

Ephesians 4:28

I have the privilege of knowing many business owners and supervisors. Whenever the discussion of the labor force arises, the constant refrain these men repeat is that it is hard to find good, reliable workers! We live in a world awash with lazy, unreliable laborers. Today's passage shows us that this might be true of the world, but it ought not be characteristic of Christians. Work is not a cussword, and it is not evil, instead work is something that we have been designed for and it is the expectation of our Lord that we would toil with diligence for our own wellbeing and the good of others.

1. A brief biblical sketch of work

- a. It is important to note that work is not a consequence
- b. Before sin and its curse entered the world, work was an expectation of God
- c. Think about this... in paradise there was work!
 - i. To be fair, work would have looked differently
 - ii. There was no cursed ground to fight, no predators to fear, no death to avoid, no strife amongst employees and the like
 - iii. Sin has absolutely marred our daily experience of work, but it has not instituted the activity!
- d. Moving on, we constantly meet heroes who were diligent
 - i. Noah labored to build the ark under God's instruction
 - ii. Moses received instructions and organized efforts to build the tabernacle
 - iii. David was a mighty warrior and a diligent king who oversaw the strengthening and fortification of Jerusalem
 - iv. Solomon was world renowned for his architectural feats
 - v. Jesus was a carpenter who worked hard for decades
 - vi. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to work saying that those who don't work shouldn't eat!
- e. The point is that work is not an option for the believer and it is an activity that God esteems

2. A righteous qualification

- a. The contrast in this passage is interesting as Paul compares the thief with an "honest" worker
- b. The implication is clear... there are pursuits and avenues to acquire resources that are biblically condemned and others that are esteemed
- c. The difference between the thief and the brick layer is actually not labor
 - i. The thief (at least an effective thief) works hard to prepare and execute his plan
 - ii. The difference is the method of acquisition!
 - iii. Not all labor is godly

1. In fact, the law of God dictates that we identify and understand our work in light of God's directive
2. This principle applies to far more than outright theft and some of what the world deems "honest work" is an abomination
 - a. Some industries operate in fields that are objectively sinful (infanticide, gambling, etc.) other fields are characterized by dishonesty and underhanded practices and this means that a Christian must comprehend and discern what he is being asked to do and what norms are present within an industry or office prior to their taking a position
3. A glorious purpose
 - a. Notice here that Paul actually employs a different line of motivation than what we might initially consider
 - b. In other places in Scripture, we are reminded that we work to provide for our needs and the needs of our family
 - c. Here, Paul admonishes the Ephesians to work for the wellbeing of those who are in need
 - i. Far from viewing our resources as ours to hoard, Paul extends the command to work to the command to love neighbor
 - ii. This means that the fruit of our labor is intended to be a resource to extend our commission to make disciples and love others
 - d. Obviously, this command does not diminish our need to discern how to employ our resources nor does it take away the other commands to provide or the glorious joy of having enough to enjoy
 - i. What Paul is saying is that salvation in Christ radically changes our relationship to worldly goods such that we are to see them as a means to assist other image bearers and serve the least of these
 - e. Interestingly enough, the result of this kind of thinking is fulfillment!
 - i. Those who are most generous with what God has given them find that God is generous in blessing them as well
 1. This could mean with more financial resource
 2. It often means that God blesses with joy, hope, peace and purpose
 3. Regardless, let us understand that our work is not just for the purpose of accruing more stuff or security for ourselves, our work is to be undertaken as an extension to our call of loving God by loving and serving others