

## Work – The Curse vs. Image of God

### Introduction

Work is a small word with many meanings, and numerous synonyms, most of which carry negative connotations (e.g. sweat, toil, punishment). The general negative view that many people hold of the word ‘work’ can be traced back to the book of beginnings, Genesis, where the curse is pronounced in the Garden of Eden.

In Gen 3 an account of man’s transgression is given. After God curses the serpent (Gen 3:14, 15) his attention turns towards Adam and Eve. The first pronouncement to Eve is that child-bearing will be extremely difficult (v16). To Adam, the ground is cursed because of him (v17), and through sweat and sorrow Adam is going to eat. Neither Adam nor Eve is cursed, unlike the serpent, but the activities which they will be engaged in (child bearing, working the land) are cursed and will involve sorrow.

Chapter 4 of Genesis records the generation that follows Adam and Eve. Cain kills Abel because of jealousy, and an unprepared heart to worship God appropriately, and he is afterward cursed by God (v11, 12). Interestingly, the curse placed on Cain involves the futility of working the ground (v12), and so the ground can be thought of as having been cursed twice, but what does the ground have to do with work?

### The Ground

Genesis 2 is in some ways a repeat of the creation record provided in chapter 1, with more details provided. Verse 5 tells us that after the earth was created and everything else (trees, animals), there was no one to “till the ground” (i.e. work the land). After God created Adam, he planted a garden and placed him there (v 7, 8), and the reason for this is given in verse 15, to work the land. The specific command that was given to man is recorded in verses 16, 17, and also in chap 1:28 – 30. So God assigned tasks (work) to man.

The assignment of these tasks (work) was given prior to God establishing the institution of marriage (chap 2:21-25), and more importantly prior to the pronouncement of the curse (chap 3:17-19). The curse pronounced in chapter 3, in no way diminished, or annulled (i.e. made it void) the original dominion tasks that God gave to man. In both chap 3 and 4, the ground being cursed, man was now expected to perform these tasks in an environment characterized by great difficulty, sweat and sorrow, the favor of God (which could easily have brought forth abundance without much effort), now being withheld. But is work only tilling the ground?

## Work

The wisdom writer in Proverbs 31 describes a “virtuous” woman in verses 10-31. A variety of qualities are highlighted, and the list can be quite daunting. Some noteworthy qualities are found in verses 13 and 27. In these verses and others it is quite clear that such a person is one who is occupied with performing tasks that benefit her family. From this passage we arrive at a working definition of work: To work is to be occupied with, or to perform duties or tasks.

In this lesson we will not focus only on one’s profession, or career, or only consider activities done for remuneration, but we will examine the system or institution of occupation. With this understanding we have a basket that contains activities that can be considered sacred or secular, righteous or unrighteous, spirit-based or flesh-based. We will not aim to make any distinctions, but rather examine from scripture what God says about this institution of occupation, work.

## Why Work?

God is the God of purpose, and through His word He identifies many reasons for His actions. The reason for the institution of marriage is given in Gen 2:18-25 (it is not good for man to be alone). Similarly it is reasonable to expect that God had purposes/reasons for this institution of work.

Ever wondered why God took six days for creation, why not all at once? Ever wondered why the Lord at the marriage in Cana allowed the men to “work” so hard to have the water turned to wine, why not just speak it and have it changed (John 2:1-11). Or why when the Lord performed his miracles they involved work, example the disciples fishing in Luke 5 or the miracle of the 5 loaves in Matthew 14? The fact is although God is omnipotent, He is constantly occupied. The Lord Jesus mentioned this in John 5:17, where He says that His father works and He works. It is God’s nature to be occupied. Idleness and laziness are constantly attacked in God’s word (e.g. Pro 24:30-34). So work has been given to keep man occupied.

Man was created last, and superior to all of God’s creation, as recorded in Genesis 1, 2. The distinguishing aspect of man’s creation was the statement in chapter 1:26, 27, man was created in God’s image. All creation reflect the awesome beauty (glory) of God (Ps 19:1). The complexity of various life forms was highlighted in the response that the Lord God gave to Job in Job 38-41, four chapters dedicated to the immensity of God’s creative work. God is The Creator, not only able to bring life out of death, but to do it with beauty. Man, created in God’s image has been given the privilege of reflecting God’s creativity within the institution of occupation, work (Gen 1:26-31; Eph 2:10).

As stewards within the institution of occupation, we are expected to be productive. Work is also the avenue for us to earn a living. This is probably the main reason that most people engage in work. It is not a bad reason, but has been distorted, as man has become greedy. However, distortions that exist must not cloud God's perspective as provided through His word. We must eat to survive, and stealing is against God's law. Ephesians 4:28 provides the command to anyone engaged in stealing to desist and rather work to earn. The apostles worked while they were ministering so that they could earn a living (Acts 18:3; 20:34, 35; 1 Thes 2:9; 11Thes 3:8, 9). The apostle Paul makes it clear in 11 Thes3:10 that he who does not work should not eat. Work provides earning capacity, and should be engaged to avoid poverty and stealing (Pro 10:4; 28:19; 1 Tim 5:8).

### The Blessing

In Exodus 31 we read of God informing Moses of who will construct the ark. In verses 1-6 and in chap 35:30-35; 36:1, 2, God states that He has blessed men with abilities to perform the tasks assigned to Moses. A similar example is in 11Chron 2:12-14, where Solomon receives assistance for building the temple. In Daniel 1:4-6, 17 we note that God blessed these Hebrew men with wisdom so that their captors were impressed with their ability to work. In addition to the privilege of work, God is the one who blesses us with the abilities/skills to work. Is it not then pitiful that we should waste opportunities to work?

With the understanding that God blesses us with the abilities we have, we should then always work as to the Lord. No doubt we find ourselves engaged in tasks that are often undesirable. The Ephesians and Colossians would relate to having difficult working environments, but the exhortation to them was to work as to the Lord (Eph 6:5-7, Col 3:22; Tit 2:9; 1Tim 6:1, 2). We are to work as unto the Lord, glorifying Him with all our strength and might, knowing that He rewards good work (Eph 6:8; 1Cor 10:31; Col 3:23).

Work is an avenue of worship. Many great inventions that have changed life the way we know it have been orchestrated by those who understood that as we use our God-given abilities we glorify and worship God and He can expand His kingdom through our work. Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press thought of his work as providing the opportunity to spread God's word to many more people. His invention was deemed by some as the most significant of the last millennium. Many other examples exist of those whose work impacted the kingdom of God, and may we also see our work, our tasks within the institution of occupation, as a privilege through which we can glorify, honor, praise, and worship God.