

TEXT SERMONS – Special Days – Labor Day

TITLE: **“A CLEAN FOUR LETTER WORD THAT
MAY GET YOU DIRTY”**

SCRIPTURE: **II Thess. 3:6-15**

The “Clean Four Letter Word That May Get You Dirty” is: W-O-R-K ! Annually we observe “Labor Day” in our country. How do you view work? Since the beginning of the human race work has been thought of either as a necessity, a blessing or a curse. How do you view work? Our culture has some confusion about work. On the one hand, we have “workaholics” and on the other extreme are “work-avoiders.”

Illust. Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, “Work fascinates me, I can sit and watch it for hours?”

- Here’s one that some of you may agree with: “The worst day of fishing is better than the best day of working.”
- Another one I’ve seen goes like this: “Hard work may not kill me, but why take a chance?”
- The majority of people today follow the philosophy of another bumper sticker: “I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.”

The Bible has much to say on the subject of work and the problem is to know what to include and what to omit in a message on work. Perhaps the fullest statement in the New Testament on the importance of work is given by Paul in II Thessalonians 3:

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. “ (II Thess.3:10-15)

The people to whom Paul addressed this letter had recently been converted to Christ and in their new-found interest in things spiritual, they had tended to neglect their daily work routines. So, as soon as Paul heard about this, he wrote, putting work in the proper perspective. And we have, therefore, a theology of work in this passage.

So, what does the Bible teach about work? There are 3 important factors that he articulated in these verses:

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK.

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” (v.10)

Let me say right up front that we should never use this verse in relation to those who are ill, the aged or those who are temporarily unemployed because we often don’t know the whole story. Some have been looking for work for many months and you can’t find a job. We hurt for you.

This verse is referring to those who are able-bodied, are of working age and who refuse to work. Notice the verse again: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” Paul is referring to the person who wills not to work, who refuses to work. In that case, neither should he eat! After a person like that misses a few meals, maybe he will decide that he must get to work after all. Why does working and eating go together? Well, God designed man to be a gardener but the Fall made him a farmer. At the beginning Adam’s job was simply to care for what God had planted. When sin entered the world, he had to plant as well as harvest. From the beginning work was connected to having food.

If we have the opportunity to work, we should take advantage of it. Thomas Edison said, “Opportunity is missed by most people because it looks like work.” Work is God’s anti-poverty program. Let us look at the responsibility of work as it bears upon different areas of life. First,

Work And Physical Life.

“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” That statement hardly needs any elucidation. It’s meaning is clear: physical life is sustained and perpetuated by working to earn a livelihood.

Illust. Here are a couple things said about lazy people:

- Plato said, “He that would eat the nut must crack the shell.”
- Robert Frost, the poet wrote, “The world is full of willing workers; some willing to work, the rest willing to let them.”
- Anonymous wrote: “He always does an honest day’s work—of course, it usually takes him a week to do it.”

Some tongue-in-cheek statements about work:

- A man went to a company seeking employment. The owner said, “I’m sorry I can’t hire you, there isn’t enough work to keep you busy.” The man quickly responded, “Oh, don’t let that bother you, you’d be surprised how little it would take to keep me busy.”
- Here is another: “He’s so lazy they named a shoe after him—the loafer.”

Once again, Paul’s words ring out, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” That relates to work and physical life.

Work And Social Life.

We go to 1 Tim. 5:8 where Paul writes, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

God expects every able bodied person who can find work to support his family. We are to provide for them, to make sure that they have a home, food and clothing. I’m afraid there are a lot of kids growing up who don’t realize that you have to work, earn, save and wait before some of the good things in life become yours to use and enjoy. I shudder, because I think that we are creating people who will never appreciate the hard work that has gone before to create the nation that they are inheriting.

God has always provided for His children. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, God provided them manna for just one day at a time. Every morning they would have to go out and collect the manna again. Only on the 6th day did He give them extra so that they wouldn't have to work on the Sabbath. And God didn't put it in their baskets for them. They had to go out and gather it for themselves. "What You give them they gather in." (Psalm 104:28) A worker is a gatherer; God gives life, health, a job and we gather. Young people, when you get married, remember that God expects you to go to work and provide for your family.

Work And Moral Life.

Eph. 4:28 - "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." Paul puts working over against stealing. Evidently there were Christians who were stealing to exist instead of working.

So, we see from a collection of Paul's instructions about work, that work relates to at least three spheres of life: the physical, social and moral.

Illust. John Stott captures the essence of work when he writes: "Work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God." He is saying, work has physical, social and moral benefits.

Illust. Did you hear the prayer that the little boy prayed in the morning? Well, at night he prayed the usual "now I lay me down to sleep" In the morning he was taught to pray:

*"Now I get me up to work,
I pray the Lord I may not shirk;
If I should die before tonight,
I pray the Lord my work's alright!"*

Work And Spiritual Life.

Colossians 3:23,24 – "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."

Work is a physical effort with a spiritual dimension. Even though work is physical activity, it has a lot to say about our relationship to God. Let's make sure we look at work as an avenue of serving the Lord. The NIV translates Colossians 3:23 as follows: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

Illust. We must never forget that the home of Jesus was the cottage of a working man. He spent the greater part of His life doing the work of a Carpenter. As such, He was doing the Father's will. Work is not unspiritual - Jesus did manual labor!

THE RELIABILITY OF THE WORKER.

II Thess. 3:11-12 - "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

I hasten to give you three thoughts about the reliability of the worker:

A Reliable Worker Is A Contented Worker.

Notice the words: “Work in quietness” in v.12 – that speaks of contentment. Now go back to v.11, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.”

“Disorderly busybodies” are not contented people! We are talking about attitude here. Attitude has everything to do with accomplishment! Quietly working away communicates an attitude of contentment while a busybody communicates a picture of a discontented person.

Illust. There’s a story told about three men who were digging a trench for the foundation for a church. When asked what he was doing, the first, a young fellow replied that he was working because his parents said he had to help with the bills at home; The second man said he was working just earning money to keep the old lady at home happy. The third man had the right attitude about back-breaking work. He said, “I’m building a cathedral to the glory of God.”

Our attitude can make work a drudgery or a delight! Today you can start changing your attitudes about work because it is about your inner life, your heart. If you have allowed Jesus in, then you can transform your service into one of worship, serving God by whatever honorable work you are performing. When there is this heart change, there will be an attitude adjustment about work. Are you a contented worker?

A Reliable Worker Is A Conscientious Worker.

Paul himself is our model of a conscientious worker. He writes in II Thess. 3:7-9 as follows: “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.”

Paul was a model of conscientiousness. He was:

- Not disorderly;
- Not a free-loader – he did not “eat anyone’s bread free of charge”;
- He not only labored but “toiled” – he was a hard worker!
- He even worked the night shift! “worked with labor and toil night and day.”

He wrote to the Colossian Christians: “Whatever you do, do it heartily.” (Colossians 3:23). That is, give it everything you’ve got. Then he gives us the reason why: “as [working] to the Lord and not to men.” Paul did that. Christians ought to be the best workers on the job. They ought to be the best in attitude, the best in dependability, and the best in integrity. All who are employed have a responsibility to be faithful, hard workers or we are sinning. If you want to get a blessing out of what you do, remember that work is what God wants you to do, it isn’t all that He wants you to do, but whatever you do, He wants you to do well. Work with integrity.

Illust. Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays -- not because she may sing a

Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship." He is, indeed. Scripture says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

THE RESPECTABILITY OF WORK.

"Be not weary in doing good." (v.13)

Paul calls work, "doing good." With those words he lifts work out of the secular arena and puts it into the spiritual arena. For the Christian, all work is "doing right" and "doing good." The respectability of work is demonstrated by two divine examples:

Work Is Made Respectable By The Divine Plan.

Before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, work was God's plan for us. Some of you may have thought that work is a consequence of Adam's sin. Not so! Genesis 2:15 states: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

In their perfect, sinless state and perfect environment it was God's plan that Adam and Eve work! To be sure, sin made work harder but it is a serious mistake to think that the principle of work is the result of us being sinners. Yes, work was increased and became harder as a result of sin. God said, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." (Gen.3:17-19) However, Adam and Eve had the responsibility of taking care of the Garden of Eden before they sinned! Later, through Moses, God revealed more about work – "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." (Exodus 20:9)

And, think about this: we will be employed in heaven! Did you forget what Revelation 22 says? Here it is: "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, *and His servants shall serve Him.*" (Rev.22:2-3)

Did you see those last few words – "*and His servants shall serve Him*"? The first paradise, the Garden of Eden, presented Adam and Eve with an occupation. The last paradise, the garden in heaven, provides occupational opportunities! We see then that the respectability of work is derived from God's divine design for us in time and in eternity. Furthermore,

Work Is Made Respectable By The Divine Person.

The first picture we have of God shows Him working: "In the beginning God created." (Gen.1:1) Exodus 20:11 adds: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them."

God is the greatest worker in the universe!

- In His youth Jesus said, “I must be about my Father’s business.” (Luke 2:49);
- Later He said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” (Jn 5:17);
- Near the middle of His ministry, He said, “I must work the works of Him that sent me” (John 9:4);
- At the end of his ministry He said, in His prayer in John 17, “I have finished the work you gave me to do.” (v.4).

The point is that God the Father and God the Son made work respectable. Their associations with work make the person who shuns work or is haphazard about work look like the worst kind of sluggard.

Illust. Homer, the famous Greek writer, said that “the gods hated humans so much that they invented work as a way to punish people.” That is not true! Work is a worthy pursuit, planned by God, Who Himself is a worker. And what a blessed privilege that can be “laborers together with God” (I Cor. 3:9)! Work is not punishment – work is God’s plan and is therefore respectable.

CONCLUSION

I also thank God for my earthly parents who had a strong work ethic. They were good models for me as I was growing up and learning to give a good day’s work for a good day’s pay. However, my greatest Model is the Savior. He said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” (John 9:4)

There remains but one thought that I wish to give you and that is, the person who has not come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, can do only one work that will please God, and that is stated by Jesus in John 6:29 - “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” And I hasten to add,

“I do not work my soul to save,
For that my Lord has done;
But I will work like any slave
For love to God’s dear Son.”

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