

Sermon – September 20, 2026 – Christian Work

Opening

Good morning and welcome to Grace Baptist Church. For those visiting or new to Grace, I'm Garrett Raper one of the elders at Grace. Jon Sherrill is one of our paid elders and would normally be in the pulpit today, but he and his family are on vacation this Sunday and next. Gil Jones and I will be filling in this week and next, and we decided that we would collaborate these two weeks to discuss work. So before we begin, let's open with a word of prayer.

Prayer

Pray

Introduction

Regarding a scripture text today, we will begin in Genesis 1:1 – although I'm not going to be reading a passage per-se. We'll be skipping around the first 3 chapters of Genesis for the most part – but today is a day when you're welcome to sit back and listen as the text is familiar to most and the message is more topical.

So what is work? Well, work can be an action or a thing, a verb or a noun if we were in English class. As a verb Merriam-Webster defines it as "to perform duties regularly for wages, operate according to plan, or produce a desired effect". As a noun it defines work as an "activity regularly done to earn a livelihood, a specific task or assignment, or the energy used when a force is applied over distance." The latter part of that definition, and many of you know that as an engineer I find beauty in the way God has mathematically ordered the universe, is also the mathematical/scientific definition of work as $\text{Work} = \text{Force} \times \text{Distance}$ (I think it's amazing we can actually put a value on work in that way).

But what do all these definitions have in common – well, several things. First is a sense of intentionality. The work that we do is on purpose – we mean to do it. Another is regularity - the same work is generally performed over and over again – usually on some schedule. And finally is a purpose – there is an outcome to work. Activity without a desired effect is not work – a quick aside is to examine ourselves as to what activities we are intentionally and regularly doing that have no purpose. This is where the devil would have us Christians, being active with no purpose.

Note these definitions have neither a positive or negative connotation. However, WE generally talk about work in a negative way. How many of us have woken up on a Sunday morning and said, maybe you even said it this very Sunday, "Ugh, the weekend's already half over. I can't believe I have to go back to work again tomorrow morning." Is that the view we should have regarding work as Christians? Spoiler alert I'm going to argue it is not. Then why do we generally have a negative view of work?

So today I offer 4 truths and several applications. The truths are 1) We Serve a God that Works, 2) Work is a Pre-Fall Commandment – We Work Because We Are Created in His Image, 3) Work Has Been Corrupted by the Fall, and 4) Our Full Joy in Work Will Be Restored When Christ Comes Again. I'll pause between points 3 and 4 to present some applications. I also want to acknowledge right up front that this is not an exhaustive study on work, we could teach for months on this topic, but some thoughts to ponder on the topic. Besides, I have to leave something for Gil to cover next week and give you a reason to come back, right?

Truth 1: We Serve a God That Works

The statement seems pretty straightforward, right? But where's the evidence. Literally the first verse of the Bible Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Work seems to be an important concept to God if he chose to begin his revelation of who he is by telling us about his work. He could have given an account of himself in his 3 forms and how before the "beginning" they had always been, but he doesn't – he immediately begins by revealing an aspect of himself – he works. This statement meets all the criteria we defined for work. There's an action – God created. It was intentional – it wasn't an accident or happenstance as some may have us to believe, he meant to do it. There was a result – looking around we can clearly see that the heavens and the earth were in fact created. In this one statement we see that we serve a God that works.

Then God goes on for the remainder of chapter 1 and chapter 2 describing in more detail his initial work of creation. Each aspect of creation – the light and dark, the sky and water, the land and seas, the plants, the sun and moon and stars, the fish and birds, the earth creatures, and finally the man and woman. Each day work – a regular pattern of daily work, each day with an intentional purpose, a recurring act of creation, and each day a distinct outcome from the activity. God shows us he works.

And here you might rightly say, "but Garrett, this shows us we serve a God that did work, how does he continue to work." Let's go a bit deeper, how does God continue to work in each of his forms: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

As the Father, as our catechism statements say, "What works does God do, besides making of all things?" God upholds, and preserves all; and God governs, and orders all things. These are the works God the Father is continuing to do. Why? Again, as our catechism says, "God does all for his own glory, and for his peoples good." God the Father continues to work, upholding, preserving, governing, and ordering all things, for his own glory and our good.

And the Son, what are some of his works. Well, he chose to come to Earth in the form of man, he obeyed perfectly the law in action and intent living a sinless life, he willfully laid down his own life as the permanent sacrifice for our sins, he conquered death by rising on the third day, and he ascended into heaven where he is now reunited with the Father. His work is the Gospel message. He was the agent of creation – Colossians 1:16 "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him." Jesus was active in creation. These were all works he did – but what now? Romans 8:34 "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the

right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Other passages use the word advocating for interceding. This is a glorious picture – imagine it in your minds! Jesus is currently working at the right hand of the Father speaking to him on our behalf – taking the requests, concerns, problems we have and relaying them to the Father, imagine a lawyer here because it’s the same terms, relaying all these things to the Father in a better way than we could have ever stated them through our prayers alone.

And finally, the Holy Spirit. I’ll admit, the work of the Holy Spirit is the least understood by me. So for the work of the Spirit, let’s refer to Romans 8:9-17 “⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus^[d] from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. ¹² So then, brothers,^[e] we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons^[f] of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” What works did the Holy Spirit do? The Spirit was active in creation (Gen 1:26 “Let us make man”). The Spirit was active in raising Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). What works is the Spirit continuing to do? The Spirit continues to work as the Spirit dwells in believers (9), gives life (11), puts to death the deeds of the body (13), leads (14), and bears witness we are children of God (16).

Concluding truth number one, there is abundant evidence we serve a God that worked and continues to work in all three of his forms of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Moving on to truth two.

Truth 2: Work is a Pre-Fall Commandment – We Work Because We Are Created in His Image

Let’s begin by reading Genesis 1:26-28 - ²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

First, we see that mankind is uniquely created in the image of God – not one particular of God’s three forms – but in the collective “our” image in verse 26. “Male and female he created them” – God created two forms of man, and because of the prolific use of “them” throughout the passage, it’s clear that both the male and female forms of mankind are made in his image.

As his image bearer, God begins in this passage to give mankind work to perform. At this point we must note that the fall of man has not occurred, that won't happen until Chapter 3 of Genesis. Therefore, the work given to mankind here is not yet corrupted by sin, we might say these are 'pure' works. So, what is the work given to man? Verse 28 – be fruitful – do things that have a beneficial purpose. Again in 28 – multiply and fill the earth – have children. Raising our children is a good work given to us before the fall. Fill the earth – have children to the point you must expand the territory you inhabit. Again in 28 – subdue it (speaking of the earth) – mankind is in charge of the earth and we're to utilize it for our benefit. And finally in 28 – have dominion over all the animals – mankind is to have a place of dominance over the animals. All these works are given generally to all mankind – both men and women as the image bearers of God.

God continues giving mankind specific instructions for work in Chapter 2. Genesis 2:15 "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Further in Genesis 2:18 "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." And finally, God established marriage – the work of the relationship between man and woman – Genesis 2:24 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." In these verses (and some taken from Chapter 3) we see the unique works given pre-fall to the man and woman. The man – meant to tend the garden, the husband, the father, the protector of the family (because should he not have protected Eve from the serpent?), and the leader of the household. The woman – his helper, his companion, his wife, and mother. The work of marriage – and if you're married you know maintaining a marriage is work. Have you ever thought about marriage being work before the fall? Breaking the work of marriage down according to our definition of work: Intentional Actions – the man leaves his father and mother and holds fast to his wife; Intentional Results – the two shall become one flesh, multiply and fill the earth. Marriage was work before the fall!

Since all these works are pre-fall, we know that they are all inherently good, right? Then why do we dread the work we're supposed to do? Why is the work of our marriages often hard because we disagree? Why do our bodies ache when we 'tend the garden'? Why doesn't our work bring us complete joy? This brings us to truth number 3:

Truth 3: Work Has Been Corrupted by the Fall

The Fall – what's that? Chapter 3 – the 'TLDR' version (Jimmie, I had to look it up one time – it means too long didn't read – email machine slang for a summary). The serpent comes to the woman Eve and convinces her to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – the only forbidden fruit in all the garden. Eve shares the fruit with the man Adam. They both disobey God in doing so, and thus sin and death enters the world. Adam and Eve, who if obedient would have lived forever, now have finite lives and will die. The effects of sin are evident not only in mankind, but in every aspect of the world, including how we perceive work and how work affects our bodies. Collectively, this is 'the fall'.

God, in pronouncing his judgment on Adam and Eve, and thus all mankind thereafter, has some specific things to say regarding work. Genesis 3:16 "To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in

childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Her work in bearing children will now bring pain. The work of marriage will be troubled. The word “for” in “your desire shall be for your husband” is better translated “toward”, or pointing against – the idea that where the husband and wife were once in agreement with one another, they now have disagreement that wasn’t previously there.

And for the man, Genesis 3:17-19 & 23 – “¹⁷ And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” And then skipping to 23, “²³ therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.” Here man is given new work – work that will cause pain in all its aspects. No longer will man simply eat from the fruit that grows in the garden – he’ll eat plants of the field, grown amongst the thorns and thistles from the ground instead of the garden. Bread will now be his meals instead of fruit. What was once provided will now be worked for, and that work will produce pain.

So now we return to where we began – what is the view we should have on work? I offer that it’s this – work is an attribute of our God – something that in him is good. It should be good in us, but sin has caused our view of it to be corrupted. I believe it’s ok that we have a disdain for the corrupted parts of work – the pain, the thorns and thistles of life, the arguments in our marriage – so long as we understand it’s not the work itself, it is the affect of sin on our work. I offer several brief applications:

Application 1: All Mankind Is Expected to Work

All mankind is created in God’s image – all mankind, both men and women, should work. This does not necessarily mean a job outside the home – work could be a job outside the home or a stay-at-home parent daily attending the needs of the children and home. Work could be taking care of a parent, spouse, or other loved one. God has created us and given us clear direction to work. He’s given us other tasks throughout the Bible as well. Just a few examples: Matthew 28:19-20 “¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” We have a clear mandate to work to spread the Gospel throughout the nations. James 1:27 “²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”. God has given us the work of helping those less fortunate such as widows and orphans.

Which leads into the next application:

Application 2: The Manner in Which We Provide Charity Should Value Work

As we help those that are less fortunate, we should do so in a way that acknowledges their status as an image bearer and their responsibility to work. This is pictured in the Bible through the act of gleaning. Leviticus 19:9-10 “⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its

edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” God does not tell us to provide charity by harvesting the field, threshing the grain, grinding the flour, and baking bread – he instructs us to leave areas in the field so that the less fortunate can work to harvest it for themselves. Now, I think we all agree there is a time to provide for immediate needs in a time of crisis, but our long-term strategy in charity (and the approach our deacons and elders have endeavored to take) has to recognize that the recipient work in some manner.

Application 3: Our Work Should Always Be Our Best

Colossians 3:22-24 “²²Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” Again, many of the applications could be expanded into full sermons on their own – but the point is clear here. Whatever work we’re doing, we’re not only doing it for someone here on earth, but we are serving our Lord Christ in doing the work. When we keep in mind who we are ultimately working for, it should be no problem for us to work our best. Further, when our work here feels underappreciated – it’s not for earthly gain we’re ultimately working for – it’s our inheritance with Christ.

Application 4: We Must Teach Our Children to Work

As the father of three teenagers, this realization hit me several years ago. The tasks we’re giving our children, although we do gain benefit, is ultimately not for the benefit of us as parents. The goal is to teach our children Application 3 – to always do their best and be prepared to do that most likely for an employer one day. We must teach them the expectations their future bosses will have for them so they are prepared. I think we all see a general lack of work ethic in society today, and a way that we as Christians are different is to have the work ethic discussed in Application 3 – and to pass that along to our children. My children would probably say, and they may be right, that I’m pretty hard on them with the amount of chores they get and the expectation I have they are done exactly right. However, when they work for other people and those people say how hard they work, how they don’t slack off, how they go above and beyond what’s required of them – I’m proud of them and I think God is pleased in this way as well. Because of their sin nature, this is not natural for our children and we have to teach them how to rightly work.

Application 5: Work is Not Unto Salvation

There is no way I could preach on work and not make this point. Ephesians 2:8-9 “⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Isaiah 64:6 says our works are like filthy rags. Salvation is through faith and belief in Jesus Christ – good works are a natural fruit of that faith. There is no amount of ‘good works’ that one can do to earn salvation apart from faith.

Application 6: Despite the Fall, There is Joy in Our Work

This is a natural application. Even though the work we now do causes us pain, and all nature fights against us, we still feel a sense of joy when we complete some work. There is joy after the birth of a child despite the pain. We can build a barn or fence line and look back on that work and be proud. Jon can pick a whole mess of green beans and enjoy the fruits of his work. This is a reflection of the image of God that remains despite the fall. If we go back to Genesis 1, what did God say after each of his creations – it was good. God was proud of his work. We as Christians have a similar love/hate relationship with pride as we have with work. But, as God had pride in his work, we can have pride and joy in the work we've accomplished.

Which brings us to our final truth – it's short but important:

Truth 4: Our Full Joy in Work Will Be Restored When Christ Comes Again

When Christ returns and sin is conquered, believers look forward to the day when all things are returned to be like those beginning days in the Garden. But on that day there will be 2 groups of people – those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and those that have denied his Lordship. For those who believe, we'll continue to work praising him for all eternity – and that work will bring us pure joy – a pride unlike the work here on earth could ever give us. I don't know what other work we may have in heaven – but we do know that whatever it is will be perfect.

But for those that don't believe, all they will be left with is the pain that came after the fall in a place called hell, eternally separated from God.

If you've never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, and today some of this is beginning to make sense for the first time – I ask you to talk with someone about it. Speak to a friend here at church, or one of the elders, but don't let another day go by without placing your faith in Jesus.

Let's close in prayer.

Final Prayer