

E X O D U S

v o l u m e 3

Work and Rest (Exodus 28-31)

Bottom Line: We work hard to serve the Lord for His glory, not His approval.

This week, just like last week, we have to fight against the temptation to view these dense, extended passages of Scripture as irrelevant and meaningless to us. All of Scripture is “God-breathed and is profitable” for us in our pursuit of godliness, even entire chapters devoted to describing what kind of clothes the High Priest should wear. We’ve discussed this principle before, but it’s helpful to remind ourselves of how to treat such passages as this. The entire Old Testament law was fulfilled for us by Jesus (Matthew 5:17; Romans 8:4), so the exact *rules* of these mysterious Old Testament passages aren’t binding on us, per se, but instead it’s the *principles* underlying the rules that are timeless and applicable to us today. Paul said that one of the purposes of the Old Testament for us today is to serve as “examples” and “instructions” for us, guiding us to “hope in Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

So before we move on, how much value have you placed on the Old Testament in your Bible study? What has been your general impression of the Old Testament? How “excited” have you been about our extended study in Exodus?

Since we are not obligated to follow the ceremonies and regulations spelled out for us in these chapters, what is the underlying principle found here that we can take away? We’ll unpack this in two parts. First, Chapters 28, 29, and 30 explain in great detail how the inner-workings of the tabernacle are to take place. These instructions are very dense and precise, and God makes clear that deviation from these guidelines is a very serious error, sometimes even deserving of exile or death (28:43; 30:17, 33; 31:14). Because this work needed to be done to such exact specifications, God called two men, Oholiab and Bezalel, “filled them with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence” (31:3) and put them in charge of the work. Taking all of this as an “example” (like 1 Corinthians 10:11 says) and understanding that these exacting rules have been fulfilled for us by Jesus (again, Matthew 5:17), we can understand the application of these passages to, at the very least, mean that our service to the Lord should be diligent, earnest, and intentional. Paul confirms this for us in 1 Corinthians 15:58: “...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” (Also see Hebrews 12:14, 1 Corinthians 9:24, and 14:4).

Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Romans 12:1-2.

Since we don’t have to carry out temple sacrifices and purification rituals today, what does our “service to the Lord” consist of? What does diligence and intentionality look like in these matters? What about earnestness? Do you feel our church today is marked by diligence, earnestness, and intentionality in making disciples and pursuing holiness? What role do you as an individual play in our church’s faithfulness to this work?

Read Exodus 31:1-6

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What role does the Holy Spirit play in our ability to do the work God has called us to? How can we work to increase the power and presence of the Spirit in our lives in order to better carry out this work that God has given us, both in the church and individually?

So it's safe to say, given the New Testament emphasis and the Old Testament principle, that our Christian life should be marked by committed, diligent service to the Lord through making disciples and pursuing holiness. But if we just stopped there, we would miss a very important piece of this lesson that ties this all together. In these chapters in Exodus, God gives Israel very strict and precise commands that, if they were disobeyed, would potentially result in harsh punishment. One could get the impression that the work that God gave them to do was of the utmost importance. Which is why what God says in the second half of chapter 31 is so striking: even though the work of building the tabernacle and performing the rituals was so important, by no means were the Israelites to allow their work to prevent them from keeping the Sabbath. God placed such a heavy emphasis on the work of the tabernacle, but said, "*above all* you shall keep my Sabbaths." Their work was to be interrupted, intentionally, and they were to cease all labor in order to honor God on the Sabbath.

Read Exodus 31:13. Why did God say Israel should prioritize the Sabbath even over the construction and function of the tabernacle? How does Israel resting from their work prove that the Lord is the one who helps them become more holy? What mistake can we fall into today in how we relate our service to the Lord with our standing before God? Why is it wrong to depend upon our good works in order to receive God's approval?

The Israelites were to work hard and to take that work very seriously. But by forcing them to rest from their work, God was trying to impress upon the Israelites that it wasn't their work that made them pleasing to God, or else He wouldn't have them stop doing it! Instead, God wanted Israel to know that His love for them wasn't dependent upon their service, it was dependent upon Himself. The covenant that He had made with Israel was the sole determining factor in how God looked upon them. The reason they were to work so hard in building the tabernacle and performing the rituals was to provide a place for the glory of God to be seen (Exodus 29:42-43), not for His love to be earned.

The bottom line for us is this: we work hard in our service to the Lord, making disciples, pursuing holiness, serving the church, and loving our neighbors. But we do these things not for the Lord's approval, which Christ has secured for us, but for His glory. Making disciples (or being discipled), pursuing holiness (or killing sin), serving the church, loving others—all these are ways that we serve the Lord and we are to do them earnestly (with eager desire), diligently, and intentionally.

Which areas of service to the Lord are you not engaging in? Which have you maybe started, but given up on? How can you be more intentional about fulfilling your service to the Lord?

An unhealthy dependence upon our works will either make us despair when we fail, or make us over-confident on them when we are obedient. Do tend to lean more towards despair or over-confidence? How can you restore your heart to realize that your good works are to make God known and not to make God love you?

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Reflection: Read these aloud, using your discretion about which questions should be pondered and which questions should be discussed.

There is a difference between an “instrument” and a “servant.” Some people will serve God in a way that they accomplish many good things for the sake of the Kingdom, but they are not truly saved. They are merely “instruments” in God’s purposes (think of those who will say “Lord, Lord! Did we not do [all these things] in your name?!”). Then there are those who are truly saved, and they work for God as dutiful servants to their Lord. Which are you? Are you trusting in your service or works to solidify your standing before God? Or are you trusting in Christ? As Matthew 7:22 shows, even if you perform miracles, but have not truly trusted in Christ, they do nothing to secure your salvation. Are you working for the Lord as an instrument? Or a servant?

Does your heart feel secure in Christ when you lapse in your service to Him? Do you feel overwhelming guilt or despair at the ways that you don’t faithfully serve the Lord? There is a fine balance to strike here, don’t get it wrong, but what is it that makes you doubt your security in Christ? Are you trusting in your own works for your sanctification? Or do you need, like God told the Israelites in Exodus 31:13, to trust that it is God who sanctifies you? How can you properly align the joy you feel from serving the Lord and the assurance you have in trusting in Christ in such a way that neither detract from the other?