

Grace Evangelical Free Church
Issues & Answers: Work

Work is the first recorded act of God (**Genesis 1:1-15**) as well as the first work/life balance initiative (resting on the seventh day). Therefore, legitimate work is good, reflecting the activity and goodness of God (**Psalms 25:8; Ephesians 4:28**). In **Genesis 1:31** God declares His work result “**very good**,” denoting work is productive, pleasurable and a quality exercise resulting in both honor and satisfaction.

Psalms 19 says that God reveals Himself to the world by His work, His existence and character made known to every individual including motivations, skills, abilities, and personality traits. Jesus echoed this in **Matthew 7:15-20** when He declared that bad trees produce only bad fruit and good trees only good fruit. Given God created man for His own glory (**Isaiah 43:7**), whatever we do should be to His glory (**1 Corinthians 10:31**), to literally give an accurate representation in terms of God’s righteousness, faithfulness, and excellence.

God created man in His image with characteristics like Him (**Genesis 1:26-31**) to work with Him in the world. God planted a garden and put Adam in it to (1) cultivate and (2) maintain it (**Genesis 2:8, 15**) as well as (3) subdue and (4) rule over the earth. To cultivate means to foster growth and to improve, while to maintain means to preserve from failure or decline. To subdue means to exercise control and discipline while rule over means to administer, take responsibility for, and make decisions. This mandate applies to all vocations, hence an occupation is a ministry before God with workplaces considered mission fields.

In response to Adam’s sin, God pronounced several judgments (**Genesis 3:17-19**), the most dealing with the nature of our labor. God cursed the ground. Work became difficult. The word toil is used, implying challenge, difficulty, exhaustion, and struggle. Work itself was still good, but man must expect that it will be accomplished by “**the sweat of his brow**.” Also, the result will not always be positive. Although man will eat the plants of the field, the field will also produce thorns and thistles. Hard work and effort will not always be rewarded in the way the laborer expects or desires.

Note that man would be eating from the produce of the field, not the garden which was symbolic of purity, innocence - an earthly paradise made by God as a safe enclosure. The earth or field, represents an unbounded, unprotected space with an emphasis on loss of inhibition and worldliness. Therefore, sociologically the work environment can be hostile, especially to Christians (**Genesis 39:1-23; Exodus 1:8-22; Nehemiah 4**).

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Other critical biblical convictions regarding work are:

- Work is done not only to benefit the worker, but others also (**Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Ephesians 4:28**).
- Work is a gift from God and, for His people, will be blessed (**Psalms 104:1-35; 127:1-5; Ecclesiastes 3:12-13, 5:18-20; Proverbs 14:23**).
- God equips His people for their work (**Exodus 31:2-11**).
- Work is not a substitute for purpose and significance which is found only in God. In **Ecclesiastes 2:4-11**, Solomon details his search for meaning in a variety of projects and works of all kinds, **"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun"** (**Ecclesiastes 2:11**).

There is a difference between the biblical view of the environment and the political movement known as "environmentalism." Due to the deep taint of sin, the present earth will be consumed with God creating a **"new heaven and a new earth"** (**2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1**). Rather than trying to preserve this earth, we are to be good stewards of it for as long as it lasts, which will be as long as it serves God's sovereign plan and purpose.

With respect to societal responsibilities and obligations toward the unemployed, uninsured, and uneducated in our society, some prove generational welfare recipients. It is interesting to note that the biblical welfare system was a system of work (**Leviticus 19:10; 23:22**). The Bible is specific in its condemnation of laziness (**Proverbs 18:9**). Paul makes the Christian work ethic abundantly clear: **"If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"** (**1 Timothy 5:8**).

In addition, Paul's instruction to another church regarding those who preferred not to work was to **"keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us."** And he goes on to say, **"For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'"** Instead, Paul instructs those who had been idle, **"Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat"** (**2 Thessalonians 3:12**).

Although God's original design for work was perverted by sin, God will one day restore work without the burdens that sin introduced (**Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 15:1-4; 22:1-11**). Until the day when the New Heavens and New Earth are set in place, the Christian attitude toward work should mirror that of Jesus: **"My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work"** (**John 4:34**). In short, work is of no value except when God is in it.

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