

Work as Service (part 2)

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[0:00] This week is the last week that we're going to consider what God intended work to be. And next week, Lord willing, we're going to start talking about what sin does to work.

And our problems now with work. But today we're going to keep going where we left off last week, and that is work as service. And we saw last week that our work is a calling from God.

1 Corinthians 7.17. Remember this. Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him.

And in that context, Paul is talking about marriage, your marital status, your work status, your social status. God has assigned and called us each to our respective places of work.

And someone who is called is always called to serve. So we start with that idea that as we think about work as service, we have to start with the idea that we've been called and assigned to our work.

[1:10] And someone who is called is always called to serve. And so a pastor is called to serve a congregation. The congregation does not exist for the pastor's sake. But the role of the pastor exists for the congregation to serve them.

And so in the same way, God has put each one of us, whatever work he's given to us, whatever calling and assignment he's given to us, he's called us to serve him and to serve the human community.

And so work isn't first and foremost about what I can get out of it. It's not first and foremost about me. Work is a calling and assignment.

And so the direction that we have to start is outward. As we look at our work, we have to think about others before ourselves.

So it's outward, not inward direction. And our selfish hearts bend everything in on onto me. And so when my work gets bent in on me, and that's what inevitably happens when I have an unregenerate heart, then my job becomes about me instead of about the people I'm called to serve.

[2:25] And my job becomes about me and not the work itself. But this idea of calling puts things in their proper perspective. It puts work into its proper sphere.

So work is service. It's a calling, an assignment from God. And we talked about that last week. And that should give us great joy, knowing that the place that we have in this world and the work that we have in front of us, God thought of that.

And God assigned that to us. This isn't just by accident, but in his providence, he's called each one of us. And then we saw that our work is how God provides for humanity.

God is at work in our work. God is at work in our work. Now, before we move on to the other topics that we want to talk about under this idea of work as service, I want to go back to a couple of subjects that we ended up on last week.

And that's how we, the first one is how we relate this view of work to our children. And I didn't prepare anything.

[3:36] I want to hear from you. And I'm hoping that we can do a little brainstorming here to get some thoughts, some ideas about how we can teach our children this idea of work.

And how we can apply it to them. And then maybe how it's different than what we normally think about work and children. So I'm looking for practical ideas, theoretical ideas, anything along that line, big or small.

Does anyone have anything? Any thoughts? Just, there's no wrong answers here. Unless there is a really wrong answer, I guess. Well, I think children are big imitators of their parents.

I think that's where it begins. Little girls want to run the sweeper like mom runs the sweeper. And little boys want to pound pegs into the board like dad pounds. Nails in.

And so I think we have to be the example that they see. Yeah. Very good. So work is a lot of times caught and not taught.

[4:43] I mean, not totally. Dare. I know when our kids were little. I mean, when they were three years old, they had tasks. They had chores that they were supposed to do.

And it was to help the family. It was to help me. It was to help daddy. It was to help them. Simple little things. But we always had the rule that first we do our work and then we play.

And the work might take, you know, five minutes or five seconds. But it was a principle that was instilled that we do it to serve each other in the family. Very good. Jim.

To go along with that, Pastor, in my conversation with a young homeless lady I brought to the community area yesterday, she shared with me, growing up, her mother made work fun.

And she said her job was help her dad out with big water in the barn, clean the barn out and wash the windows. And she said, one day her dad said, I sure wish you would clean those windows.

[5:37] He said, why, dad? I'm trying to help you out. He said, boy, she said, they're real fragile. Reads to break. She said, so after that, she said, I kind of left the windows alone. Okay. But she said, growing up, her brother and sister, her mother, would make it.

You know, she'd say, you do this and you'll get so much free time and stuff like that. So, yeah, it's just. And I see in the Amish community, the kids are taught to work young. Yeah.

I just think of that one of the first lessons that we had, that work is one of the very few things that humans can take in large doses and not be harmed by it and actually be helped by it.

And the idea that children shouldn't work or we shouldn't push our children and then teenagers don't need to take on responsibility. I think from the earliest age, they need to learn that work and work in large doses is what humans are made for.

And it's not a bad thing. I thought I saw someone over here. Oh, Roger. I usually like to combine both the formal instruction and the informal instruction.

[6:44] So formally, it would be important, I think, for us to help our children understand where it came from, whose design it was, so that they're not just hearing these things as our opinions and later on toss them aside for somebody else's opinions.

Understand that this is what I'm hearing from mom and dad is actually coming from the word of God and see it's open to the word of God and show them where it's coming from. But then also helping them find the greater joy in opportunities through the day, whatever it is that we can have them do. And even to the point where work is hard and it's going to involve some sacrifice, you do have to give up something that would be more, we'll say, enjoyable in your thinking or even more fun to do this.

But then help them understand and see when it's done. Now, how do you feel now? And so they're understanding and relating the concept of sacrificing giving with joy as well and not just, I can only have joy when I'm doing something for myself and entertaining myself.

But there's a greater joy when I actually do something for others. And even if it costs me something in the way of effort, there's even still greater joy than that.

[8:10] So if I could summarize that, while I said work is caught, not taught, on the other hand, we do need to put work into a framework where we as parents verbalize to our children, this is what you should think about work.

This is what God says about work. And so you're giving them ideas and a framework and a worldview in which to do that work. And so while you're setting the example in your work, you're also speaking instructively to your children.

I think a lot of times what happens is we just expect our children to understand these things. We just expect our children to know them. And then what it seems like what happens a lot of times is that, okay, now they turn 20 and they do the things, but they don't know why they're doing it or they don't understand the bigger picture.

And so instruction, teaching, but then also a good example. I don't want to go too much longer.

Mark, this will be the last one. I was just going to say that I think just like our children learn about God through our example, either negative example or positive example, I think they touch our attitudes towards our work.

And, you know, there's a sense in which we owe it to our children to find joy in our work and to communicate that to them. And so many fathers, you know, they come home after a hard day at work and then they're really nasty and hard to live with with their families because work is drudgery,

work is hard.

[9:51] My supervisor doesn't understand me. And it goes on and on and on. And, you know, I think our attitudes about work are transferred to our kids.

So we want to be careful that we don't pass on a cynical. So it's something for us as parents to think about. And I understand that all of you are in that stage, but it's good for us to hear from each other.

Now, the other subject that I want to talk about before we move on is how can we use this idea of calling or assignment to folks that aren't, they're no longer doing what they used to do.

So they're in retirement or they are now they have an empty nest. So I'm thinking of moms. You've you poured your life out for your children for 25 years and now they're gone.

And now that calling to a great degree is gone. It's it's not there anymore. How can this idea of calling or assignment help those people?

[10:56] Give them resources. Give them a way to think about their life and in their future. To give them hope in and what God has called them to do.

Roger. Once the kids are gone, I think the tendency like with me is I want to pass it on to my grandkids now. You know, what I taught my my son and my daughter and hopefully they're passing on what I trained them in.

But now to help them raise the raise their kids. OK. Of course, we've got to be careful about grandparents raising children, I think. But on the one hand, but what you're saying is very is completely valid that the parenting is is never completely over.

Uh. Yeah. Sorry. The focus is on God and God assigning, not what we want to do ourselves. And so assignments change.

Most of us have jobs where we have certain tasks and that task has a beginning and an end. In life, a task may last a lot. One task may last a longer.

[12:03] But that doesn't mean that then that task is over. Now the assignment changes to a degree. Mm-hmm. And that's what we've got to keep in focus is that I can't do the same thing now that I did when I was 20.

It's a totally different story now. But yet the calling in the assignment is still just as live. Right. So God's calling. I mean, God is still calling us to something.

I think it's comparable to. So you're working in a factory and you have the same task for 10 years. And then all of a sudden they move you to a new department. And now you have a new task.

Well, most of us wouldn't go, well, my life is over. It has no meaning. But sometimes we have the tendency, well, now that that work is over, what do I do with my life?

And we feel hopeless or driftless. And I guess the idea is that, yeah, it might take some time in order to find the new calling, the new direction that you're supposed to go.

[13:07] But just because your job has changed doesn't mean God's calling has left you, that you don't have any assignment from him from now on. You have a new assignment.

And so God has given you new responsibilities. He's still going to use you in a new way. Well, I'm sorry if you have more to say. We do need to move on. Today we're going to keep talking about work is service.

And we have three points. And the first one is vocation and the gospel. The second is work is love. And the third is work is a ministry of competence.

So first, vocation and the gospel. Remember, we talked about Martin Luther and how he really got a hold of this idea of calling.

The medieval view was that the church was the kingdom of God. And so if you were going to have meaningful work, work that counted for God, then it needed to be some sort of work in the church for the most part.

[14:12] Secular work was unimportant, a demeaning necessity. Now, that medieval view had one root in its ecclesiology and its doctrine of the church.

So they saw the church in a certain light, in a certain way. And so they viewed work in a certain way. So it had one root in its ecclesiology and its view of church.

But it also had another root in its soteriology and its doctrine of salvation. So back then, it was generally held that monks and nuns and priests and so on, that they, by taking on monastic vows or submitting themselves to the rigors of the monastic life, they could actually merit special favor from God for their work.

And so their claim on salvation was stronger because of what they did, because of their job. So, what their job was.

Now, Luther lived in that world. He grew up in that world. And he said, if ever a man could be saved by monkery, it would have been I. So if anyone could be saved by being a monk, it would have been me, because if anyone was the best monk, I was it.

[15 : 35] He sounds a lot like Paul, doesn't he? As for realistic righteousness, faultless. But that didn't save him. And his conscience still haunted him.

And he would spend so much time in the confession, confessing every little detail, every possible sin, that his confessor actually told him to leave and come back, when he had actually something to say.

Well, it all changed when he was assigned to begin lecturing on the book of Psalms. And in that period, just focusing on the text, things began to lighten a little bit for him.

But the breakthrough didn't happen until he started a series on Romans. And he was meditating in the tower. He talks about it several times.

He was in the tower, in the cloister there, in the monastery. And he was meditating on Romans 1, verses 16 and 17. And please turn there.

[16 : 39] Romans 1, verses 16 and 17. And here, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. Now, it was that phrase, a righteousness from God, that caused Luther so much trouble.

Because he was so used to thinking of righteousness as justice. And so, this is what he kept thinking. Now, a justice from God is revealed.

And he took it to mean that this righteousness, this justice, was a just, a righteous law. And so, in the gospel, a righteousness, a way of obeying God has been revealed.

[18 : 01] Does that make sense? Righteousness. So, righteousness is something that you need to do. And the gospel tells you the thing that you need to do. The thing you need to obey.

So, when Luther thought of the gospel, he thought of himself. And he thought of his need to obey.

And if he obeyed, then God would justify him. But he couldn't obey. And he didn't obey.

And then, what happened, and if you've ever been there, you realize what happens to sinners when they hear the gospel and they think it's about what they need to do, how they need to obey.

He began to hate God. Because in the law, the law condemned him. But now God gives the gospel, and that gospel condemns him as well.

But then it all changed when he started meditating more and more on that last phrase. The righteous will live by faith. And then that's when it began to make sense.

[19 : 04] And this is what he wrote. I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous live, by a gift of God.

So, this righteousness is a gift of God. It's not something that they do for God. It's something that God gives to them, namely by faith. So, he gives it by faith. And here I felt that I was altogether born again, and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

There, a totally other face of the entire scripture showed itself to me. So, his eyes were opened, and he felt born again. The gates of paradise opened, because he saw and understood the gospel.

Dawn broke on his soul when he realized that what Paul was talking about, he was not talking about the active righteousness that God demands, but the passive righteousness that God gives to those who believe.

So, the sinner is justified, declared righteous by God through faith. Through faith in Jesus Christ, and the work and death of Jesus, not by his own work, or by his own law-keeping.

[20 : 18] And so, to put it another way, sinners are justified by receiving, not achieving. So, everything changed at that point. A whole other side of scripture opened up to him.

A whole other side, a whole different way of living. And it changed how he looked at work. And that, the gospel, what Luther discovered, rediscovered, has these two amazing implications.

First, if religious works are necessary, if religious works are necessary to achieve a good standing with God, then the people who are clergy, the monks, the nuns, the priests, there's always going to be the difference between those in church ministry and everyone else.

There's always going to be a difference between the pastor and his people. But if religious works have absolutely nothing to do with earning and gaining a right standing, a justification, being reconciled to God, then no one can see religious work as superior to any other work.

And that's what we said last week. We are who we are because of Christ. We are not anything in God's eyes because of the work that we do.

[21 : 44] So that's the first implication. There can't be this great difference between priest and people, pastor and people, because we're all justified by faith alone.

And here's the second implication. Therefore, I have no right to feel proud or condemned because of my job.

I have no right to feel exalted because I have some great job. And I have no right to feel condemned because I have some menial job.

I don't have a right to feel condemned because other people don't appreciate my work. Men, have you ever wrestled with that? They don't appreciate what I do.

No one notices what I do. No one cares about what I do. And what happens is we begin to feel condemned. We feel like our lives are worthless and we're useless and we feel like someone has written guilty, no good over our lives.

[22 : 48] But if it's God who justifies, who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Now, monks sought salvation through their religious works. In modern people, obviously the monasteries aren't bursting at the seams anymore, so that way has faded away to a large degree. There are still a lot of people out there trying to be saved by their religious works, but modern man, secular man, seeks a different kind of salvation. And they seek it through their work.

They want to hear the, I am a good, you are good. You're doing what is right by what they do, by their career success. And so they feel justified, they feel right if people pay attention to their work, if they get honor and glory from their work, or if they get paid a lot, or they feel condemned and worthless because people don't honor them or pay them well for their jobs.

And so women flock to the workplace, leaving their children in the arms of others because they don't think mothering is honorable enough. And they don't think it makes them worthwhile, and so it makes them feel small and useless and condemned, no good, because they aren't wheeling and dealing in the business world.

[24 : 21] Now what is that? Well, first, that's devaluing something that God holds to be very valuable, mothering. But it's even something more basic.

It's not believing the gospel. It's not submitting to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It's trying to be good and valued and to hear that, well done, good and faithful servant, or it is good by what?

By the job. By our job. By our peers rather than our creator. And so it's not submitting to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Instead, it's saying, I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to get the well done all on my own. The gospel frees us from that. It frees us from that relentless pursuit to prove ourselves to others because in the gospel, I'm secure.

In the gospel, God has already said, you are righteous in Jesus. But it also frees me from that condescending attitude that I think I'm better because my job is better.

[25 : 32] My well done comes from God. It comes from Jesus and Jesus alone. Now, all work then is not a way to save ourselves in any way, shape, or form.

Our work is a way for us to love God and to serve others around us. Now, that brings us to our second point, work as love.

Work as love. So, work is not a way that we can save ourselves. Then, work must be a way that we can love other people. And work is a fundamental way that we can love others.

Because when God calls you, he calls you to love, calls you to serve. And when you're called to your work, that means you're called to love the people that you serve.

Now, the world twists everything around and makes work all about me. And, and I work in order to get money and I work in order to get leisure.

[26 : 39] I'm working for the weekend. And, Christians, if we don't guard our own thoughts, that's how we are going to think. that's what, how we are going to look at our work.

And, when that happens, when work becomes about me and getting only for myself, then something perverted and twisted turns into, gets into our work.

This is how Dorothy Sayers, the Christian author, put it. Doctors, when people think like this, doctors practice medicine not primarily to relieve suffering, but to make a living.

The cure of the patient is something that happens on the way. Lawyers accept briefs not because they have a passion for justice, but because the law is the profession which enables them to live. Do you see how twisted that becomes? So, instead of being a doctor because I want to relieve suffering, I do it because I want to make money. But she also noticed that at the height of World War II, the British people began to see work differently.

[27 : 51] And I want you to think about why that was. They started to experience more joy and fulfillment in their work because for the first time, maybe in their whole lives, men and women were doing something not for the pay, but because it needed to be done, because they saw this is something worthwhile doing.

She said this, the reason why men often find themselves happy and satisfied in the army is that for the first time in their lives, they found themselves doing something not for the pay, which is miserable.

You don't go in the army to get rich, but for the sake of getting things done. So, what was happening in wartime Britain was this, everyone saw that their work was contributing for the good of everyone else.

everyone needed to pitch in, everyone needed to do their part, everyone needed to work hard because the survival of the nation depended on it. Work was indispensable because the Germans were coming.

But, Christian, it shouldn't take war for you to see that your work is indispensable at all times as well, in peacetime, not just in war. your work is indispensable because it is one of the primary ways that you love your fellow man, that you love your neighbor as yourself.

[29 : 15] Listen to how one author put it, and this is a, it's a rather long quote, but I think it's, it's definitely, it's probably worth the price of the book. Look at the chair you are lounging in.

Look at the pew that you are sitting in. Could you have made it for yourself? How would you, how would you get, say the wood? Go and fell a tree, but only after first making the tools for that, and then putting together some kind of vehicle to haul the wood, and then constructing a mill to do the lumber, and then making the roads to drive on from place to place.

In short, a lifetime or two of work to make one chair. If we worked not 40, but 140 hours per week, we couldn't make ourselves, for ourselves from scratch, even a fraction of all the goods and services that we call our own.

Our paycheck turns out to buy us the use of far more than we could possibly make for ourselves in the time that it takes to earn the check. Work yields far more in return upon our efforts than our particular jobs put in.

So imagine that everyone quits working right now. What happens? Civilized life quickly melts away. Food vanishes from the shelves.

[30 : 48] Gas dries up at the pumps. Streets are no longer patrolled, and fires burn themselves out. Communication and transportation services end.

Utilities go dead. Those who survive at all are soon huddled around campfires, sleeping in caves, clothed in raw animal hides.

The difference between a wilderness and culture is simply work. So there might not, one of the best ways, we'll put it like this, one of the best ways then you can love and care for your neighbor is to do your job.

Because it's not only you that's gaining from your job, but everyone else's as well. When we all do our work and we do it well, we serve everyone at the same time.

And so that leads us to our very last point. If you're called and assigned, if work is not the way that you need to be saved, if work is the way that you can love your brothers and sisters, or your fellow men and your brothers and sisters, then do your work and do it well.

[32 : 06] Work as a ministry of competence. things. So how does a carpenter, how does he be a godly carpenter?

How does he love his fellow man? How does he fulfill the calling God gave him to be a carpenter? Does he just do that by going to church?

Or by having a Bible study at his house? Or not doing anything blatantly sinful? Well, I think obviously all those things have a part, definitely.

But what it means to be a godly carpenter, first of all, or at least it needs to factor in there somewhere, is that you make good tables. That you do your work well.

And when you do your work well and you do it as unto the Lord, then you are fulfilling your calling in a way that pleases him. Let me give you a more dramatic example of when we do our work well, we really love people.

[33 : 19] Flight 1549 was a normally scheduled flight from LaGuardia to Charlotte, North Carolina. On January 15, 2009, Jeff Skiles and Sully Sullenberger were flying the plane and right after takeoff the plane flew right into a flock of geese, killing both engines immediately.

Now the plane was going too low and it was going too slow in order for them to turn around and land back at LaGuardia. And they immediately ran through some other options of landing in New Jersey and the pilot realized that they couldn't make it.

Those options were quickly ruled out and the only option was the Hudson River. You probably didn't remember this. Now at that moment what would be the most loving thing for the pilot to do?

To witness over the intercom? To invite people to his midweek Bible study? At that moment the greatest gift that Sullenberger, the pilot could do was to do his job and do it well.

Was to use his experience, his attention, his focus, his good judgment in doing his work. And so in those moments of peril it didn't matter how the captain related to his crew and it didn't matter how he communicated his faith to others or anything like that.

[34 : 55] At that moment the most loving thing for him to do was to be competent enough to land the plane safely. And so I'm not saying, don't hear me to say, that evangelism and praying for your fellow workers and being a good witness and inviting people, those things are just totally unimportant and all you need to do is do your work well.

That's not what I'm saying. But what I am saying is that doing your job well, working competently is always the loving thing to do.

It's always the obedient thing to do. Doing your work and doing your work well is a ministry and it's an act of love towards your fellow man and toward God.

Because, and this is where we want to end, your work is always ultimately an act of worship. It's either an act of worship to yourself or it's an act of worship towards God.

And when you see that your work is a calling from God and because he called me, I'm going to do a good job. I'm going to do a good job and I'm going to do it with all my heart. That honors God.

[36 : 10] When you see that, yes, this is from the Lord and so I'm going to put both hands on it and I'm going to do it and I'm going to do it well because he is somebody worth serving. He's somebody we're doing a good job for.

He's called me to do it and so let me do it. It doesn't matter if I get paid a lot or little. I'm not serving those people. I'm not worshiping those people. I'm serving finally and ultimately him and I'm his man.

I'm his woman for this job, for this place and so I'm going to show the world that he's worthy of my service. He's worthy of all my strength. And so our work, well done, is a wonderful way to say thank you God.

Thank you for your gifts. Thank you for your mercy. Thank you for your salvation. Thank you for your grace. Here's my work. Thank you.

John Coltrane was a brilliant jazz saxophonist in the 40s and 50s and the 60s. And for 10 years, from about 45 to 55, he was enslaved to heroin, to other drugs.

[37 : 28] And he had some sort of religious experience. He had been a professing Christian years and years before. And whether it was conversion, I don't know.

I probably wasn't. But God worked in his life in a very real way, even if it was short of salvation. And through these experience with God, it freed him from drugs and heroin.

And his work took on a new light then. He had new clarity, new abilities, because God had helped him through that. And in his next album, after Coming Clean, after this experience, whatever it was, it's called A Love Supreme.

And he wrote, This album is a humble offering to him, an attempt to say thank you through our work, even as we do in our hearts and with our tongues.

May he help and strengthen all men in every good endeavor. This week, you have a good endeavor. It's different for each one of us.

[38 : 38] You have a good endeavor. You have a good endeavor before you. And so offer it to God and then do it well. Well, we're dismissed.

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