

Theology of Work (part 2)

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[0 : 00] You are saved by grace. He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through the kindness to us in Christ Jesus, through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

So you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is God's gift, not from works so that no one can boast, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

Now the first thing I want you to notice in that passage is the mention of immeasurable riches, which are promised to believers in the coming ages.

You might remember at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul says, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

In other words, a believer should never think of his or her work in this life as futile or meaningless. We're not secularists who assume death is the end of everything.

[1 : 22] No, our labors here will be rewarded in eternity. No labor in the Lord is done in vain. There are immeasurable riches to come.

And that fact alone shows something of the all-encompassing redemption Christ has provided us. There's a sense in which he redeems even our work.

By redeeming us, he redeems every part of us. He redeems every part of our lives. Paul says, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Now, I can't speak for you, but that statement takes my mind right back to the creation story in Genesis. God worked to create Adam and Eve.

He worked to create them so that they could image or reflect him by also working. And here, Paul says he's working yet again. We are his workmanship to create, or we might say recreate, us in Christ Jesus for what?

[2 : 36] Good works. Just like he did in creation, in redemption, God is working to create a people for work.

Now, I know our nine-to-five jobs are not typically what we think of when we hear the phrase good works in the Bible. We probably think of things like praying or serving people or evangelizing, something along those lines, something that feels distinctly Christian, distinctly spiritual.

But is that really all there is to good works? I mean, the term itself is pretty simple. Works refers to labors or deeds or virtually anything one does.

And good means profitable. It means virtuous. So, by definition, Paul is saying God creates us new in Christ for the purpose of doing really anything that is good.

Now, I'll say again, we want to avoid making that secular, sacred distinction all the time.

[3 : 51] After all, the Bible does, in fact, call us to work, labor. We saw that in creation. We see it after the fall. Colossians 3.22 says, So, clearly, the context of that is physical work, not distinctly spiritual work.

And then in the next verse, he says, Whatever you do, do it from the heart as something done for the Lord. So, we are called to work. We're commanded to work.

And according to Paul in Ephesians 2, we are redeemed to work, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. That's from Colossians 3.

Lastly, the fourth part of the framework is consummation. So, the struggles we have now with our labors will eventually be removed forever.

Just as Christ will one day redeem us completely, including our physical bodies, he will redeem the earth, and he will redeem our work. He'll restore the joy of it completely.

[5 : 16] In some degree or another, he'll reunite work and worship and fellowship with God in the way that God originally meant it to be back in the garden.

So, with that, I want to continue thinking about the subject of work. After all, this is where we spend most of our waking time. And I'd like to address some of our more practical concerns.

Some of you even shared your concerns and questions with me, so I'd like to address them. Again, Paul says we are God's workmanship.

Now, that's a translation of the Greek word *poiema*. And if you say that slowly, it might remind you of an English word.

It sounds a lot like the word poem, poem, *poiema*. In other words, we are God's, you might say, artistic handiwork in Christ.

[6 : 23] He creates us new to make. Specifically, he creates us new to glorify him and serve others through making.

In Christ, we are called to take what has been corrupted by sin and remake it, reshape it, just as God has done with us, so that it might bring honor to the Lord.

And we do this in the business world. We do this in our homes. We do it in our own artistic endeavors. We do it in hospitals and doctors' offices and classrooms or wherever we find ourselves.

But how do we accomplish this when our occupations or our vocations feel utterly mundane and unimportant, and perhaps we feel completely unmotivated?

How do we fight laziness or cynicism in our work? Well, I think it starts with the principle I read from Colossians 3.

[7 : 32] Let me read it again. This is Colossians 3, verses 22 through 24. Slaves, obey your human masters in everything.

Don't work only while being watched as people pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do it from the heart as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord.

You serve the Lord Christ. You see, God won't permit us to put Him in a little box that we only open on Sunday morning.

He commands that we serve Him every day, everywhere, and in everything we do, which, of course, includes our work.

He is Lord, and He lays claim to every aspect and every moment of our lives. So, in every aspect and in every moment, we rely on Him and His grace, and we strive to serve Him and obey Him.

[8 : 43] Let's just set aside the details of your particular job for a moment. No matter who you work for, or what your job is, or how you feel about either one of them, the Lord calls us to serve Him through that job.

Keep in mind that Paul is writing to slaves. I am sure they are not where they ideally wanted to be. But Paul essentially says that's beside the point.

We don't work to please people. We don't work only when the situation is ideal for us. We work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord as something done for the Lord in whatever we do.

Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 14, verses 6 through 8. Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord.

Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God. And whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it. And he gives thanks to God. And here's the lesson for us.

[9 : 54] For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord. And if we die, we die for the Lord.

Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. And this is why the Bible can say, whatever you do, whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 6.20 says, You were bought at a price, so glorify God with your body. Christ humbled himself to become a man.

And then he humbled himself by submitting to his Father's will in everything. And then he humbled himself even further by dying on a cross.

And for what? To save us from an eternity of God's wrath. It makes me think of a passage from Charles Spurgeon's devotional where he says, Do you believe that your sins are forgiven?

[11 : 06] And that Christ has made a full atonement for them? Then what a joyful Christian you ought to be. How you should live above the common trials and troubles of the world.

Since sin is forgiven, can it matter what happens to you now? Well, that puts things into perspective, doesn't it? Now, I don't mean to minimize how someone might feel about their job. Maybe you feel utterly dissatisfied with your work or with your employer, but it certainly helps to keep the situation in perspective. God loves you. He has saved you by the blood of his Son. He has brought you life so that, in part, you can find joy in this world and in your work.

And even when everything comes to an end, when this life is over, he has imperishable, immeasurable, eternal rewards waiting for you.

[12:18] Your labor in the Lord is not in vain. But more to the point, the Lord has bought us. He has redeemed us at a significant price to himself.

We're no longer slaves to our sin. We're no longer slaves to pride or greed or dissatisfaction or whatever else taints our work. We're slaves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We now do everything in his name with all of the blessings that come with that. Suddenly, work is not mere work. It's remade into what it's supposed to be.

Joyful, God-glorifying service. You don't like your boss? You don't care for your job right now? Well, lay that aside for a moment.

Remember what you have in Christ. Remember what you've been promised in Christ. And then remember what Paul says about working for men. Ultimately, we're not working for men.

[13:27] We're not working for people. For reasons we may not fully understand, God has led us into a job where we serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether it's a job you love or a job you hate, serve the Lord Christ, Paul says. Paul also reminds us, by the way, that we need to be clear about our motives.

Let's say you have a job you love. Wonderful. But what drives you to the office or the factory floor each day? Do you work for human approval or applause?

Do you work merely for the paycheck? Or perhaps the prestige that might come with the job?

Examine your heart because the Christian works sincerely, desiring first and foremost to honor our Heavenly Father in what we're doing.

When we get up in the morning and we consider the work that needs to be done that day, we might have a lot of things that runs through our minds.

[14:41] If we dread the work ahead of us, we might say to ourselves, well, you know, I've just got to do it. I need the paycheck. Maybe we're a little bit more noble than that, and we say, well, you've got to do it for your family.

And that is a good motivation, by the way. Paul told Timothy, if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

By all means, work for your family. But what should our primary motivation be? Whatever you do, do it from the heart as something done for the Lord and not for people.

In short, our work is fueled by thanksgiving for God and all that he's done for us. Now, inevitably, we fail in so many ways.

We get tired and we get frustrated with our jobs, with our work, and we fail to serve Christ in those jobs with thankful hearts.

[15:52] Sometimes we get lazy. We show up late. We leave early. We waste our time while we're on the job. We do things half-heartedly. Maybe we fall into the trap of seeking praise from people or being altogether consumed by a love for money.

But that brings us right back to the realities of the gospel. Even when we're working, we are resting in Christ. We're not trying to earn God's favor through our jobs, which would only lead to either despair or pride in ourselves.

And when we fail, the gospel reminds us that nothing, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. His mercies never end.

They are new every morning. But let's say you don't enjoy your current job. Or maybe you're seeking a new career or perhaps your first career ever.

I want to make it clear that you may go through seasons where you have to endure a job you don't love, but that's not to say you can't work toward finding a job you do love.

[17:13] Never does the Bible say, thou shalt not do something you enjoy. Instead, it would have us submit our desires to the Lord.

We might ask, are they godly desires? We might ask, are my dreams shaped by a Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated vision of life?

Do my passions align with the Lord's will? And if so, the next step is turning to God in continual prayer, asking Him for wisdom, asking Him for direction.

You know, this is especially true for young people. We want to map out every step of our lives. We say to ourselves, this is what I really want to do, and this is how I'll get there.

I've got it all figured out. Well, remember what James wrote. You do not know what tomorrow will bring or what your life will be.

[18:18] For you are like a vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, if the Lord wills, we will do this or that. We need to trust the Lord.

We need to trust Him when He opens doors. And we need to trust Him when He closes doors. It's not necessarily sinful to want something better or to have a very specific dream, but we need to start with a humble position of trust in the Lord.

We may have something even... God may have something even better in store for us than we ever imagined. But perhaps He has a much different way of getting us there than we imagined.

Think of Joseph. Joseph, when he was still in the land of Canaan, I doubt he ever thought to himself, one day I will become a powerful man in Egypt. But that's where God led him, only after years of really hard circumstances.

So even if Joseph had dreamed of becoming a powerful man in Egypt, and I guess technically he did have dreams to that effect, slavery and imprisonment, I don't think are the ways he would have planned for himself to reach that goal.

[19:41] Our ways are not God's ways. So that's where we need to start. Proverbs 3, trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge Him or know Him, and He will make your path straight. In Acts chapter 16, there's the story of Paul trying to make his way into parts of Asia Minor to preach the gospel.

Now there's no indication that the Lord told him to go there, but he wanted to preach. He was commissioned to preach, and those people needed to hear the gospel. So he went.

And in verse 6, we're told, they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. So what does Paul do? He turns in another direction.

He goes elsewhere. He'll take the gospel to another people. Then we're told, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Then finally, the Lord shows him where he needs to go.

[20:44] Now I've always found that story interesting. Clearly, Paul had a very noble dream. I want to take the gospel to lost people. What's more noble than that?

And he made a plan to do just that. He didn't wait for a sign from heaven or anything like that. The Lord wasn't telling him, this is where I want you to go. He just went. But as Proverbs says, Proverbs 16, 9, a person's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps.

And that's precisely what happened. It wasn't Paul's original plan, but it certainly worked out. It was God's plan, so of course it worked out. And by the way, Paul would eventually preach the gospel in Asia Minor.

The Lord just had a different timing for things than Paul knew. So if you have aspirations for another job or perhaps a better job, the place to begin is from a humble posture of prayer and reliance on God's wisdom.

Psalm 25, 9 says, He leads the humble in what is right. Think of our children. How often do parents try to lead their children in a way that is right only to watch their children wander off in another direction?

[22:12] They wouldn't humble themselves. They wouldn't submit to their parents' wisdom. And it often leads to disaster because the parent knows. The child does not yet. In fact, read the entirety of Psalm 25 when you have a minute.

David writes, Lord, I appeal to you. My God, I trust in you. David doesn't know what to do. It seems that he's in a helpless situation so he wisely turns to the Lord.

Lord, I don't know what to do but you do. Help me. Lead me. And later he says, I wait for you all day long. He knows it's better to wait on the Lord than to grow anxious or discontent.

Now, if you're in one of those seasons where you feel like you're waiting on the Lord, my recommendation is to spend that time not worrying about your current situation or dwelling on the

things you don't like about your current job but instead work on yourself, so to speak. And let me explain what I mean by that. In Philippians chapter 4, Paul is a prisoner. Needless to say, he's not really where he wants to be.

[23 : 36] He's very much waiting on the Lord not knowing whether the Lord will deliver him or let him be put to death. He doesn't know. And yet, this is what he writes.

Don't worry about anything but in everything through prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any moral excellence, if there is anything praiseworthy, dwell on these things.

Do what you have learned and received and heard from me and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you. And that's not all. A few verses later, he says, I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself.

I know how to make do with little and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of being content whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.

[25 : 02] I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me. So let's break this down. First, Paul says, don't worry.

Do you feel like your job has become a prison? Maybe life itself is beginning to feel like a prison. Well, Paul knows what that's like. He's in prison.

And he says, don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. Stop worrying.

And start praying. Better yet, be thankful. Again, this is a guy coming, this is coming from a guy who is literally a prisoner.

So how can he tell us sincerely, be thankful in everything? Can I read from Spurgeon again? Because I really like that passage. Do you believe that your sins are forgiven and that Christ has made a full atonement for them?

[26 : 09] That what a joyful Christian you ought to be. How you should live above the common trials and troubles of the world. Since sin is forgiven, can it matter what happens to you now?

And maybe we think, sure, one day, one day, I'll be with the Lord in heaven. But not today. Today, I'm not in heaven.

Today, I'm in a job that's making me miserable. Well, according to Paul, with thanksgiving, yes, thanksgiving and prayer, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding can very well guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Pray, be thankful, and we have more than enough to be thankful for. Then, Paul says, we should dwell on good things, which is very counter to our nature.

We tend to dwell in everything that's wrong. But Paul says, no, fix your minds on what is honorable, just, pure, lovely, and so on. And this is true for all of life, by the way.

[27 : 26] If you're struggling with discontentment or unthankfulness, you know, little things we can do will go a long way. Turn off the news. Step away from the internet and social media.

These things don't typically help to foster a spirit of thankfulness and contentment because they're not focused on good things. The news media, for example, is an entire business built on maximizing viewership by using human nature to their advantage.

They know that we are drawn to drama and bad news. They know that we're more likely to keep watching if they show a horrific video that surprises and shocks us than, you know, maybe a feel-good story.

So, common sense says turn it off. Do every little thing you can to turn your attention back to what is good, namely, Christ and the gospel.

Do this, Paul says, and the God of peace will be with you. So, if you're in a position you don't like, waiting on the Lord for possibly something else to come along or open up, you know, work on yourself in the meantime.

[28 : 46] Can't change your job? Work on you. Learn the secret of contentment. Continue to serve with cheerfulness. Psalm 100 says, Serve the Lord with gladness.

Come before Him with joyful songs. Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us and we are His, His people, the sheep of His pasture.

We don't need to be in ideal circumstances to find joy. Paul was singing God's praises in prison because he knew the Lord, not His circumstances, was the source of His joy.

Listen to what Peter writes in 1 Peter 2, starting with verse 18. Verse 18. Household slaves or bond servants, submit to your masters with all reverence, not only to the good and gentle ones, but also to the cruel.

For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it?

[30 : 03] But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God. For you were called to this because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.

He did not commit sin and no deceit was found in His mouth. When He was insulted, He did not insult in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but entrusted Himself to the one who judges justly.

Granted, Peter is talking about suffering specifically because you are a Christian. Then again, maybe that's why you're not happy with your job. Maybe you're surrounded by unbelievers who mock your faith or blaspheme our God.

Regardless, Peter says, it is a noble thing to suffer well. And Christ is the supreme example of this. He suffered unjustly at the hands of cruel and spiteful people, but He did not sin. He did not complain. He did not insult anyone because as Peter says, He entrusted Himself to the one who judges justly and will one day judge all people.

[31 : 28] He knew, despite His temporal circumstances, He would be exalted in the end. And so will His people. After Jesus fed the 5,000 by way of a miracle in John chapter 6, you might remember that He left them and He crossed the sea.

But they chased after Him and they found Him. And when they did, Jesus said to them, this is John 6, 26, Truly I tell you, you were looking for Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

Don't work for the food that perishes, but for the food that lasts for eternal life. which the Son of Man will give you because God the Father has set His seal of approval on Him.

Now, of course, Jesus is not suggesting we shouldn't work. There are more important things to do. But He is showing that our work is in everything. It's not everything.

As He said in His Sermon on the Mount, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And then these other things will be added to you or provided for you.

[32 : 45] Finding our ideal job is not the priority. Seeking God, knowing Christ, doing what's right no matter the circumstances, dwelling on what is good, that's our priority.

Now, there are plenty more work-related issues I'd like to address and plan to address, but for now, I want to end with a prayer written by Katie Rose.

I'm not sure who she is, but beautiful prayer which she titles For Unseen Labors. Here's what she writes. O Lord, who works in a thousand unseen places, I pause in your presence as I begin my work today.

Nothing is unknown to you, and you know that my labors often go unrecognized by others. At times, this has disheartened me. Yet this I believe, to work is a valuable gift.

You've placed me here with an opportunity to tend these tasks for your glory and for the good of your children. May I not be blind to the beauty before me.

[34 : 05] Be thou my vision, O Lord. For in your sight, the task at hand becomes an act of worship, and as the touch of your hand sweeps through, may these labors be sanctified.

Holy Spirit, meet me in this work with the power of your presence, for in your presence is the fullness of joy. How much of your work, O God, is unnoticed?

You have created all things, and by your Spirit they are sustained. How often do I neglect to thank you for the breath in my lungs, for the grass beneath my feet, and for the varied flavors of food, for colors, and kestrels, and laughter?

You have worked all these things into your creation. Indeed, the world revolves around your unseen acts. Yet, despite our lack of acknowledgement, you are constant in care and unceasing in service.

May I humbly follow this pattern. As I go about my work today, give me eyes to see you at work in the world. Let me not forget the centuries of good and faithful servants who were never recognized on earth, but whose heavenly reward awaited them, secure and unseen.
[35 : 33] May I be more more attuned through the■