

Some thoughts on the work of God By Phil Brainerd

Introduction

On this weekend people in the United States celebrate a holiday called, “Labor Day”. Lots of people wonder how this holiday got its name. Well, some of you know that I was born in early September. Let’s just say a while back. So, many years ago, my mother went into labor. In honor of that event, the day has been called “Labor Day” ever since.

You don’t buy that, huh? Perhaps we should check a more serious source.

Here is a definition from the US Department of Labor web site: “Labor Day, the first Monday in September, is a creation of the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country.”

This is interesting because, normally, we like to think of any holiday as a chance to take off from work. As such, “Labor Day” is a bit ironic. Instead of working, we go on vacation and stop thinking about work. And most times, we forget the history of the holiday.

Well, today, I’d like to share some thoughts on labor, also known as work, as it relates to the Bible. The Bible talks quite a lot about work, so we won’t hit on everything in one short session. But I think there are some very important things for us to consider. ***And understanding these things that could make our lives much better.***

So, having said all that, let’s take a look and see what the Bible tells us about work.

I. God Works.

The very first thing we learn about work is that God does it. We see it from the first words of the Bible, where God creates the heavens and the earth and all living things. When we look at the things God has created, we learn something very important about God -*He likes to make things*. He makes galaxies and stars and planets. More than that, when God makes things, he makes beautiful things. When he creates, he expresses himself.

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- 2 Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
(Psalm 19: 1-2)

When we think of a great artist creating great works of art, we don't think of that as "work", so much. But please understand, creating the best art is a lot of work.

We learn some other important things about God through his creation. For example, the creation expresses his power. If you give even a quick look to the forces of nature, you can't miss that. I talk a lot about that and other qualities of God in the series, "Life Answers in Genesis", and in the early chapters of my book, "The Idols on the Hills".

So, the creation tells us a lot about God. But there is one quality of God that we learn from creation that is often missed. Here it is: **Creation expresses God's humility**. There's a new one. We always talk about God's power, but do we talk about his humility? Not so much.

What is humility? That's another topic that could take up a whole message. The apostle Paul tells us about one aspect of humility in his letter to the Philippians:

"3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves..." (Philippians 2:3)

Paul says that the person who possesses humility values others above themselves. He later went on to say that our Lord Jesus Christ showed humility by becoming a servant to the human race. We'll expand on that in just a few minutes.

When God created the heavens and the earth, and all the living creatures he became a servant of everything he created. How is that? When God created everything, he became committed to take care of it.

"As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease."

(Genesis 8:22)

For all of the creatures God made to live on the earth, you need seedtime and harvest. In order to have that, certain things have to happen. The sun needs to rise and set on schedule, even when we can't see it because it's hidden behind clouds. The moon needs to orbit the earth - That's how the tides in our oceans are maintained. Here's an important point: **Somebody has to make all that happen.**

The apostle Paul said something very interesting about Jesus:

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)

Look at that last sentence, “In him, all things hold together”. Did you know that nothing in the universe holds together without conscious effort from God? God can’t take a break. If he did, everything in the universe would fly apart.

Illustration: We’ve all been around when a child sees a cute puppy. They cry out, “Mommy, Daddy, can we take it home?” Mommy and Daddy look down and ask, “if we take the puppy home, will you take care of it?” And what self-respecting child would say, “no”. So, the puppy comes home. And many times, Mommy and Daddy wind up taking care of it. Maybe I should say, Mommy and/or Daddy.

This important: God can’t do that. God can’t fall in love with something one minute and lose interest the next. ***If God gets tired of running the universe, there is no one else to hand it off to.***

God worked when he created the universe. God works to take care of the things he created. In doing so God shows his humility; his willingness to become a servant of the things he has made.

So, the first thing we learn about work in the Bible is that God does it. Let’s move on to our second point.

II. Work is a gift from God to Mankind.

The fact that God works, shows that work is a good thing. We learn in the first chapter of Genesis, something that I talk about a lot: God made humans in his image -He made us to be like him.

So, when God worked by making the universe and all the living things in it, he topped off his creation with the very special creature called “Humans”. When he did that, he gave work to them as a gift. How did he do that?

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

Look at the last part of that sentence: “...to work it and to (what?) take care of it”.

This was no coincidence. God didn't create Adam and then say, "Oops! I forgot the daycare! Say, Adam, why don't you go... (look around) over to the garden. Just find something to do, OK? Stay there in the garden until I figure out what to do with you!"

No. God likes to make things. When he makes things, he commits himself to taking care of those things. God wanted Adam, who was made in his image, to have the experience of taking care of something. So, he gave Adam the gift of work. Through Adam, God gave this gift to all the human race.

Let's use the puppy illustration again. Hopefully, if you bring home a puppy for your children, you're not expecting your children to figure out how to care for it all on their own. First, you buy all the supplies. Then you say to your child, "let's start by making sure the puppy is fed - That will be your job." Then, you show the child where the food is kept and where the puppy's bowl will be. You, the adult, do it the first time. Then you watch. When the child has a good habit going, you can then let them do it alone. Then you move on to walking the dog, and cleaning up after the dog, and brushing the dog, etc. ***That way, children learn that enjoying a puppy involves learning how to take care of it.***

It's the same with God and humans. God works. He created mankind in his image, so of course, he would share the gift of work with us. So, work was and is a gift from God to the Human Race.

About now is the time that someone is thinking, "But, I don't ***feel*** like work is a gift." Money can feel like a gift. Free time can feel like a gift. Vacations can certainly feel like a gift. Work, well, no.

So, what happened?

III. Work was damaged when Adam fell.

Q: If work was a gift, why don't we enjoy it? A: Work was one of the many things that was damaged when Adam and Eve sinned against God thousands of years ago in the garden.

Let's look at what God said to Adam after that happened:

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.
18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;

for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

(Genesis 3:17)

So, work became damaged. Let’s look at one of those sentences in particular: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17)”

When God created the universe, it was perfect. In a perfect creation, perfect work produced perfect results. Work always involved effort, but when Adam worked, the result was always something fulfilling and meaningful.

Now, work was “painful toil”. Previously, effort was efficient. Effort always produced meaning. Now, there were thorns and thistles. Painful things got in the way of enjoying work. Now, there was something called “sweat”. You’ve all heard the phrase, “no sweat”. That means, doing something is easy. Prior to the fall, when Adam and Eve worked, there was no noticeable sweat. Now, work would be **characterized** by sweat.

However, there is a bigger problem than the convenience or profitability of work. God, as we said, possesses humility. God intended for humans to be like him, sharing in this particular characteristic, as well as others. ***By sharing in this quality, work was meant to be yet one more opportunity to meet with God, and to understand him, to commune with him and enjoy him.***

At the fall man became prideful. He want’s to be most important. A few minutes ago, we read a passage from the book of Philipians. Let’s read that passage in its context:

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

(Philippians 2:3-8)

Again, let's look at one of those sentences in more detail on the next slide. Paul warns us to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit". Why would Paul take the time to warn us about this? Because, that's what we do - And, we do it often!

You see, humility causes someone to value others more than themselves. That's what Jesus did. He valued all of us more than he valued himself. So, he became a servant. He was so dedicated to serving others, that he went to the cross, so that he could give something wonderful to all of mankind – the forgiveness of our sins.

Pride is the opposite. The prideful person puts themselves first. They consider themselves more important than everyone around them. We humans universally have "selfish ambition". We all have "vain conceit".

The prideful person wants others to serve **them**. You've all met people like that. They're hard to be around. This is bad on two levels: **First**, when we're full of pride, we miss out on what God has for us -He wants us to learn how to be like him through humility; serving others. That lets us meet with him and enjoy him. **Second**, it's bad as a practical matter -No one likes prideful people. No one wants to be around someone who puts themselves first.

So, how do we get back to the place where God intended for us to be? How do we reclaim work and labor?

IV. How to reclaim work.

Here's how we reclaim work and labor.

- 1) Although it sounds idealistic, remember work is still a gift from God, who loves us. It's worth putting forth the effort to reclaim it, because God is at the end of our efforts. He wants to help us.
- 2) Not just in your job, but in your whole life, pursue humility. That means, value others more than yourself. We all need to become a servant, like Jesus Christ. If you do this, it will change all aspects of your life -Your work, your relationships; everything!
- 3) Understand that, in the end, you work for God, not for yourself. In fact, you work for God, even more than you work for your employers:

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossian 3:23-24)

Here's an important note: Can we do this ourselves? No! We are all tarnished with sin. We need to ask God to help us. For some, that means asking God to save you from your sins through Jesus Christ. If you're never done this, there are some important links at the end of the article. Contact us, and we'll tell you how to do this. For those who have asked Jesus into your life, this takes time. So, give yourself that time. God is gracious and forgiving. He wants to give us wonderful gifts to lift us towards him -Not cumbersome burdens to weigh us down.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

I. God Works

- In doing so, he expresses his humility in serving the things he created.
- At its core, when we look at how God creates, we learn something very important about the character of God.
- If nothing else, we can worship him and thank him for his faithfulness to us and to the rest of his creation.

II. God gave work to humans as a gift.

III. Work was tarnished when Adam and Eve fell into sin.

IV. We can reclaim our work and our labor by asking God's help to pursue humility.

- We need to become servants.

May God bless and help us, as we seek to do these things.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net