**Pastor’s Post #26: “YOUR WORK IN GOD’S WORLD*”* (09/02/’17)**

We all – at one time or another, and more or less – complain about our work: Its stresses…or its boredom. Its frustrations. Its difficulties. We wonder if we’re really doing something important. Eventually, we all long for retirement from our work – or, at least, for a change in the pace of our lives.

All of this misses the most basic truth that God made us to work.

When God created our first father, Adam, *he put him in the Garden of Eden to work and to keep it*.

He and our first mother, Eve, were to have dominion over the earth and over all of its creatures. They were to *be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it….* All of that is about work – labor – and lots of it – all the time.

It was the fall of our first parents into what is sometimes called “an estate of sin and misery” that brought the burdens and aggravations associated with work. The labors of childbearing and child-rearing would be accompanied by pain. Working the land – subduing the earth – would, from that point on, have its thorns, thistles, and sweat. Work remained good; but it carried with it the constant reminders that we now live in a fallen world – and we are fallen creatures.

As you read through the Bible, on every page you meet the issues of work, wealth, and their roles in the development of society. Enoch builds the first of the world’s cities. Jabal becomes the father of those who lived in the fields and tended livestock. His brother, Jubal, is the father of those who wrote and performed music – playing the instruments of the lyre and pipe. Tubal-cain become the first of the tradesmen who forge instruments of bronze and iron.

God commended labor and wealth to the nation of Israel. The fourth commandment – which called for a day of Sabbath rest in each week – includes the mandate to *labor six days.*  And, under the blessing of God, many benefits would come to Israel and to others from the fruits of those labors. *The Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful*, wrote Moses (under the inspiration of God) in Deuteronomy 16:15.

The Bible’s book of Proverbs teems with references to work, the dangers of slothfulness, keeping our priorities when it comes to wealth (Godliness is better than gold!), but also commending wealth as well as the labor necessary to secure it. *The hand of the diligent makes one rich.* But it is equally true that *the blessing of the Lord makes one rich – and He adds no sorrow to it.* *In all labor there is profit, bu*t (one of my favorite phrases as one who must do a lot of speaking as part of his work) *much talk leads only to poverty.* And the memorable portrait of the virtuous woman in Proverbs chapter 31 is full of references to the kinds of work that women do as mothers, wives, and as citizens of their communities.

The New Testament, too, constantly refers to work. Jesus’ parables, in particular, speak of the use of gifts – returning them to God with interest when we stand before Him on the day of Judgment. It takes time, labor, and money to be a Good Samaritan. While a person’s life truly *does not consist in the in the abundance of his possessions,* we are still called to be *rich toward God* in the use of our possessions. If we are not faithful in the use of our worldly wealth, we won’t be *entrusted with the true riches* of the wealth of heaven.

And in the epistles of the New Testament, Christians are called to *redeem the time* (literally: *to make market of the time)* *working* (and the word means “working hard; working to a sweat”), *doing honest work with our own hands so that we may have something to share with anyone in need.* While we are warned *not to set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches (*which may fly away as quickly as they come), we are still to *do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share – thus storing up treasure for ourselves as a good foundation for the future.* In fact, this way of living is nothing less than *taking hold of that which is truly life.*

While this high biblical view of “vocation” – or “calling” was only more or less emphasized over the succeeding centuries of our Christian era, the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century heralded it. The individual has worth and dignity because he or she is made in the image of God. And even as God works, so do we. We’re given gifts for service in the world. All vocations, or callings in life, are sacred before God. “A dairy maid can milk cows to the glory of God”, proclaimed the German Reformer, Martin Luther. The Swiss Reformer, John Calvin, wrote that “the Lord commands every one of us, in all of the actions of life, to regard his vocation…Every individual’s line of life…is, as it were, a post assigned him by the Lord, that he may not wander about in uncertainty all his days…” Out of this grew a distinctive and potent Christian work ethic: Prize property as a gift of God. Exercise good stewardship of everything. Work hard to make a profit – in every area of life. Use that profit wisely – not least for the benefit of those around us. Or, as the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, so memorably expressed it: *Make all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.*

On today’s *Visit to the Pastor’s Study* we’re going to open up some of these themes as we consider *Your Work in God’s World.*

And to do that, I want to make use of what, in my opinion, is one of the richest (an apt term for dealing with this topic!) – one of the richest, most provocative, and fascinating chapters in a book about bringing the joys of God’s blessings to the world around us. The book is called (appropriately!) *Joy for the World.* The chapter is “Work and the Economy”; and it contains gems like this:

* *The only way to root out materialism is to reorient people’s attitudes about their entire economic lives.*
* *We work fruitfully not because we want to gain dignity and security, but because we already have (dignity and security) in God.*
* *When Christians integrate their faith with their work, performing their work as manifestation of discipleship and prioritizing fruitful service to their neighbors, they spend most of their lives infusing the impact of the (Holy) Spirit’s work in their (own) hearts directly into the very bloodstream of human civilization.*
* *If affirming marriage is a major problem area for American Christians today, affirming work and economics is an area where we need even more growth.*

Dr. Greg Forster penned those thought-provoking statements. He’s the author of the book from which they come: *Joy for the World.* Dr. Forster earned his PhD with distinction in political philosophy from Yale University. He is a Friedman fellow at EdChoice. Currently he serves as Director of the *Oikonomia Network* at the Center for Transformational Churches - a division of Trinity International University, where he is also a visiting assistant professor of faith and culture. He is the author of six books (in addition to *Joy for the World*), - including an e book to be released in connection with the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation - and co-editor of four other books. Dr. Forster has also published numerous articles in scholarly and popular periodicals, has spoken at conferences of *The Gospel Coalition* and other Christian groups, edits the group blog *Hang Together*, and contributes regularly to online outlets. His great burden is to equip churches, individual Christians and Christian families to be good citizens of both the Kingdom of God and the communities in which the Lord has put them. Dr. Greg Forster is our guest once again on *A Visit to the Pastor’s Study.*

Here’s a link to the full program:

Yours in the King of Kings,

Pastor Bill