

## **Reformation Sunday**

### **Changing Diapers for the Glory of God**

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#### **Colossians 3:17-24**

The Protestant Reformation is rightly celebrated for its recovery of the gospel which had been so deeply obscured by the Medieval Church. Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is the doctrine which lay at the center of the Reformation. But the Reformation was also about reforming the church's worship and governance. The church had corrupted the pure worship of God with superstitions, forbidden images, and the Mass. What is more, instead of the leadership of biblically qualified elders the church was ruled by an unbiblical hierarchy of Popes, cardinals, bishops, and priests.



But there was another matter addressed by the Reformers which often goes unnoticed. The Protestant Reformation smashed the divide between so-called sacred and secular work. The Church of Rome held that the work of priests and church hierarchy was the only holy work. Those seeking admission into the priesthood or monastic life swelled as men desperately sought a way to be justified before God. Having holy employment was seen as one sure way of finding favor with God; a type of access denied to the masses whose work was often seen as an impediment to one's salvation.

To be sure, the Reformers acknowledged the need for churches to have formally trained ministers set aside for the work of preaching and teaching. The New Testament prescribes such employment. However, they were clear that the work of pastors was no more holy than the work of farmers or blacksmiths or homemakers. To illustrate the point, Martin Luther wrote that changing a baby's diaper was holy work to done for God's glory. He commends believers to think of their household tasks in the following way:

O God, because I am certain that thou hast created me as a man and hast from my body begotten this child, I also know for a certainty that it meets with thy perfect pleasure. I confess to thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother. How is it that I, without any merit, have come to this distinction of being certain that I am serving thy creature and thy most precious will? O how gladly will I do so, though the duties should be even more insignificant and despised.

What joy there is for God's people in knowing that the smallest task can be done for the glory of God. What comfort there is knowing that work that seems mundane and even purposeless can be offered as an act of holy devotion to the Lord. Dear Christian, your work, no matter how small it may seem to some, need never be in vain.

**Main Idea:** All legitimate labors are a gift from God and can be done for his glory and the good of others.

The Reformers gained their understanding about work from the Bible. The Scriptures tell the story of work from its fundamental goodness, its corruption, and its coming redemption.

#### **1. The Goodness of Work**

Genesis 2:26-28

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

- The goodness of work is fundamental. That is, in its very nature work is good. Work was not a result of the fall. It was a gift to the man and woman. It was the way that God graciously made his image-bearers participants in his ongoing governance over the world. In this way, the man and woman and all their descendants were intended to be God's vice-regents in the world. This

was a chief way that God blessed his human creatures with a dignity that nothing else in the created order possessed.

- The first thing the Bible tells us about the man and woman is that they were created to work; to be productive. Specifically, they were to maintain the garden, subdue the rest of the earth, and multiply. The “Creation Mandate” was the way work was always intended to be. It was fulfilling and purposeful. The man and woman put their hands into an earth which would always yield to their efforts.
- Work is both commanded and commended in Scripture. The command to work, for example, is implicit in the Ten Commandments (as the fourth commandment begins, “six days shall you labor, and do all your work,” Ex. 20:9) and explicit in the apostolic writings (“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need,” Eph. 4:28).
- The whole of Scripture commends honest labor, viewing it as a source of personal satisfaction (Eccl. 3:22), the means of providing for our families (1 Tim. 5:8), benefiting others (Eph. 4:28) and especially as a serving the Lord, as we do everything in word and deed in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17, 23-24). Weaving these purposes for work together, John Stott defines work as “the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfilling to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.”

## **2. The Corruption of Work**

Genesis 3:17-19

- God’s curse upon the Adam, Eve, and the earth ensured that, because of their sinful rebellion, work would be hard, oftentimes feeling futile. Whenever we encounter futility or pain or boredom in our work we are seeing the continuing legacy of the fall. The teacher of Ecclesiastes laments: “What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.” (2:22-23).
- Work, like childbirth is not only joy; it involves labor, sweat, and frustration. The problems of job-related stress, unjust labor laws, lazy employees, incompetent bosses, failed ventures, et cetera, are an index to our present condition: life in a fallen world.
- But the corruption of work, like the corruption of humanity, did not rob it of its intrinsic dignity. Though work is now frustrating and difficult it is still good.

## **3. The Redemption of Work**

Colossians 3:17-24

Isaiah 65:21-23

- Work will one day be fully redeemed in the new creation. Until then we get glimpses of this future redemption when we work as unto the Lord.
- We do not recognize some work as holy and other work as secular. All legitimate occupations and employments are good and can be performed for the glory of God. Whether one is preaching a sermon or changing a diaper there is no difference as to which can be done in the name of Jesus.
- The hope of new creation is held forth multiple times in the New Testament (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21-22). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the inaugural event in the new creation, with Jesus himself as the first fruits of the harvest and the gift of his Spirit as the guarantee that final redemption is coming. Among God’s good gifts in the new creation will be the redemption of work as the prophet Isaiah foretold (Isaiah 65:21-23).