

Theology of Work: God's Plan for it, the Problem with it, and a Gospel-view of it

(Activity: taking a Gospel-view of our work)

Three Rivers Grace Church

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I.) GOD'S PLAN FOR WORK (Genesis 1-2)

- **The earliest work:** In the beginning, God worked. Work was not a necessary evil.
- Since **we are made in the image of God** (Gen.1:26-27) and were originally commanded to work and maintain God's creation (Gen.2:15), working is in our DNA or design.
- **There is dignity in manual labor as God** planted a garden during Creation (Gen. 2:8) and Jesus was a carpenter (Mark 6:3)
- The material creation we're called to care for is good; God will redeem it and us. (Rom.8:20-25)
- In six days, God created, formed, and then *partially* filled the Earth. People continue His work of development **by** rearranging raw material in a way that helps society flourish.
- In New Testament, we learn God calls us to serve the world through work (1 Cor.7:17)

a. Luther's reformed work theology: both church and secular work are God's work

Conclusion: Christians should appreciate the work of everyone, including non-Christians. As Keller says, "Our gospel-trained eyes can see the world ablaze with the glory of God's work"

II.) THE PROBLEMS WITH WORK (GENESIS 3:8-19)

- **Work can be fruitless--** "thorns and thistles" (Gen.3:18)
- **Work can seem pointless** – "for all is vanity and a striving after wind" (Ecc.2:17)
- **Work can be selfish** – "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves..." (Genesis 11:4)
- **Work can reveal our idols** (e.g., power, fame, money, etc.) – ""You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal" (Exod.34:17; **READ: *Luke 18:18-27)**
 - ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

III.) THE GOSPEL AND WORK

- The world typically blames society's problems (e.g., oppression, crime, financial troubles) on something within the physical world, and looks for the ultimate solution (e.g., better leaders/laws, more policemen, more money)
- Without the gospel, we will either be demonizing something that isn't bad enough, or idolizing something that isn't powerful enough to save us from the problem.
- Society's ultimate problem is: _____? Society's ultimate solution is: _____?

(Note: 3 section on this page are largely based on Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*)

Example #1: Engineering Professor

a.) **Idols:** Best papers, smartest solutions, most funding (to solve problem), fame (in field)

b.) **Biblical counters** (below):

- In response to idolizing ‘Best papers/solutions’ award:

Phil. 2:3-4

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- In response to the idol of ‘Most Funding’:

Matt.16:26

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

- In response to the idol of Fame:

Phil. 2:5-7

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,^[a] ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,^[b] being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

c.) **A Christian approach to doing my work:**

- **Work to achieve:** **Excellence** (e.g., good work ethic), **not Success** (e.g., best paper). [From Men’s Retreat message (Dr. Bruce Bickel)]
- **Be an Example via:** Humility (serving others like Christ did), Graciousness (forgiving mistakes of others like Christ) did, Repentance (when I fail, repent)
- Focus on **developing my people, not my empire**