

"ON THE JOB!"**MONDAY****READ GALATIANS 6:9-10, 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58, ACTS 20:34-35**

"We are obviously very much aware of the issues that face us in our society with regard to hard work, which has always been a part of the American ethic. We are a culture that is having difficulty with work at this particular time. We are into leisure mostly. We are into being entertained. We are being told, as young people growing up today, that somebody owes us a living, that we should make demands for what we want and what we expect. We're producing a generation of young people who never see their parents work because even if they have two working parents, it's outside the home. They leave in the morning, they come back at night. All they know is work makes you irritable, and work causes you not to get along too well and makes you bad parents and usually leads – very often leads, at least in half the cases, to divorce and the breakup of homes. So work is not a very popular theme." (From 'Grace To You' online Bible Series)

Wow. Not so good, but so very true. It's an assessment of what work looks like to the American family. Days gone by in a more agrarian culture, kids saw parents work hard, probably learned to work right alongside their parents on the farms and in the fields. Perhaps they shared a "family business" where everyone worked to support the family needs. Generations learned trades from their fathers and mothers. Not so much these days.

Do we have an attitude of "entitlement", of "expectation" about what our jobs and careers can and should give to our lives? Could we be mistaken in our ways of looking at it all? Scripture talks about labor and work. How can we translate those thoughts into today's culture? How can we as Jesus followers gain a new perspective on what it means to "work"? How can we show God's way to our kids and the young people around us? Do we value the "common laborer" as much as the CFO of a large company? Give some thought today about the attitudes you convey about work: to your kids, your grandchildren, your co-workers, your employees, your friends and neighbors. Would it line up with what the Apostle Paul is teaching?

TUESDAY**READ JAMES 2:14-26**

What we "do" is important. Jesus half-brother, James, takes up the topic of work in detail in the second part of chapter 2 of his letter. When discussing work, he invariably uses the plural "works" (Greek *erga*) rather than the singular "work" (Greek *ergon*). This leads some to suppose that James uses "works" to mean something different from "work." However, *erga* and *ergon* are simply plural and singular forms of the same word. James is describing any kind of work, from works of kindness, such as giving food to someone who is hungry, to on-the-job work, such as increasing the sustainable yield of rice paddies. His use of the plural shows that he expects Christians' work to be continual. It's all connected in theory and value.

What does James himself say? James 2:14 is arguably the centerpiece of his argument, so we will consider this section before moving on: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?" James bluntly answers his own question by stating, "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" — as dead (as he notes in a carefully chosen example) as someone in desperate need of food who receives only empty words of well-wishing from his neighbor. James takes it for granted that believing in Christ (trusting in God) will move you to feel compassion for—

and act to help—someone in need.

We have opportunities every day to meet the needs of people we work for and among. It can be as simple as making sure a confused customer finds the right item for their need or noticing that a new co-worker needs help but is afraid to ask. James urges us to take special concern for those who are vulnerable or marginalized, and we may need to practice noticing who these people are at our places of work.

This is the heart of the book of James. James does not imagine that work is at odds with faith. There can be no *"justification by works"* because there can be no good works unless there is already faith (trust) in God. James doesn't mean that faith can exist without works yet be insufficient for salvation. He means that any *"faith"* that doesn't lead to works is dead; in other words, it is no faith at all. *"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead"*. James doesn't command Christians to work for the benefit of others in need *instead of* placing faith in Christ, or even *in addition* to placing faith in Christ. He expects that Christians will work for the benefit of others in need *as a result of* placing faith in Christ.

The insight that Christian faith always leads to practical action is in itself a lesson for the workplace. We cannot divide the world into spiritual and practical, for the spiritual *is* the practical. *"You see that [Abraham's] faith was active along with his works,"* James says. Therefore we can never say, "I believe in Jesus and I go to church, but I keep my personal faith out of my work." That kind of faith is dead. James's words *"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone"* challenges us to work out our commitment to Christ in our daily activities.

Our job, our work, is an opportunity where that should happen.

How are you doing with yours?

(Theology of Work Project)

WEDNESDAY

READ 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6–15, PROVERBS 18:9, MATTHEW 5:16

Paul writes to the church: *"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'" This verse is set in the context of 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15, which warns believers against idleness and laziness. The focus of the command is against those who refuse to work rather than those who are unable to do so.*

The verses preceding the instruction to those unwilling to work relate a positive example: *"You ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate"* (2 Thessalonians 3:7–9). Paul and his companions did not come to the people of Thessalonica to take food or money from them but to share Christ with them. They were willing to work a side job to provide for their food.

In contrast, if any Christian worker came to a church and refused to work, Paul says not to offer him food. This instruction also had application to people within their congregation. Verses 11–12 note, *"We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat."* This is the Christian work ethic. Believers are to be known for working hard, not for a lazy attitude. Scripture often addresses sloth or laziness as sin.

For example, says, "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys." Another Proverb, 19:15 adds, *"Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless go hungry"*—there is a clear link between not working and not eating in this proverb. Ecclesiastes 10:18 also notes the negative consequences of laziness: *"Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks."*

Again, the admonition that *"the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat"*

concerns *unwillingness* rather than *inability*. There is a difference. James 1:27 describes true religion, in part, as *"look[ing] after orphans and widows in their distress."* Needy children and widows, the

disabled, those with special needs, the elderly, and others who cannot earn a living are deserving of much help.

As believers, it is important that we be known for our strong work ethic and helping those in true need. We should *"let [our] light shine before others, that they may see [our] good deeds and glorify [our] Father in heaven"*.

Who is a brother or sister in the Lord who models for you what it means to "work" in the biblical way? Tell them today how much you appreciate their attitude and actions that bring glory to God and a positive witness for the Lord to others. Text them. Drop them a note the mail, or email them. Better yet, thank them in person.

THURSDAY

READ DANIEL 12:3, PHILIPPIANS 2:15, GENESIS 1:26-27, MATTHEW 22:37-40, GALATIANS 6:10

William Barclay, the Bible Teacher and Commentator writes this about slaves and masters in his treatment on Ephesians 6:5-9:

"He (Paul) does not tell them to rebel; he tells them to be Christian where they are. The great message of Christianity to every man is that it is where God has set us that we must live out the Christian life. The circumstances may be all against us, but that only makes the challenge greater. Christianity does not offer us escape from circumstances; it offers us conquest of circumstances."

The Apostle Paul is not endorsing one person owning another, but calling both slave and master who follow Jesus to live as Jesus calls us to live despite the accepted cultural situations...be it good or horrible. We can see this is true in all our lives. Regardless of circumstances, Jesus is with us and calls us to live sacrificially and with a submissive heart prone to love and grace.

How are you doing today in your job? Be you employee or employer. How is it going at home? Be you husband, wife, child? Living out our faith in the risen Jesus calls out for the very best in us...always.

The challenge is not an easy one, but one of the will that is in line with the Spirit residing in our very hearts and transformed minds. It is not easy to *"be a Christian where you are"*. Our faith should change our attitude, our behavior, our mindset. We are no longer a slave to our own will, but to the will of Christ Jesus.

Today; give of your best to Jesus and ask Him to be seen through you in your place of employment, your home and family; your closest human relationships. It's there that you will *"shine bright"* for the Lord in ways you cannot even imagine!

FRIDAY

READ COLOSSIANS 3:23

We close this week's Daily Bible Devotionals with a prayer. Make it your prayer today:

"Father, we are the first to acknowledge that the standard is so high and sometimes what we do is a little monotonous and sometimes it's stressful because there are so many relationships around us with things that we find irritating and challenging. And that's why we plead with you to be gracious unto us that we might know the fullness of Your Spirit, that we might overcome these debilitating human things. Father, I pray for the filling of the Spirit in this congregation so that they may go out speaking to themselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord and they may bring into the work place a fullness of joy. So that they may in everything be giving thanks to You. So that they may by the energy of the Spirit of God have an attitude of submission, the attitude of a servant that says I just want to serve You, because I consider you better than me. And thereby may they adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. May they demonstrate to everybody around the saving power of Jesus Christ. I pray that for those who work and those who are employees and those who employ them as well.

May Christ be honored in the work place, may Christians set the pace and set the tone. And Father, we thank You for those who do and therefore honor You. Whether their employers and bosses are believers or not, we thank You for those who are faithful to do that. And may we remember, Lord, that all our work is sacred, everything we do is service to You and gives us the opportunity to manifest Your great power in our lives. Make us all testimonies for Your glory.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen".

(From Theologyofwork.org)