

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Three)

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In Ecclesiastes, chapter one, Solomon came to the conclusion that life is pretty much a downer, and it is lived in a world with the cyclical nature of circumstances, and the vast majority of mankind endures what cannot be changed. Given the circumstances he described, I believe that he reached a correct conclusion.

Toward the end of Ecclesiastes 1 and on into chapter 2, he conducted a series of tests for himself that involved meditations on wisdom. You can pick these things up right from what is written in the scriptures. He gave himself tests that involved meditations on wisdom, huge work projects (as we got into chapter 2), and then came text involving the pursuit of pleasure, including the pursuit of art, and then back to thoughts about wisdom again, and finally some deep thoughts regarding death.

In this sermon we will not touch on all of these subjects extensively except for one, and in future sermons we will look more extensively than today at wisdom and death as Solomon perceived them within the context on Ecclesiastes. Today we will continue through an aspect of Ecclesiastes 2 which gives us an opportunity to make somewhat of a side trip to expand the importance of work to a Christian life. There must be no doubt in our minds that work is important to our preparation for the Kingdom of God and for glorifying God.

This sermon considers our works' importance in light of the overall goal of God's purpose. He, brethren, is our *model*. God is a creator. He *works*. Christianity is a way of life that must be focused on and worked at for one to become skilled at it. It must be perceived by us as a specialized way of life designed to produce a specific product, and we are being created in the image of God, and we have a distinct role in this creation.

The terms "walk" and "work" are both used as metaphors in the Bible to illustrate the activities necessary for the Christian to fulfill the requirements of a life lived to glorify God, and at the same time to be prepared for being fully-fledged members of the Kingdom of God.

The term "walk," in all of its forms, appears 413 times in the Bible. The word "work" appears 476 times. They are not all used in a metaphoric sense in every case, but the sheer number of times that they are used gives an indication of their importance to life and to God's purpose. Both terms are tightly bound within the purpose of right

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understanding and observing the Days of Unleavened Bread, which we just experienced. This is because the Israelites of old departed their bondage from Egypt a free people and began their pilgrimage to the Promised Land during those days.

They walked the entire way for the entire time—40 years' worth—and their walking thus became the way to illustrate in a single word the efforts needed to achieve the great goal that God has brought into *our* life. If they had not walked the whole way, they never would have made it. Now taking that word in its metaphoric sense, it comes to mean very much to you and me. *If we do not do what God calls “walking” in the New Testament sense, we will never get to the Kingdom of God.*

The Israelites were pilgrims working their way by walking. Their walking was not for the purpose of relaxing entertainment or for exercise. It was a form of labor assigned by God for them to perform, and covers a purposeful expending of energy to achieve a great goal.

The Bible addresses work in two categories: (1) what one does for a living, and (2) the performing of works as they might be termed in regard to Christian-living responsibility.

It has become fashionable for people in Protestantism to denigrate Christian works, but the fact remains that if one does not work at being Christian, one will never be prepared for the Kingdom of God. Working and walking are absolutely necessary—an essential activity if one is going to be in the Kingdom of God; that is, working and walking in their metaphorical sense. They have great meaning to salvation. Even though one does not earn salvation by actually working, yet on the other hand it plays a major role as to whether we will ever get there.

First we will look at work in a general overall sense, but gradually shift our focus toward principles most important to our Christian responsibility as preparation for the Kingdom of God. We are going to open this sermon in Matthew 6. In the first part of this sermon we will be putting things that are foundational to Christianity and Christian works right at the very beginning here.

Matthew 6:31-32 “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

Everybody is concerned about that very thing—“What shall we eat?” and “What shall we

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drink?” It is natural to do that because food, clothing, and so forth are important to one’s life. But in verse 33, by way of contrast, Jesus said:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you

Jesus is not denying the importance of eating, drinking, clothing, working. He is not denying its importance. What He is doing here is setting the correct priority that His brothers and sisters—the sons of God—have to have as *their* highest priority regarding work. So there is no doubt earning a living is of importance to life. However, we can very easily drift over to emphasizing one—Christian works or our day-to-day job—above the other.

It appears to me, just from my observations, that overemphasizing the day-to-day wage-earning job is the *easier* of the two to emphasize. The important principle here is we must consciously put God’s Word and work as being of highest priority. My key word there is “consciously.” We must *consciously* put God’s Word and God’s work as being the higher priority over our day-to-day activity of earning a living. I am not saying that Christian works should be given greater time. A big difference here. I *am* saying that we must have a higher regard for it than the day-to-day job. So I admonish you at the beginning here of this sermon that it is very easy to draw us over to the carnal work.

“Work” is dictionary-defined as “the physical or mental activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something.” God, in whose image we are being created, is our overall model. The very first image God gives us of Him in the Bible is: He is working. So let us go back to Genesis 1. We will just use this verse as one to hone in on, but before we get there, just recall briefly what it says in Genesis 1:2.

Genesis 1:2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The very first picture God gives us of Him in the entire Bible from the beginning is that He is working. Remember the “Law of First Mention.” Here is the first mention of God, and He is working. That means working is going to have major impacts on our life. If we are going to be in the Kingdom of God, work is important. There is no avoiding it. Work is important!

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In verse 26 we find God telling us what His specific job is at this time He is working on.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

There it is, right there. Creating is working. Our first picture of Him is He is working, straightening out the creation that has been pretty much destroyed in the war between Himself and Satan. Then we see Him starting a *new* creation of making us in His image. Once things are put into order, His work continues right on.

Let us consider something just very briefly. There is a general thought in this American culture, and I think probably in every culture on the face of the earth, that as one rises in importance within that culture, the one who rises is generally relieved of work as he rises. Well that, brethren, is a flawed concept to say the least, because, here is God working. There is absolutely nobody higher than Him, and He is setting the pattern He wants everybody to follow. He is the One with the most authority, and He is working. He is not relieved of work at all.

There are ways to see this even in the human scene that I will not go into, but the thing I am thinking of is actually patterned after God right in the human family. So nobody is higher than God, and in His culture, as we just saw, He is the highest of all. We saw in other scriptures—John 5:17—where Jesus said that God works continuously, and He also basically said, “and I do too.” The Father and the Son both work continuously.

We also saw in Hebrews 1:3 where it says that He is upholding all things by His Word of power, and that word “upholding” indicates purposeful energetic movement toward a goal. God does not forget His goal. He just keeps on going toward it.

Let us continue through by going to Genesis 2. If you follow the orderly sequence of events through these creation chapters, we find Adam and Eve are created, and then God created the Garden of Eden. In verse 15 it says there:

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

What I want you to get out of that is, He created Adam and Eve, He created the Garden, and the first command He gave them was to work; and then He said "Don't sin." The command to work actually preceded the command not to sin. I want you to get this in mind. God is in favor of work, and if we are going to be in His image, we are going to take up the challenge to work like God works, even if not at the same level.

There are three things that I want you to note to the point we have gotten, and they are this:

(1): There is no such concept from God that Adam, and thus mankind, is entitled to something for nothing. We *have* to work. He just did not put them in the Garden and say, "Here, enjoy the fruit." He put them in the Garden and said, "Work. Then you can enjoy the fruit. But don't sin."

(2): The command to work precedes Adam and Eve's sin. The conclusion here is that work is not a penalty for sin at all. The command to work actually came before there was any sin.

(3): The curse.

Genesis 3:17-19 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

The curse that God imposed following their sin did make work more difficult to perform.

There is one more thing that I want to add before we move on to another section, and believe it or not, this is going to come out of the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon said something here that is very important. Notice this conclusion that came after this experiment with working and seeking for entertainment.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.

That is God's intention. Even though God put the curse on the earth, it is God's intention that we *enjoy* work. That is an interesting statement. Nothing is better. We will go over this in a little bit more detail later on, but not in this sermon, and we will see the wisdom that Solomon has there about that. But at any rate, it shows us a very positive statement regarding God's intent for work.

We are going to go back now to the book of Ephesians in the New Testament as we continue going forward and laying the foundation for understanding the way God approaches work in the Bible. This principle that is here is very important to a Christian's understanding.

Ephesians 6:5-8 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh [meaning the boss where you are employed], with fear [meaning respect] and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

I think that without doubt this passage states one of the highest priorities regarding understanding our responsibility to work—that is, understanding our responsibility as a Christian, and it is the foundation of our gratitude for what Christ has done, and at the same time the basis of what we owe Him in return.

It comes down to this: The way that we work is a visible witness of God before the world; that is, if we are godly people. The way we work is very important to God because He wants the world to see the way we work—primarily our *attitude* in the way we work. He wants us to be a willing servant and is using this means of glorifying God.

So the overall instruction here is that we are to labor in our job in which we earn our living, and at the same time carry out our responsibility as a Christian with (as the NKJV says) “sincerity of heart.” The KJV says “with singleness of heart.” That is actually a little bit better translation. There is nothing wrong with “sincerity” at all, but “singleness” is more direct. The correct direction is that the Christian is supposed to work, understanding that he is not really working for that employer, not really working for himself, but he is working for Jesus Christ. We will see how far this goes in just a little bit.

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What matters to the Christian is what *God* thinks. The best way to glorify Him is to really carry about in your mind that you really are working for Christ. Is not God somebody you want to impress? You may not want to really impress your human employer. Maybe you can get by on that, understanding that in reality God is watching over our lives to the extent that He wants us to understand we are in turn working for Him and His Son. That is what is important to our God and Creator. What we carry about in our mind is what is important to Him.

One of the reasons the KJV says “singleness” is that God wants to make sure we understand that our mind is not to be divided from the reality that our calling has made us a *willing* slave of Jesus Christ. In one sense I have never come across a person who has literally been a slave other than a *Christian* slave. I mean he has not been a *human* slave of anybody. There are very few people left in the United States of America who have ever been really literally owned by another human being, but the Christian slave *is* owned by another person, and He is not a human being.

These points are being given to help us grasp and put into practice in a practical way these spiritual truths.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

If you are following with me, you will understand that we have been enslaved by Jesus Christ. He purchased us. He now literally owns us, and in order to buy us He had to give His life in the crucifixion, and when we accepted His blood, we now literally belong to Him. So here the One who owns us is telling us what we have to carry about in our mind in regards to work.

From here turn to Romans 6. This has more to do with this concept of slavery. I hope that we are advanced enough spiritually that we can understand this important spiritual concept.

Romans 6:18-20 And having been set free from sin [by the blood of Jesus Christ], you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members [every part of your body] as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as

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slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

What I have done is that I have taken this vast important spiritual truth and applied it to work, and I used Ephesians 6 as the foundation for this, and what I have given you is a spiritual truth. So we are in fact slaves of Jesus Christ. So as God sees things, that is the way He sees things, and the way He sees things is what matters. Since we became the slaves of Jesus Christ, we are no longer working to advance our own interests, and really technically, we are not here to advance our employer's interests either. What we have in mind is that we are working to advance the interests of God and the Kingdom of God. We are to fulfill our labors at all times, and in all cases to Christ and to our employer with energy and enthusiasm, and above all, service.

I remember something that I picked up from a sermon Herbert Armstrong gave many, many years ago, and I have carried it with me. I cannot say that I have always fulfilled it perfectly all the time, but at least it was there in my mind. In his sermon he was explaining this same principle, and he said, "There is one little caveat here, and that is I Corinthians 1:26 which says God has not called many great or mighty people, but rather He tends to call those who are the poor and the weak of the world."

He said that principle also applies in our employment as well, and therefore he said that we Christians may not be the best of our employer's employees in terms of technical expertise, skill, or whatever, but he said, "I'll tell you what. You had better strive to be your employer's most *responsible* employee."

Understand there is a difference there, because being the weak of the world we probably will not be the most skilled person our employer has working for him in that particular trade or whatever, but you had better be his most responsible one. You are trustworthy. You can be depended upon. You are going to be there. You are not going to be arguing with him. You are going to be doing your job whether he is watching or not. That is being responsible. God knows that we do not have necessarily the best skills. Some of us *do* have those things—the capability to meet that—but many do not.

I mentioned earlier that the world has pretty much denigrated Christian works as being valueless, partly because they misunderstand Paul's clearly-stated truth that one cannot earn salvation by means of works. But we have become slaves of Christ, and that does not hinder us in being able to bear witness for the entire body of Jesus Christ. We became slaves through His redemption of us, and we are so tightly bound with Christ that we are actually seen as being part of His very body. Our reality is that we are

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working for Him regardless of what our day-to-day job is. Whether we are a housewife, whether we are a welder, a salesman, an administrator for a huge corporation, or whatever, we can carry out this responsibility.

From here we are going to go to Proverbs 24 to put in another principle that is important to God's way of life.

Proverbs 24:30-34 I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

This proverb tells us that Solomon learned something from the condition of the farm he observed, and that is, if one desires to produce profit from life, one must avoid indolence. Profit requires keeping at a task consistently enough to produce it.

We saw in the early chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes that God clearly desires that we be profitable. Avoiding indolence, or laziness, requires sufficient vision and sense of responsibility not only to oneself but also responsibility to others to keep on going. God has given us both the vision of His purpose and a sense of responsibility to Him and to our Savior, and to each other as well.

In the book of Ecclesiastes is a principle that we have read a number of times. We are going to read it with Proverbs 24:30 in mind and apply it to you and me at least ever so briefly. In Ecclesiastes 9 we have this principle. Remember, we are avoiding indolence.

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

Proverbs 24, beginning in verse 30, is speaking on avoiding indolence. It is also speaking in order to show us very clearly so that no one can miss it, that wealth is produced by diligent effort in carrying something out until something you hoped to produce is produced.

What I want to do here is to turn our attention away from working for an employer,

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getting paid for your day-to-day work, and in this case working for God and His Kingdom.

Taking this concept that wealth is produced by means of diligent work, in your meditations on this scripture, I do not want you to make the mistake of limiting wealth to money. That is easy to do, but there is much wealth in life that has nothing at all to do with money. Do you think righteousness is not wealth? Do you think good character is not wealth? There are multitudes of things that have nothing at all to do with wealth that we would normally think of wealth as being.

I would like you from time to time to think of wealth in terms of skill. The most important skill of all is to live like God does. That is the most important skill in life, and thus one becomes wealthy in skill at living.

But how many other things are there that we can become skilled in? The list is almost endless. How about being skilled in music, in everything from singing to playing an instrument? How about being skilled in carpentry? How about being skilled as an automotive mechanic? How about being skilled in sewing, in painting, as a computer operator, a writer, a speaker, and on and on?

Do not get all bent out of shape because we cannot become skilled at everything that we do, and actually, God, in somewhat in some cases, is actually the cause. We will see definite scriptural references that indicate that God is the cause, but I will help you to see it just from this standpoint in a very shallow way; but nonetheless, it is a true way. All we have to do is look at our own body. God has made every part of the human body skilled at performing its function within the body, but not every part of the body is capable of doing what every other part of the body does. You get the point here?

God compares the church to the body of Jesus Christ. The body of Jesus Christ, the church, has all kinds of functions that it is carrying out, and not everybody is skilled at doing everything within the church. Paul makes it very clear that God has appointed some apostles, evangelist, teachers, and so on. God has placed everybody in the body as it pleases Him, but not everybody even in the body of Jesus Christ can do everything with equal skill. That is an important thing that we deal with, and though we are to put our energy into all that we do, we cannot do everything.

But there is usually part of just about every function that we get involved in, and that is we can become better than what we are. Is that not true? We can become more skilled at the part we are doing. That is what God is pointing to. In a sense He is saying, "Don't be satisfied. You can become better than what you already are." We should not be

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overly worried about it, but part of our thinking should be that if we are functioning for Jesus Christ, and we are part of His body, we want to glorify Him in just about everything we can. Every function we get ourselves involved in, we have to know that we cannot do everything with equal skill. That does not mean that God is down on us because we cannot do something that somebody else can do better.

I am confident that there are spiritual things that every one of us can do better now. How about prayer? Is it not possible you can pray more fervently, longer, more thoroughly, with more wisdom, with more understanding, with all knowledge, and understanding? Cannot we crank those things up a little bit?

Here is a big one: How about Bible study? When we sit down to Bible study, how long is it before our eyes get heavy and we go to sleep? That happens to everybody eventually. I am not saying that this is the most terrible thing in the world. It is something we have to fight off. We are human. We have to fight it off. God knows that.

But let me ask you something that only you can answer regarding Bible study. Are you operating your Bible study on an organized basis? Do you actually have a plan that you are carrying out so that your Bible study functions better than it has in the past? When you sit down to study, do you have a definite goal in mind that you are going to accomplish? I am not talking about a goal that might be as long as saying that you are going to read two chapters. Most of us have been in the church 15, 20, 25, 30 years. Have we advanced over what we were doing ten years ago in our study so that we are more thoroughly understanding what it is that we have put our mind to do?

Here is something that you can do, and it works, and I guarantee you that it is a simple thing, and it will put God's Word into your mind better than it is right now.

I learned something from Abraham Lincoln. I was reading a biography of him. I do not know if you know this, but they wore stovepipe hats back in those days. Abraham Lincoln's stovepipe hat had a band around it like so, and it had notes stuffed in it all around the edge. When he thought of something, he wrote it down on little pieces of paper and stuck them up there, and he would know. Incidentally, it was right close to his head too! But that was not really the reason why he was doing that, because when somebody asked him why he was doing it, he said, "I have found that the more of my senses I can get involved in the operation of my thoughts, the better chance it has of sticking in my mind. That's why I write. It's not just thinking it. I write."

Let us apply that principle to the Bible. I know of somebody who did this, and it works. This person would study a subject for a whole week, or two whole weeks, whatever, and

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all the while he was doing this he was taking little notes and writing them down. Every day he would study, let us say, “baptism.” He would look up the word in a concordance, look at the scriptures, have a thought or two and write them down, and then at the end of a period of time, usually on the Sabbath, he would sit down and he would write an article as if he were trying to convince his friend that his ideas regarding baptism were the right ones. Now he was preaching to somebody. Not really doing it—he was doing it on a piece of paper. Do you see what was happening? He was reading. He was meditating. He was writing, and now, in a sense, it was almost like he was speaking a sermon or a sermonette to somebody.

Is that the way you study? But it is a way, you see, to get God’s Word in your mind. You simply get as many senses as you possibly can within a period of time and then try to explain it to somebody even though you never do it literally. It is just on a piece of paper, but you thought it through.

I will tell you what you could do in order to make it more effective. Get yourself some reference works. There are things that you can get. I would highly recommend that you at least have a concordance. Get a concordance. Another excellent help would be a topical Bible where everything is arranged by subject, and they tell you all the scriptures where this subject comes up. You can follow a subject all the way through the Bible with a topical Bible. I do not care *what* the subject is—baptism, Holy Spirit, trinity, whatever—and as you are studying, you are writing notes down about *your* thoughts about the subject. All that the topical Bible does is refer you to the scripture.

I will give you another reference that is excellent help. It is called *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. What they do in that book is they go through very many of the illustrations that are in the Bible and explain how that image is used all the way through the Bible, like these words that we began with—“walk” and “work.” You can look both of them up in *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

Make the time that you study valuable. Just do not let it slide by, and say, “Well, I’ve read two chapters.” That is better than nothing. I will not denigrate that and say that it is no good at all, but there is a way to improve it so that you become much more skilled, much more expert, by pushing yourself to meditate on one subject at a time.

Proverbs 24:16 For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.

What I am getting at here is this. Do not give up. The righteous get back up again. If they feel they are not making any progress, they do not give up. They go back at it

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again to see if there is a different angle they can come at in their studying and thereby accumulate more along the way and become more skilled.

We just looked at this one about having to work with a great deal of diligence, and so we are going to go back now to II Thessalonians, again touching on “work.” Remember that this is written to the Christian congregation, and it involves work.

II Thessalonians 3:6-15 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

What we have here is a clear and strong statement regarding the Christian responsibility to work in imitation of our Father and our elder Brother Jesus Christ, as well as following the pattern of the apostles and others of the ministry set before them.

Apparently what happened was that these people quit working on the basis of their misunderstanding that Christ was going to return at any minute. However, Paul said this “not working” was being disorderly. The Greek word that is translated here for “disorderly” is *ataktos*, and it literally means “irregular.” It pictures soldiers marching, but not keeping their lines in order. They were breaking the pattern of conduct set by Christ. Instead they involved themselves in loafing, spreading inciting gossip, asking to be supported by the church, and were meddlesome in other people’s business.

We might think it really was not all that bad, especially when Paul said not to treat them as though they were not a brother, but at the same time he clearly states that such conduct was far from acceptable, and therefore he commanded the other members to

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withdraw from these loafers and admonish them. There is a practical truth about work that we need to understand, and it is an important one, and that is that work is costly. It does not come free. Work is costly.

Turn with me to Matthew 16. I am going to pick this out of a little bit longer piece of information, and if we have enough time we will get back to it again.

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

I think you can begin to make connections that if somebody is going to follow Jesus Christ it means that person is going to conform his life to what Jesus said in regard to work. The point of attack that Jesus is making here is kind of generalized, but Jesus is stating that in order to do this, one must deny himself, take up his burden, and follow. This sacrifice is involved in Christian responsibility and our day-to-day job too, but it is particularly aimed by Jesus at His followers regarding Christian works.

What is He talking about here? Denying oneself is sacrifice, and denying oneself is required of Jesus' followers because the carnal nature is always present and invariably desires to take the easy and most likely a wrong way to produce things, and that will produce failure before God and man.

Let me give you a primary example of somebody even before he started the job. He had to think this through, and he *knew*, even as he began it, that the sacrifice was going to have to be made by him. I can think of two very quickly right off the top of my head: The Father and the Son. Even before They began the creation, They knew it was going to cost Them to carry Their work forward. The Father *knew* He was going to have to give up the Son, and the Son *knew* He would have to give up His life in order to do the work, finish the work that God gave Him to do.

This is a huge principle. Whenever we take on a job, we are giving up time and energy in order to produce a profit for our employer. The same thing is true when we devote ourselves to Jesus Christ. What are we doing? We should know, even as we begin, we are going to give up our life in order to work for Him. This same principle goes through the whole regimen of work. It is costly. Yes, we get rewarded by an employer when he pays us, but we do not get rewarded until after we have given of ourselves in order to produce a profit for that man.

You see what is tied into this? There is no such thing as doing work without making an

investment of yourself in the work—time, energy, whatever. While you are doing the work you cannot be doing something else. You can only do one thing at a time. Do you get the point? So when people begin to realize this, what do they do? If they are lazy, they just quit working, and they quit working because they do not want to make the investment of their time and energy in order to produce something.

We have got to overcome and realize that there is no profit until we invest ourselves in the job. Work is costly, and it is something that has to be put out of our minds, understanding that it is going to take a sacrifice of ourselves in order to produce, whether it is for Jesus Christ or whether it is for our employer. The same principle holds true—husband for wife, wife for husband; husband and wife for the children. The family becomes successful because mom and dad invest themselves in the well-being of the family. You get the principle?

God sets the pattern. He began this creation knowing that He was going to have to invest Himself if there was going to be something that He could share with others and Himself. This is a major, major point of understanding for Christian life.

We cannot give love until we first give ourselves, and if we are willing to do that, then there can be the right kind of profit both for God and for us and for the person who receives the love as well. That is why, even in capitalism, the investment comes first. The sacrifice comes first. We might say the gamble comes first if it is going to produce any profit. With God it is not a gamble. He guarantees that if we deny ourselves, and give of ourselves, then He is going to respond as well.

Denying oneself is required, because the carnal nature is always present, and invariably it desires to take it easy, to do the wrong things, and that will invariably produce failure before God and man, and this we clearly do not want to do, because not denying oneself will not be profitable.

If one truly denies oneself, works hard, what happens if one really becomes wealthy? It happens, even in God's Family. There are several scriptures you can turn to regarding this.

Genesis 13:1-2 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the South. Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Genesis 26:12-14 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same

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year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.

Genesis very clearly says God enriched both Abraham and Isaac. God made them wealthy. In a way, here, we have to be careful because people have ideas about a wealthy person. Even Jesus warned of a wealthy person may find it harder to go through to enter the Kingdom of God than a camel going through the eye of a needle. But Abraham and Isaac are going to be in the Kingdom of God, and that wealth did not hinder them from using it rightly and properly.

I also want you to look at Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:36-37 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

These verses show that not everybody God calls and works with is wealthy. There are some people that He calls and works with, as Paul says there in Hebrews 11, they were destitute. They did not have any money. They went around in rags, I guess you might say. Were they unconverted? No. They were converted people, and yet God did not provide them with wealth. He did provide them with enough to get by, but they were not wealthy.

So what can we learn from this? One of the principles is this. God works with each individual that He calls for the purpose that *He* has in mind, producing in *their* life, in *their* character what *He* wants from them, and if it is going to require being poor, they are going to be poor. If it is going to require that they be wealthy, then God will work with them to produce the wealth as well. We have to make sure that our judgment is such that we do not do what the Jews did, and come to the wrong conclusion both regarding wealth and poverty.