

Biblical Perspective On Work

Six divine principles

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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WORK

«I know what it is to be in need and what it is to have more than enough. I have learnt this secret so that anywhere, at any time I am content, whether I am full or hungry, whether I have too much or too little.» (Philippians 4: 12)

The apostle Paul set us a wonderful example of how to study the Word of God and put it into practice in our lives - an example I would suggest for us all to follow, let us like Paul learn to be good stewards and live life in all its fullness.

Since childhood our minds have come under unrighteous influences concerning material sufficiency. We have come under the influence of the enemy and lying, pilfering and dishonesty have taken root in our characters. To this list we may also add the tendency to receive profit without any outlay in the form of labour or effort. We need to abandon such concepts and lay aside these images and to begin to live anew according to the Word.

«In conclusion my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable.» (Philippians 4: 8)

Our aim is to do all things righteously so that the devil cannot exploit us, impede us and corrupt our lives. We should learn how to be victorious over him in our lives. But how?

«Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the devil's evil tricks.» (Ephesians 6: 11)

He often experience material difficulties, lose our jobs, our money, our possessions. In times of sufficiency let us not become content. The enemy will surely come against such an image of satisfaction. In our ignorance we give the devil the opportunity to rob and deceive us.

«Don't give the devil a chance.» (Ephesians 4: 27)

What are the evil tricks and opportunities for the devil referred to in the Word? What right does he have to bring evil into our lives? We ourselves, unwittingly, give him that right.

«The man who used to rob must stop robbing, in order to earn an honest living for himself and to be able to help the poor.»
(Ephesians 4: 28)

This verse sets forth some important principles. If you study them well you will be able to stand against the devil.

1. THE MAN WHO USED TO ROB MUST STOP ROBBING

Who is a thief?

«The thief comes only in order to kill, steal and destroy.» (John 10: 10)

If we do the same we carry out the will of the devil. In whose likeness are we created?

Biblical Perspective On Work

«On it is written the curse that is to go out over the whole land every thief will be removed from the land.» (Zechariah 5-3)
«People don't despise a thief if he steals food when he is hungry yet if he is caught he must pay back seven times more - he must give up everything he has.» (Proverbs 6:30-31)

These laws are at work in the life of every human being. Even if a thief remains uncaught and unpunished he will eventually lose more than he ever gained.

As Christians we should work honestly so that all our deeds witness to the truth - not coveting that which belongs to someone else. not appropriating to ourselves anything for which we have not paid the correct price, receiving only that money which is due for carrying out our work. Even if destitution or famine should come upon us, we should not allow ourselves to be led astray but show faithfulness.

«You preach “Do not steal but do you yourself steal?»
(Romans 2: 22)

«If I have more I might say that I do not need you. But if I am poor I might steal and bring disgrace on My God.»
(Prov. 30: 9)

«They must not answer them back or steal from them. Instead they must show that they are always good and faithful.»
(Titus 2: 10)

We may well convince ourselves that it is wrong to steal. But it sometimes happens that we receive money for which we have not worked. In times of raging inflation, so prevalent in Russia

today it is difficult to maintain one's income. Many deceitful companies have been established in Moscow. They ensnare those who have no particular desire to work or to endure material hardship. These people invest their money and hope to receive a return and thus escape their material hardship. But what does the scripture have to say concerning this method of making a profit:

*«He lends money for profit. Will he live?
Ho he will not. He has done all these
disgusting things so he will die.»* (Ezekiel
18: 13)

This is what will happen to the one who lends money and charges interest. He will die.

«Lord who may enter your temple? Who may worship on Zion - your sacred hill..... He makes loans without charging interest and cannot be bribed to testify against the innocent. Whoever does these things will always be secure.»

With this in mind be aware that these actions belong in the kingdom of darkness. God is not about to bring you profits from such dealings. Do not bother to pray about that. The Scriptures are unequivocal in their appraisal of such activities. Moreover it allows the enemy a foothold and gives him the right to strike against you. Thus will he rob you. You expected to receive a big return on a small investment, where is the sense in that? This scripture may prove contraversial:

*«You may charge interest on what you loan
to a foreigner but not on what you lend to an
fellow-Israelite. Obey this rule and the lord
your God will bless everything you do,»* (Deu-
teronomy 23: 20)

Who are these foreigners?

Biblical Perspective On Work

The law was given to the people of God, to the nation of Israel. Everyone else was a foreigner. Now we are in the time of grace. Everyone has the possibility of salvation. To us is given the ministry of reconciliation. Thus we are to bless the unbeliever (the “foreigner”, that we may thus help to bring him to salvation.

A lot more could be said on the question of loans, interest and so on. I think that it is clear enough that we should not lend money for interest.

2. IT IS BETTER TO WORK.

This is what we should do: - work! Read Psalm 128 noticing especially verse 2:

«Your work will provide for your needs ; you will be happy and prosperous.!»

If we walk with the lord, our work will be blessed. Many seek their happiness in work but do not always receive joy and delight from the work of their hands.:

«This is what I have found out: the best thing anyone can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has worked for during the short life that God has given him; this is man's fate. If God gives a man wealth and property and lets him enjoy them, he should be grateful and enjoy what he has worked for. It is a gift from God. Since God has allowed him to be happy, he will not worry too much about how short life is.» (Ecclesiastes 5: 18-19)

Not everyone has this gift. Work is a reward from God.

«God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness to those who please him.» (Ecclesiastes 2: 26)

Wisdom and knowledge together are revelation, that is the result of walking in the Spirit. So «hen we obey God and follow his laws he rewards us.

«The best thing a man can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has earned. And yet I realized that evene this conies from God. How else could you have anything to eat or enjoy yourselves at all?» (Ecclesiastes 2: 24-25)

Some tines man is wise and successful in his own eyes but is anxious about his work.

«You work for something with all your wisdom, knowledge and skill and then you have to leave it all to someone who hasn't had to work for it. It is useless and it isn't right. You work and worry your way through life and what do you have to show for it? As long as you live everything you do brings nothing but worry and heartache. Even at night your mind can't rest. It is all useless.» (Ecclesiastes 2: 21-23)

So if we work outside of God's Will we labour in vain. Our minds need to be renewed, we must give up our previous attitude to work and do everything unto God. Many believe this to be right in connection with Christian work and ministry but that it does not matter how we earn a living. This is not right. All that we do, at work at home and at church should be done to glorify the Father. When God created Adam he gave him a commission:

Biblical Perspective On Work

*«Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it.»
(Genesis 2: 15)*

At his ascension Jesus Christ, gave his disciples a commission:

*«He said to them, “Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind.»
(Mark 16: 15).*

If we really believe the Word then all that we do should be done in accordance with it. He who does nothing should not eat:

«Our brothers we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to keep away from all brothers who are living a lazy life and who do not follow the instructions that we gave them. You yourselves know very well that you should do just what we did. We were not lazy when we were with you. We did not accept anyone’s support without paying for it. Instead we worked and toiled; we kept working day and night so as not to be an expense to any of you. We did this not because we had no right to demand our support; we did it to be an example for you to follow. While we were with you we used to say to you: “whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat. “ We say this because we hear that there are some people among you who live lazy lives and who do nothing except meddle in other peoples” business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we command these people and warn them to lead orderly lives and work to earn their own living.» (2 Thessalonians 3: 6-12)

I do not know which of you does not want to work but I do know that it is difficult to find a good job. I urge you, above all else to resolve this question once and for all. What sort of work do you want. There was a time when Avel and I were looking for work. Before praying we wrote down the points we would consider important:

1. interesting, creative, useful
2. long term
3. close to home
4. enough to live on
5. good managers and staff

It may be that you would consider other things to be important but the main thing is to receive satisfaction and joy from your work as well as doing something useful with your hands.

3. TO DO SOMETHING USEFUL WITH YOUR HANDS.

All that we do should be of benefit to the Lord, to other people, to the earth. We expend a great deal of time and energy in work and earn enough to live on but our work does not, in itself, serve any useful purpose. In this way we allow the devil to come against us and to spoil our lives:

«It will produce weeds and thorns and you will have to eat wild plants.» Such is the expectation of those who do not know the Lord God. What use are weeds and thorns to anyone? Who wants to eat wild plants? What sort of work is not useful?

Biblical Perspective On Work

The usefulness of a job is not dependent on the nature of the profession. You may have a wonderful profession but not do a scrap of good.

«Ail those who make idols are worthless, and the gods they prize so highly are useless. Those who worship these Gods are blind and ignorant - and they will be disgraced.» (Isaiah 44: 9)

Verses 10-13 go on to tell us that all who take any part in this will be disgraced: artists, metal workers, carpenters. So we need to know the end product of our labour, what benefit will result from it.

«Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion. They have made it a desolation; desolate it mourns to me. The whole land lays desolate but no man lays it to heart. Upon all the bare heights in the desert destroyers have come for the sword of the Lord devours from one end of the land to the other; no flesh has peace. They have sown wheat and reaped thorns, they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the Lord.» (Jeremiah 12: 10-13)

The work of the pastor is a noble calling but he can lay waste the vineyard. Labour without knowledge and wisdom will yield nothing just because the work is not done from the heart. Here is another example:

«There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money but instead of getting better she got worse ail the time.» (Mark 5: 25-26)

There are doctors who do more harm than good - and teachers and educators and all sorts of workers who cause damage. If things are not going well for you in your work, then you need to study, to seek every opportunity to bring success into your work or you need to leave that profession for another. Your talents and skills need to be revealed. It may even be that at work your time is spent to no good purpose but yet you get paid. Again that gives the enemy a foothold.

«Curse the man who does not do the Lord's work with all his heart.» (Jeremiah 48; 10).

If we are careless in our attitude towards our work then the Lord cannot entrust his work to us. If you love your work, be it at home or in the workplace, at school or at church, you should carry it out conscientiously and with all your heart. Carelessness and laziness cause great damage in any area of work. These attitudes are of the devil and we should abandon them.

«Lazy people should learn a lesson from the way ants live. They have no leader, chief or ruler but they store up their food during the summer, getting ready for winter. How long is the lazy man going to lie in bed? When is he ever going to get up? "I'll just take a short nap" he says; "I'll fold my hands and rest awhile. But while he sleeps poverty will attack him like an armed robber.» (Proverbs 6: 6-11)

If we are experiencing need or poverty it may well be that a spirit of laziness has found a home within us. We need to examine ourselves and correct such ways. We do not find it an effort to do unclean and wrong things but when we need to do something righteous we are hindered by laziness. We can always find excuses, lack of time etc.

Biblical Perspective On Work

«At one time you surrendered yourselves entirely as slaves to impurity and wickedness for wicked purposes. In the same way you must now surrender yourselves entirely as slaves of righteousness to holy purposes.»

(Romans 6: 19)

It is just as simple and should be done just as willingly. Distance yourself from carelessness, laziness, ignorance and dissatisfaction so that you may benefit from your work.

4. TO EARN AN HONEST LIVING.

From our sufficiency we are to cover our own needs and help those in need. We are to do sufficient work to cover our needs but not to such an extent that we are preoccupied with accumulating wealth and using our income to satisfy our lusts. If we are blessed abundantly we are to use to help the poor.

At one time Abel and I pondered over our budget and arrived at the conclusion that we were unable to manage everything at once - even those things that were our first priorities. We decided to stand in faith with respect to our material needs and that our budget would gradually grow. I suggest the following order of priority for expenditure:

1. a stable, healthy diet
2. appropriate clothing
3. education and cultural development
4. lifestyle, convenience
5. recreation, entertainment, own transport etc.

I have met people who have next to nothing in the fridge but who spend money on beautiful tableware or a new car. But if you do not have enough to eat can you drive a car? And what will you eat off your beautiful tableware? Maybe you will impress someone but there is no wisdom in that.

«Make it your aim to live a quiet life. to mind your own business and to earn your own living, just as we told you before. In this way you will win the respect of those who are not believers and you will not have to depend on anyone for what you need. «(I Thessalonians 4: 11 - 12)

We are commanded to work with our own hands, to lead decent and worthy lives. We see again these basic principles which underscore everything but the concluding phrases of these two verses go much further. The two parts of this principle are interdependent as we give so shall we receive. That is God's law.

We have studied together how to organise the means at our disposal to accommodate our needs. For this we need wisdom and fellowship with the Father.

5. TO GIVE TO THOSE IN NEED.

I know it is hard to pass by beggars on the street. The Word of God tell us first to give to our brothers and sisters, fellow believers, who are in need. You may give to a beggar but he will continue to beg. You need to bring him to the Lord and teach him to work or give him the means to work. Among the poor are many deceivers who extort money, or rather steal from those who are in similar need. We know to exercise wisdom in giving to beggars. An incident in which Abel was involved serves to illustrate this. Returning home late one night he encountered an old woman weeping in the doorway. She begged him for help: her daughter had died leaving three children. He came up to the flat, collected some money and went back down. He suggested to the old woman that she should take him to her home to see if he could help in any other way. She took him to the block of flats and told him the number but waited below while he went up. He rang the bell. Someone answered the

Biblical Perspective On Work

door and told him that no - one had died and there was no grandmother either. Returning below Abel found that the old woman had vanished. Such conartists are always to be found. Such people will often exploit the fact that believers are to give to the poor. To every believer is given first and foremost a ministry of reconciliation. So it should be a matter of priority to bring the gospel to all who ask for our pity. We can bring him to new birth, establish him in the word and meet his needs in this way. I quote an example of children's homes.

Many missionaries bring humanitarian aid to the homes but because they do not know the language they are unable to bring the gospel and so only provide the children with books, toys and food. At the same time believers who have the ability to evangelise lack the ability to provide material needs. This situation shows a lack of wisdom.

«You will always have the poor people with you but you will not always have me.» (John 12: 8)

What does that mean - you will not always have me?

«I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to Me will certainly receive his reward.» (Mark 9: 41)

We should give to men of God. In this way the love of God is made manifest through us.

*«This is how we know what love is: Christ gave his life for us. We too then ought to give our lives for our brothers. If a rich person sees his brother in need yet closes his hear» against his brother, how can he claim he loves God?»
(1 John 3: 16-17)*

Biblical Perspective On Work

By giving in this way we bless one another in the Lord's Name. When we give to a man of God the Lord makes up for the gift and increases it so that we ourselves not only know no need but can share with those in need. You can know the victory in this. Read the story of widow's oil and flour in 1 Kings 17: 8-16. This is not merely a description of a miracle but a very important principle. When you share with a believer to the very last believing God for the lack then abundant blessing will be poured out into your life. In the same way if you experience scarcity remain faithful. Do not be afraid to share your last with one in need for then there will be an overflow in your life. The eighth and ninth chapters of the second letter to the Corinthians is about helping the believers. Please read them in your own later.

I hope that you have now learnt how to work righteously, how to use your money righteously. The desire of my heart is to see our Church living like the early believers in the Book of Acts. (Acts 2: 42-47 and 3: 32-35)

