

Work as Christian Duty

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 9:4–10

Background Scripture: Genesis 2:15–25; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12

Today's Scripture: Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; John 5:17; John 9:4;
Acts 20:33–35; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12

I. Work Given by God

Genesis 2:15

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

15. Before the fall, God declared that work is good. While the curse following humanity's disobedience renders work toilsome—marked by thorns, thistles, and sweat to bring forth food—it did not start out that way. The arduous nature of work is still with us today, but it ought not to distort our view of work itself. God himself is a worker, demonstrated by the creation narratives in Genesis 1–2, and he calls humanity to work alongside him.

Exodus 20:9

9 “Six days you shall labor and do all your work,”

9. This verse is part of the fourth of the Ten Commandments, that of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Work is necessary, and so is rest. God modeled rest from his work of creation in Genesis 2:1–3.

II. Work of God

John 5:17

17 In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

17. This verse is Jesus' response to Jewish leaders who persecute him for healing on the Sabbath. Although God rested after his work of creation, his providential care continues without interruption, and Jesus shows the alignment of his own priorities with those of his heavenly Father. Consistent throughout the Gospels, Jesus' perspective is that to heal on the Sabbath is to do the good work of the Father.

John 9:4

4 “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

4. Here, Jesus uses the terms *day* and *night* to represent his own limited time on earth to *do the works of him who sent him*, the Father. Contextually, Jesus is speaking with his disciples about a man born blind. The reason Jesus gives for why this man was born blind has nothing to do with the man's or his parents' sin; rather, it happened so that “the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3).

III. Work to Meet Needs

Acts 20:33–35

33 “I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs

of my companions. ³⁵ **In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”**

Paul is addressing the elders of the church in Ephesus. Speaking to them before heading to Jerusalem for the final time, he summarizes his ministry.

33. Much of the economy of the city of Ephesus was rooted in the renowned temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana). This temple attracted many visitors to the city and brought significant wealth to the artisans who made shrines. However, Paul’s preaching and the resulting conversions to Christianity disrupted the local economy. Those who profited greatly from the temple incited a riot in response (Acts 19:28–40).

To a modern reader, it may seem unusual that Paul mentions *clothing* alongside *silver* and *gold*. However, dye and fabric were costly in antiquity, and clothing was often valued similarly to gold and silver. The main point is not the specific items mentioned, but rather that faith in Christ does not nullify the law of God that prohibits coveting.

34. The phrase *you yourselves know* mirrors how Paul started his speech to the elders (Acts 20:18). He spent at least three years in Ephesus, giving the elders ample time to know him and his character. Paul had the right to receive support from the churches and sometimes did. But he must distinguish himself from false teachers who sought to profit from their teachings.

It is worth reiterating the reach of Paul’s work and its benefits: his *hands . . . have supplied* not only to his own *needs* but also to those of his traveling *companions*.

35. Physical labor is not to be for selfish gain, but to assist others. Paul worked with his hands to be self-supporting,

thereby setting an example. His actions confirmed his words, or to put it a bit differently, his walk matched his talk. The word translated *weak* can mean someone physically ill or spiritually vulnerable.

Although *the words of the Lord Jesus* that Paul cites are not specifically recorded in the Gospels, we must remember that the Gospels do not capture every word spoken by Jesus. Thus, this particular quote may have been commonly known within the early church through oral tradition. Its message certainly aligns with Jesus’ teachings.

IV. Work and the People of God **2 Thessalonians 3:6–12**

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

6. The *brothers and sisters* Paul addresses here are those in the church at Thessalonica. His appeal *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* strikes a note of formality and

utmost seriousness. This sense is further heightened by Paul's language of *command*. He is not offering mere suggestions or guidelines! He uses the word translated "command" a total of five times in his two short letters to the Thessalonians.

Paul's command deals with behavior toward *every believer who is idle and disruptive*. The idea is of someone who lives in a haphazard way. This undoubtedly includes having a poor work ethic—laziness, if you will. Those not in this category are not to hang around with those who are.

7. In contrasting himself with the disorderly person of the previous verse, Paul offers himself as an example *to follow*. His request is not unreasonable. As seen in the commentary on Genesis 2:15, work is good. God himself works and invites humanity to join him.

8. The first part of this verse is an extension of the previous verse. In avoiding laziness in their manner of living, Paul and his companions made sure to provide compensation for the food they ate.

The middle part of this verse reflects Paul's previous letter to the church. Paul likely refers to his manual work as a tentmaker, through which he supports himself in Corinth. Likely for the sake of emphasis, Paul uses two words, *laboring* and *toiling*, to emphasize the extent of his efforts to avoid being a financial burden. He also uses the words *night* and *day* as another point of emphasis. This perhaps alludes to a noteworthy sacrifice of his time, working to meet his needs while preaching and teaching the gospel.

9. The word translated as *right* in English can also mean "authority" or "power." The two terms are related, although there is a difference: authority is the *right* to do something, while power is the *ability* to do something.

As an apostle of Christ, Paul had both power and authority. Any decision of his

not to use either one is not evidence of their absence—he simply chose not to exercise them. Paul consistently evaluated his actions and refrained if they would cause other believers to stumble. In the case of the Thessalonians, it was of significant benefit for them to see him working for his bread rather than receiving it without payment.

10. Paul places great importance on *work* and personal responsibility. A person *unwilling to work* is not fit to receive food to *eat*. We may safely assume that the word *one* in this command refers to those physically able to work. Historically, the church cared for those unable to work for various reasons. Paul's instruction aims to ensure that those capable of working do their part, thereby preventing a burden from falling unfairly on others.

11. Here, Paul focuses on a point initially raised in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, above. He receives reports that some individuals refuse to work and are also actively interfering with the work of others. Paul will have to deal with this problem more than once before the end of his ministry (1 Timothy 5:13). When some members choose to be idle and meddlesome, it burdens others and creates friction and discord. This internal strife weakens the church's witness to the outside world, undermining its mission and message.

Unity among Christians is a primary goal of the New Testament church. Church leaders are responsible for fostering and maintaining this unity, sometimes requiring them to directly address disruptive behavior.

12. This verse has the cure for those who are "busybodies": stable, meaningful work. Work is a connection between God and humanity, and it should be conducted in a holy manner. The ultimate goal is for everyone who is physically able to work to provide for themselves, summarized as *earn the food they eat*.

Involvement Learning

Work as Christian Duty

Into the Lesson

What is your job? What is busy about it? How is it challenging?

Our work is an important part of our identity. In today's lesson, consider why God values work and how we can complete our work—in whatever context—as an act of worship and obedience to him.

Into the Word

Read Genesis 2:15 and Exodus 20:9. Write a “job description” for human beings in service to God.

Read John 5:17; 9:4; and Acts 20:33–35 and answer the following questions regarding each person: 1—What is each person's work? 2—How does each person complete it? 3—What is the work's purpose?

God the Father _____

Jesus _____

Humans _____

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12. What are the main points of Paul's teaching?

What does Paul say is the correct response to “busybodies”?

Key Text

“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

—Acts 20:35

Into Life

Based on today's study, what is the meaning and purpose of work?

Write down a personal resolution regarding work in service to God.

Thought to Remember

Those who are able should engage in good work.