

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO WORK

Apologetics

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0. INTRODUCTION

0.1. SOME OF THE POPULAR VIEWS OF WORK

0.1.1. THE BIOLOGICAL-ECONOMICAL VIEW

- Work is only for survival, and get wealth – the most important thing is to get the highest reward
- problem: if I do not need work for living, I may not work at all; leisure more important than the results of the work

0.1.2. THE PHILOSOPHICAL-EVOLUTIONIST VIEW

- Frederick Engels: *The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*
„Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source-next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself.”¹
- problem: work is only an impersonal force, that “happens to humans”

0.1.3. THE SOCIOLOGICAL-CULTURAL VIEW

- Work gives position in society – the place in the hierarchy of importance, dignity or privilege, “the pecking order”
- problem: work idolatry; dependence on humans for self-worth

0.1.4. THE CAREER-PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

- Work is the means of self-realization, gives you sense of significance and purpose
- problem: workaholism; if you are not talented or you cannot achieve what you expect from yourself your life loses meaning

0.2. THE BIBLE

- CALVIN: *The Lord's calling a basis of our way of life*

CALVIN – “Finally, this point is to be noted: the Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling. For he knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, he has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life [*officia ordinavit*]. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living “callings.” [*vocationes*]”²

BARTH – “The life which is obedient to the command of God is much more than work. Even in so far as work is included, it is not in itself and as such that which is demanded of man.³...To attain a comprehensive and indeed Christian and biblical concept of the active life in the sense and along the lines of the command, we must try to see it from above, from the standpoint of God, of heaven, of the kingdom of God coming down from heaven to earth, of the providence and universal rule of God, i.e., of its otherworldly aspects and therefore spiritually. ...An active life lived in obedience must obviously consist in a correspondence to divine action. We are careful not to say in a continuation or development of divine action”⁴

¹ MARX – ENGELS, F. *Collected Works* 25, p. 452

² CALVIN, J. *Institutes III*, 10, 6.

³ BARTH, K. *CD III*, 4, p. 472.

⁴ BARTH, K. *CD III*, 4, p. 474.

1. GENESIS I – MAN&WOMAN, THE IMAGE OF GOD

- **1Cor 10:31** ...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1.1. THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN BEINGS → DIGNITY OF WORK

- not riches, self-fulfillment etc. – but *imitation* of God
- **Gn 1:26** let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (הָרָר) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
- **John 5:17** "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

1.2. THE MODE OF WORK → RULE

- the goodness of creation does not mean there was no need to rule
- **Job 39:16-17** She [the ostrich] deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers; though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear, ¹⁷ because God has made her forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding.

1.3. THE CHRISTIAN LIKES WORK

- the attitudes to work in Antiquity – low opinion (dualism: physical world lower than the eternal psyche → work intended for slaves)
- **2Thes 3:6-10** Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.**

1.4. THE GOAL IS COMMUNION WITH GOD (SHABBAT)

- **Ex 20:9-10** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.
- **Pr 23:4** Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist.
(אַל-תִּיגַע לְהַעֲשִׂיר מִבֵּינְתֶיךָ חָרָה)
- **Mt 11:28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
- **Heb 4:9** then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the **people of God**

2. GENESIS 2 – MAN&WOMAN, THE SERVANTS OF GOD

- dignity (focus of the 1st chapter) and servant hood (focus of the 2nd chapter)

2.1. THE POSITION OF HUMAN BEINGS → SUBMISSION IN WORK

- work *for* somebody – obeying, providing
- **Gn 2:15-17** The LORD God took the man and put him in the **garden** of Eden to work (עָבַד) it and keep it (שָׁמַר). ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded (צִוָה) the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the **garden**, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat¹ of it you shall surely die."

2.2. THE MODE OF WORK – SERVICE

- labour (עָבַד) and protect (שָׁמַר)
- eating in Eden → keeping the garden (work for living)

2.3. THE CHRISTIAN DOES THE WILL OF HIS MASTER

- **Lk 17:10** So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants;¹ we have only done what was our duty.'

- [for slaves:] **Col 3:23-24** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

2.4. THE GOAL IS HUMAN COMMUNITY (FAMILY)

- family – the basis of all human relationship – Adam got Eve (he didn't find a help between the animals)
- father provides for the family – loving, protecting and guiding
- **Acts 20:34** You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me
- **1Tim 5:8** But if anyone does not provide for his relatives (τῶν ἰδίων), and especially for members of his household (μάλιστα οἰκείων), he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (ἀπίστου χείρων).

3. GENESIS 3 – MAN&WOMAN, REBELS AGAINST GOD

- **Hos 6:7** But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

3.1. SIN → SEPARATION FROM GOD AND EDEN

- enmity; fear; death...
- **Gn 3:23-24** ...the LORD God sent him out (שלח) from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove (גרש) out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

3.2. THE MODE OF WORK – SWEAT

- slavery; futility (Ecc)
- cursed not *work* but *the ground* → difficult to make living
- **Gn 3:17-19** "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' **cursed is the ground** because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

3.3. THE HARD WORK → NEED FOR SALVATION

- **Mt 5:4** **Blessed are** those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
- **Mt 11:28** **Come** to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will **give** you **rest**.
- **Rev 14:13** Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

3.4. WHY WORK IS HARD

- **Isaiah 61:1-3** The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;¹ he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;² ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion - to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- We need to look at work from several angles that the Bible gives us.
- Our attitude to work depends on our attitude to God, family/society and our sinfulness.
- Jesus is the perfect example of the man whose work is both obedience and rule of God, the Father.