

CHAPTER FOUR

Our God Loves to Work

“But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’”
John 5:17

MASTER PRINCIPLE #4

**Work is a holy,
everlasting calling.**

Work is not part of the curse. It preceded sin and the fall of man, and Jesus taught that work is eternal.¹ Heaven is no retirement village in the sky. It is where God’s work is done more efficiently because sin is gone.

Removing sin from work is like removing sand from the gears of a transmission. Everything goes more smoothly. While we only have a hint in scripture about the kind of work we will do in the future, be sure of one thing—you will be working. Wherever God is, there is work. It is a holy, everlasting calling, and He loves to do it.

Let’s hear Jesus speak to us about work:

But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I myself am working.” For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel.”

John 5:17-20

¹John 5:17-20

Here's a cosmic good news/bad news joke: The good news is, Heaven really does exist, but the bad news is that it isn't the "ultimate weekend." It's a sin-free work environment! As Jesus tells us in John's gospel, when you study the Father, He shows you where and how He is working. God is an incredibly active Creator, and that is the understatement of this book.

Meet God the Worker

God first reveals Himself in Genesis as a Creator, Worker, and Entrepreneur. He takes life, law, and energy out of His own Spirit-self and puts it into the material Cosmos He creates. The Greek word "Cosmos," which we translate "world," literally has as part of its meaning the inherent need to "tend or care for the thing that is created." It could be translated, "creation to-be-cared-for," in terms of its conceptual meaning. Strong's Concordance notes that the word "world" (Cosmos) derives its meaning from the Greek word, "Comizo," which means to take care of.² The Greek word in the New Testament translated, "Earth," comes from a totally separate word, "ge," which means soil or ground.³ The Greek word used for Father's work in John 5 is, "ergazomai," which is to be engaged with or minister to.⁴ The Earth is dirt and will pass away and be transformed, but the created Cosmos, which encompasses the Earth but is greater than the Earth, will eternally be tended by ALMIGHTY & SONS. It will always engage us in the privilege of caring for it. What began in the Garden of Eden will extend to the whole Earth.

We see the working nature of God all the way into the next age. In Revelation 21:10 we see the Church coming down to her earthly abode out of the heavens with Christ in her center, ruling over and from the Earth. Remember this is after the "Millennium" of Revelation 20 and

² Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament; language section — "Greek" p. 43

³ Ibid p. 20

⁴ Ibid p. 32

the Great White Throne judgment. Revelation 22:1-2 is an especially intriguing verse:

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Please take note of two facts: (1) Nations will still exist in the next age, and (2) they will still need healing. The rest of this final chapter uses words like “serve” (vs. 3) and “reign” (vs. 5) which means to actively rule over and to administrate. There is no mention of rocking chairs or linen hammocks. The overcomer’s reward is the rulership of nations.⁵ Still want to go to Heaven? Let’s all agree that the other place has torment, which means they’re still trying to accomplish things, but with no possibility of communication or success. Some of us feel like we’ve already worked a little in that environment and want no part of it!

The promise of a work-free Heaven is a heresy and reveals also a lack of biblical scholarship and knowledge of God. Work is the incarnation of my intangible “soul” out into God’s universe. This is a very deep truth and worthy of a major effort to more fully draw it out. Work allows what is inside me to be revealed in the outside world. That is why God created the concept of work and loves it so much, because what is inside God is so spectacular it must be externally revealed. It is through His work that we see who He is! What an incredible and revealing thing work really is once we understand it from a biblical point of view. No wonder so many people hate work: It reveals externally what is inside of them, and that isn’t very pretty.

⁵ Rev. 2:26-27

Our Work Reveals Our Soul

James picks up this truth as he writes to us:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. *James. 4:1-3*

Among other issues, James is telling us that external confusion and strife are nothing more than external revelation of sin within us. What is in me does come out of me and shows up in my attitudes and commitment to excellence (or lack thereof) in my work. Who do you suppose sees the “real you” most clearly—your pastor or your boss? One you are with only several hours a week, and then only when you're on your best behavior. The other you're with eight hours a day, when you're feeling good, bad, or ugly. That is why, in terms of economic evangelism, if we could get Christian managers to see that they're really *pastors in the marketplace*, we'd have a revival! I'll say more about this later. Suffice to say, your work reveals your soul. Work is how the soul is revealed and becomes visible.

The economic implications of this truth are massive in terms of how they affect a company's work force or even that of a whole nation. The pastoral and relational implications are equally significant as the more pragmatic issues like quality control and competitive edges are brought into focus. Let me give you a clear example out of my own experience.

Some years ago I wanted to buy a new car. I wanted to buy an American car as a point of national support, but I also wanted to buy a car that would serve me and my family as a point of safety, economic quality, and economy. I went to a trusted brother in the Lord who had sold cars for many years and shared my concerns, and

I asked for his advice. What he shared with me was an eye-opener that illustrates our point precisely.

He said, “Dennis, let me ask you a question. Would you rather buy an automobile from a company where labor and management live in a strongly adversarial relationship, with workers focusing on their ‘rights’ and an ‘I don’t get paid to do this’ attitude? Or would you rather buy an automobile where labor and management are mutually supportive with one common goal of making the highest quality car on the market for the best competitive price?” What could I say? Sold, Toyota. And by the way, thirteen years and 180,000 miles later I know I made the right choice.

The point is this: Our labor reflects our motives, attitudes, goals, and the internal and external harmony of our environment. Economics is much more about people’s souls than studying curves, charts, and computer analysis printouts of currency and stock market trends. Those measure results more than causes. And trade deficits say more about work ethics than protectionist legislation. God knows about all this since He invented the whole possibility of work-soul transfer. By the way, can you imagine the kind of art, music, and communication that await us in the sin-free age to come, where people’s souls are freely and creatively released? Sign me up all over again, Jesus!

Where Are the Christian Craftsmen?

Where are the craftsmen? Where is the work ethic? They’re buried under the sick American soul. What will it take for America to learn that taking the Christian influence out of our national public life is a catastrophic *economic* choice as much as anything else. In the nonsensical and unconstitutional act of excluding values from the public realm under the guise of the separation of “church from state,” we’re really torpedoing America’s economic future. Spiritual values show up quickly in our labor. Ideas have consequences, and of all the world’s major religions, *only Christianity has a theology of labor*. Why? It’s because work is a holy everlasting calling, and God loves to work. His soul lives to be incarnated.

In order to get millions of the Church's tradesmen and business professionals, who make up the world's work force, totally free, we must strike a deathblow to the second-class view of work in the real world. We must convince them that they aren't carnal, and God loves them and honors them not one bit less than those who have earned a living from the ministry in the local church. Christian workers of the world unite: You have nothing to lose but your false theology, and everything to gain in your new found mission!

Here is one more significant point before we shift gears. God, the Worker, absolutely hates unemployment. In Matthew 20:1-15, we see Jesus make this point with amazing clarity in the parable of the landowner. Because most of us in the Western world have been raised in a socialist culture, we relate to this passage from the point of view of the laborers and the apparent "injustice" of their equal pay for unequal work. However, what Jesus says is that our socialist attitudes reveal more about our problems with *envy* than with justice (vs. 15). The heart of the parable is the landowner's deep agitation over unhired men hanging out, wasting their lives in the marketplace. At least four times he went out looking for unhired men. Not once is his concern for profit or even the fruit of his personal vineyard ever mentioned. He has one supreme concern: unhired lives, that is, men and women "rotting" in life.

God hates to see people without a job. Our modern solution, rather than unshackling our economy, is to pay out welfare. I say this: To pay someone not to work robs him or her of their dignity and helps destroy their soul. God the Work-lover sees these unused gifts and the tragedy of people's helplessness and dependency on other men, and sees indignity instead of aid. No wonder the fish (the unsaved) are biting on economic issues and hammering on the issues of employment. Could it be that they see something that we Christians haven't seen yet about the work/dignity relationship?

Work Produces Both Wealth and Riches

As mentioned in chapter three, there is a major difference in what our labors can produce and what Christ says we should *seek* out of

our labors. Perhaps the best way to further explore this subject is to ask the question, “Are wealth and riches wrong?”

Many people quote 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 9: “...though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” That’s interpreted, “Well, Jesus was poor, so to follow Him we must be poor, too.” But Jesus became poor for a reason: “...for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Since the context discusses our spiritual need, not our material condition, the passage does not say that Christ came to make us materially rich. But neither does it imply that we should be materially poor. Instead, in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, Paul explains that he wants Christians to imitate Christ by pouring themselves out in service to others so that they, too, may come to know and enjoy God in all His goodness.

In Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus said this:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, their your heart will be also.

Again, many Christians misconstrue these verses. They think God doesn’t want us to prosper. But Christ didn’t mean that at all. If He had, He would have nullified the covenant of Deuteronomy 8:18: “But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” Jesus never nullified the Old Covenant; instead, He fulfilled it and affirmed its validity as long as Heaven and Earth abide.⁶ Paul drives home the point: “For all the promises of God in Him are ‘Yes,’ and in Him ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God through us.”⁷ If anything, the promises of God’s covenant with

⁶ Matt. 5:17-20

⁷ 2 Cor. 1:20

Abraham, reiterated to Israel, are intensified to the Church under the New Covenant.

The power to create wealth is one of God's gifts under the covenant. Far from nullifying God's covenantal gift of the ability to create wealth, the New Covenant under Christ intensifies it. Christians who live faithfully under the covenant should be even more effective at creating wealth than believers under the Old Covenant.

Why, then, did Jesus say, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19-20). He said it to distinguish worldly riches—or what we'll call simply riches—from wealth. The Bible doesn't distinguish the two by these words, but it does by context. Riches are material; wealth is spiritual. Riches burn up in the fire of judgment; wealth passes through the fire.

Wealth is the product of stewarding for God the gifts He has given. Notice that in the parable of the minas the challenge to be obedient to God was to steward what God had given. The nobleman, representing Jesus, did not commission anybody to go out and win souls.⁸ He commissioned people to take what God the Creator had invested in them and increase it.

If you will steward and increase the gifts God has given you, people will get saved around you because you will radiate what God created you to do and be, and they will experience life. If you want people to get saved, don't just hand out tracts. Hand out a life that you have stewarded to God's delight.

Kingdom Economics Is Wealth Oriented

Why can't we read the Bible clearly? Why doesn't its message get into our brains? It's there, sure enough. Jesus said, if we may paraphrase Him, "Here's what I want you to do: Steward the gifts! And when I come back, I will reward you by making you rulers of cities." When

⁸ Luke 19:12-26

Jesus spoke of the nobleman's return, which represents His own return, He made it clear that cities will have new rulers: faithful Christians who have stewarded His gifts fruitfully.

Wealth is made up of the ability and character skills that we gain to manage the material world. As already seen, riches, in contrast, are primarily material goods that one can gain with or without obedience to God. You do not have to obey God to become rich. Many people become rich through crime, exploitation, and pure lust for worldly goods. Wealth may produce riches, but riches cannot produce wealth because wealth comes from obedience to the covenant.

We talked about this in chapter three in looking at 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 which says that all our work will be tested by fire. The work that has produced wealth will pass through death; the work that has not produced wealth will end with death. Don't worry about trying to produce a lot of riches, but give yourself to the production of wealth, character, and godly stewardship. If you do that, *riches will take care of themselves*. We need billions of dollars for the work of the Kingdom; go produce your share. But go knowing that the game is not really about money; it is about developing love, skill, obedience, and knowledge.

When we move away from capitalism, which is riches oriented, to Kingdom economics, which is wealth oriented, stewardship replaces riches as our motivation. When that happens, contentment replaces envy, greed, and discontent. Godly strategic planning produces contentment, with or without riches, because it produces the lasting fruit of wealth. If you're like me, you've known some very rich people who were not content. They had riches, but they were never satisfied; they were always scrounging for more. Why? It's because they were trying to get the satisfaction from riches that is only possible through wealth. Like a man in a lifeboat who in desperation drinks saltwater to quench his thirst, they find that the more they consume the more madly they crave it.

Solomon knew their lot. His great purpose in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes was to help people see that laying up treasures on Earth is vanity:

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

Eccl. 2:18-21

Solomon's problem was that he was a poor father. Because he did not raise his sons to be godly, Solomon's own sons split the kingdom, and everything for which he labored was destroyed. Remember a major principle of chapter three: Wise stewardship over property operates generationally rather than short-run. God wants us to transmit real wealth to our children, and real wealth is the power to do God's will on Earth as it is done in Heaven.

God Is Calling for Christian Revival through the Work Place

I have sometimes been tempted to start a "hire the heathen club" after being burned by Christian workers. I wonder how many of you, out of your own experience with slipshod, presumptuous Christian work, would want to join my club? Obviously my sarcasm poorly conceals a lot of pain. This ought not to be, since Christians ought to be the best workers on the planet because their Father is so vested in excellent work.

As we have seen, far too many Christians think work is a part of the curse, so they never really put their hearts into it. Christian employers have been burned by lazy Christians, so heavenly minded they're no earthly good. Christian employers have typically aggravated the problem by taking it easy on them "because they are brothers." And my experience has shown me that much of the world thinks Christian employees are not necessarily a bargain either.

Let's Turn Up the Heat for Christian Excellence

The opposite should be true. If you have a Christian employee, you should require more from him than if he were unsaved! When you hire him, you should tell him right up front: "I'm going to require more from you, not less, because you're a believer. If you don't measure up, I'll terminate you faster than I would if you were unsaved, because Jesus said in Luke 12:48, 'And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.' That's how God operates."

For years deterioration in both the quality and the quantity of work has occurred in much of the United States. The solution begins with Christians renouncing and repenting from their anti-work attitudes. We have stripped our culture of the Reformed work ethic that lies at the root of the economic productivity of the industrialized world. Probably most of the American people now view work as a curse. Getting to the weekend and the material things they desire (not personal fulfillment through their work) is the goal of their labor. We won't see a fundamental change in our economy until the Church repents of its anti-work attitude and views work as a blessed call to which Christians commit themselves just as God does.

Once we see this truth with sufficient clarity to communicate it, we will be ready to begin to transform the other organizations that have come together around the business community. If we can revive the biblical work ethic, we will begin an economic turnaround wherever clear thinking Christians labor. Our grandchildren, should the Lord tarry, will rise up and call us blessed, and so will the Chamber of Commerce, unsaved though it may be.

Ultimately, economic collapse or not, we believers will still need to get our work ethic cleaned up—whether here on Earth or in eternity. Work is a holy, everlasting calling, and Almighty will get His passion for self-fulfilling labor into His sons and daughters as surely as He is God, even if it takes forever.

