity (who we are)

In other words, who I am is based on what I do. Our status and self-worth is determined by our career. ***In what ways do we see this in the lives or our work colleagues and places of work?***

But the gospel turns this way of thinking completely upside down.

Identity (who I am In Christ) → what we do (how we work)

Read Ephesians 6:5-6 (& Ephesians 2:1-10)

What does Paul tell us about our identity as Christians?

- We are slaves of Christ - we have a new boss, we're under new ownership.
- In ch.2 Paul describes life outside of relationship to Jesus Christ - we were spiritually dead - cut-off from God the source of all life and goodness. We were enslaved to Satan - under his rule and authority. And we were slaves of sin - living only to please our selfish desires, in wilful rebellion against God. And so we were objects of God's wrath - deserving to face his perfect anger forever in hell.
- But out of God's amazing love and mercy - he made us alive in Christ Jesus - we are now united to him. That means that Jesus died our death - he took upon himself our sin and guilt as he hung on the cross. But it also means that Jesus' life of perfect obedience and righteousness is credited to us.
- And so we've been set free from slavery to sin and Satan, God's Spirit has been poured out into our lives and so we are now free to serve the living God. Therefore to be a Christian is to have a new master - Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to understand that whatever sphere of work we're in - we have a new boss, we're under new ownership, we're now working ultimately for King Jesus - and so we're to work to please Him.

Look again at Eph.6:5-9 - underline every time Paul highlights that Jesus is our boss.

Vs5, 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, ***just as you would obey Christ.***' Vs6, 'Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, ***but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.***' Vs7, 'Serve wholeheartedly, ***as if you were serving the Lord, not people***, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.' Vs9, 'And masters, 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 favouritism with him.'

- Because Jesus is Lord of the universe and our lives, we're now to serve him in every area of life - and that includes our working lives. So we need to start thinking of ourselves as being employed by Jesus, our daily work as service for Jesus, Jesus as our ultimate boss.
- Whether you're a Dr or a factory worker, whether you're in paid employment or a full time mum bringing up children - whatever form our work takes - we need to think of Jesus as handing over these responsibilities to us. Whatever our situation, we should think of ourselves as serving Jesus Christ - we are responsible to him. He is our new boss and we're to please him. All that we do - is to be for the glory of king Jesus.

How should living with Christ as our boss change our approach to work?

- Respect/submission vs5
- Integrity vs5&6
- Working hard vs6

Because Jesus is Lord of the universe and our lives, we're now to serve him in every area of life - and that includes our working lives. So we need to start thinking of ourselves as being employed by Jesus, our daily work as service for Jesus, Jesus as our ultimate boss. Over the next 2 weeks we're going to be thinking about what that looks like when it comes dealing with worry and anxiety, interacting with colleagues, employees and bosses, our ambitions for work and how we can more effectively use the work situation God has placed us in to be witnesses for Christ.