

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORK

WEEK 2: WHAT IS A BIBLICAL WORK ETHIC?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The overall goal of this six-week class is to give a broad overview of how Christians are to view work with a Biblical worldview.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is a Biblical theology of work?
 - **Week 2: What is a Biblical work ethic? How can I work for God's glory?**
 - Week 3: How can I tell when work has become my identity and/or an idol?
 - Week 4: Are some jobs more spiritual than others?
 - Week 5: How do I balance work, church, family, and life?
 - Week 6: Should I quit my job / take a new job / retire?

INTRODUCTION

- Once again, when talking about the topic of work ethic, it is important to frame it from Scripture. There are a whole host of various jobs, hours, and days that we may be tasked to work, therefore, this is what the Bible has to say *generally* regarding the believer's work ethic.
- Even though our demands may vary per job, there are still commands that pertain to everyone.
- When we say *work hard*, that is pretty subjective to the job when dealing with physical exertion. Some jobs require more physical labor and others more mental labor. The command to work hard is not dependent on where you are working but that you labor with purpose.
- We must have the right heart and mind when we view our work. In this class we are going to talk about what the right number of hours worked is, our quality and commitment to work, how ambitious is too ambitious, how our work ethic reflects our view of God, and we will end with briefly talking about those who do not have a traditional job or boss.

WHAT IS A BIBLICAL WORK ETHIC?

Is 40 hours a week Biblical?

- The short answer is no...it is not found in the pages of the Bible how many hours we are supposed to work.
- Does that mean it is anti-Biblical? No, not at all. The number of hours worked in a week are heavily dependent upon the culture one lives in.
- But, we do have some Biblical principles to apply regarding how many hours we should work.
- Here is a brief history of the 40-hour workweek:¹

The Industrial Revolution (Started 1760)

- The industrial revolution is a topic a lot of us learn about at school. Its importance cannot be underrated in the modern age. But how does its influence cover the inception of the 40-hour workweek? Well, essentially, it transformed working life. *Instructing workers to work structured hours and complete shifts*. It was the inception of the timetable at work. The clock-in/clock-out creator.

Robert Owen (1810-1817)

- Robert Owen was a textile manufacturer and philanthropist. He believed that the 10-hour working day was the way forward. Now, this sounds like a long day to you and me, but this would have felt like a holiday back then. Robert Owen later raised the demand for the 8-hour working day. In 1817 he set about raising awareness for the 8-hour working day with the slogan "8 hours labor, 8 hours recreation, 8 hours rest".

The Adamson Act (1916)

- The Adamson Act was a federal law, the first of its kind, which instated that interstate railroad workers would work an 8-hour day, with additional pay for overtime.

The Fair Labor Standards Act (1938)

- The Fair Labor Standards Act was a revised version of a 1932 draft by Senator Hugo Black. The Fair Labor Standards Act was a US federal law laying out wage and hour standards for most private and public employers. The act established the 8-hour day and the 40-hour workweek. Additionally, it established that workers be paid for overtime, which was capped at four extra hours.

¹ <https://www.peoplegoal.com/blog/40-hour-workweek>

HOW CAN WE VIEW HOURS WORKED?

Our quality and our commitment to work.

- As stated before, the Bible does not have a number in mind but rather looks at the heart.
- We should not equate how hard we have worked with the number of hours we have put into our job.
- If we are in a place for 50 hours a week but 15 of those hours are spent on breaks, goofing around, talking to co-workers, playing online, etc. Then you really have not worked 50 hours, only 35.
- How can we make sure that we have a grounded Biblical work ethic?

We should not be slothful or deceitful in our work.

- Proverbs 6:6–11 “Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? ‘A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest’ -- Your poverty will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man.”
- Proverbs 10:4–5 “Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.”
- Proverbs 12:11 “He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who pursues worthless things lacks sense.”
- Proverbs 13:4 “The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat.”
- Proverbs 14:4 “Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much revenue comes by the strength of the ox.
- 1 Timothy 5:8 “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
- *God’s plan is for lazy people to repent and work; then they will see how he provides.*²
- “Fear God and work hard.” - David Livingstone
- In our work, we are witnessing to the onlooking world our relationship with Christ. If we are slothful at work, we may end up looking like the rest of the world, not shining a light as we are supposed to.
- If we are deceitful at work, we are now counted as liars and our witness is ruined. We have no longer allowed our yes to be yes and our no to be no.
- *Their capability in the workplace gave them credibility in the marketplace. Recklessness in the workplace undermines any level of gospel influence we may hope to have. Our example in the workplace is critical to any gospel we proclaim.*³

² <https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/towers/towers-issue/2017/june-july-2017/dna-christian-work-ethic/>

³ Ibid.

- This does not mean that you have to leave your workplace exhausted every day in order for God to get the glory. But it does mean that you should not be clocking in late and trying to leave early.

We should know our ultimate judge is the Lord who has our ultimate reward.

- Ephesians 6:7–8 “With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”
- Colossians 3:22–24 “Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”
 - Spurgeon once asked a young girl who worked as a maid how she knew she was saved. She answered, “I now sweep under the mats.” Her transformed heart was concerned with honoring God where only he would see. That is what separates a believer’s work ethic from the world. We are concerned with excellence in the places that only an omniscient God will inspect. The world seeks only to gain the approval of the employer but disregards the heart visible only to God. We work for God. He expects us to have the same work ethic regardless of any human audience.⁴
 - Do you see what Paul is saying here? He begins with a warning against doing nothing. If you are a slave, then obey your masters in everything. Just do it, he tells them. But he goes one step further. “Just doing it” isn’t enough either. As slaves, they should work and serve “with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.” They are to do their work with all their heart, “as working for the Lord, not for human masters,” and they are to do it with a recognition that it is ultimately the Lord Jesus Christ they are serving!⁵
- If our aim is to impress our employers, not only is it an ever-shifting goal, but it is a far lower standard than what the believer is called to.
- In our work, we should know that we are working before the Lord all the time. We may not get the overtime that we deserve or the bonus that we worked hard for either. But, if we have in mind that the Lord is keeping track in heaven, we will be more apt to work hard.

Our work schedule should reflect our true priorities.

- Matthew 6:33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
- 1 Corinthians 10:31 “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
- While the Bible says to work hard, it never approves of *over working*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Traeger and Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work: How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning to Our Jobs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

- I think this is the area that most people struggle with, how much is too much and how little is too little.
- If your work is keeping you away from Biblical priorities, it may be time to try and redo your schedule.
 - I would also add if your playtime or hobbies are keeping you from Biblical priorities, you need to rethink your schedule. We will cover this more when we talk about balance.
- *Your schedule is going to reflect your priorities in this life.* We all can make time for the things that we really want to do.
- This does not mean that we do not work, but it does mean that we work with our eyes looking heavenward. We want to be good stewards of the time that we have been given by God.
- This means that some jobs are 50–60 hours a week while others are 35–45 hours. If you are able to support your household, pay the bills, and generally live life, what more do you need.
- The more hours that are put towards work just means one may have to be more intentional about the time they are spending with family and the church.
- Traditionally, the first thing to fall away when schedules get tight is anything with the church. After that, it is family priorities which go away.
- We should be weary of anything that is going to keep us out of regular fellowship with the body of Christ.
 - We know that this is not always the case. Someone certainly can love the Lord and have to work on Sunday or miss a Bible study.
 - This is not the norm for the believer but the exception. Since God certainly commands us to gather as a body of believers, He is not going to then put you in a job so that your schedule gives you no opportunity to gather with the body.

HOW AMBITIOUS IS TOO AMBITIOUS?

- It is easy to lose perspective when we are working hard. We can either get too focused on making sure things are getting done, or we can get distracted so nothing really does get done.
- Some key points that we need to remember when it comes to work ethic:
 - You cannot do everything in 24 hours...only God is able to do that. God has designed us that we need to have sleep.
 - **Psalm 4:8 “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.”**
 - The world at large does not rely on your accomplishments. God calls you to simply be faithful to the work that He has placed before you.
 - **Proverbs 28:20 “A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished.”**

- You are the means that God uses for accomplishments, not the source. God does not depend on us to get anything done; He is free from reliance on His creation.
 - 1 Corinthians 15:10 “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”
- Ambition is a good thing when it is not the main thing. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:1 “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”
 - The word desire means here can be used for either positive or negative. It is also the Greek word translated lust and covet.
 - It is not the desires or ambition that is bad, it is about the motives of the heart.

YOUR VIEW OF YOUR WORK WILL REFLECT YOUR VIEW OF GOD

- A strong work ethic is confirmed in the Scriptures along with many warnings concerning slackness.
- *The believer’s work ethic should be nothing short of exemplary. Yet many of the worst workers also claim to belong to Christ. They see work as a necessary evil, not a means of God’s provision. They are allergic to prolonged effort and magnetized by ease. They proclaim salvation by grace but lament that their paycheck is earned by works.*⁶
- Looking at Ephesians 6:5–6 “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.”
 - “The one who is lord according to the flesh (or boss in this world) is to be obeyed. That is a hard concept for the present-day worker to understand. It is almost part of the job description of today’s worker that he must gripe and complain about his superiors, either openly or otherwise.”⁷
 - Our work ethic should reflect that fact that we know God has placed someone over us in a job or that we have been placed over others.
 - Paul says to masters in Ephesians 6:9 “And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”
 - It is essentially the same thing. Whether you are the earthly boss or under an earthly boss, each of your masters are in heaven and it does not matter what your status is on earth. God does not show partiality because of worldly success.

⁶ <https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/towers/towers-issue/2017/june-july-2017/dna-christian-work-ethic/>

⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Ephesians, The Christian Counselor’s Commentary* (TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 122.

- Our obedience should be one of the key traits that allow us to stand out of the crowd at work. Not only is it spiritually commanded by God, but it is also for your own health.
- When one works in a spirit of resentment and rebellion, he is working under stress. That attitude, over time, will wear him down physically and his overall countenance will become insufferable.⁸
- Paul also says to work with *fear and trembling* towards our earthly boss.
- This fear and trembling is not the same fear you have towards God but one of respect. We respect our employers by not complaining, doing a good job, doing the work we said we would, and attempting to simply work as peaceful as possible.
- It does not take salvation to obey an employer; a faithful believer, however, does this work with an attention to detail where only God will see.⁹
- It is because we know that ultimately God sees everything that we do work as hard as we do.
- The Christian worker should be known to be diligent.
- The Reformers considered work to have intrinsic dignity. John Calvin wrote, “No work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eye of God.”
- Hugh Latimer linked the dignity of work to the dignity of Christ. “This is a wonderful thing, that the Saviour of the world, and the King above all kings, was not ashamed to labour; yea, and to use so simple an occupation,” Latimer wrote. “Here he did sanctify all manner of occupations.”
- John Cotton noted, “Faith is ready to embrace any homely service his calling leads him to, which a carnal heart would blush to be seen in.”¹⁰

What are some signs that you have become idle, no longer diligent?¹¹

- **Your work is merely a means to an end, a place to serve your own needs.** Sometimes this kind of thinking can be pretty blatant and obvious. I work, some people say, so I can play. I’m in it for the money and the things money can buy. Or it can take on a veneer of spirituality. “I work,” you might say, “so I can be free to serve my church, and so I can give money to my church.” Either way, it’s pretty clear that a person who thinks like this doesn’t care much about their job at all. They only care about the other things their job allows them to do.
- **Your work totally frustrates you.** Work will always carry with it some level of frustration; that’s why it’s not worthy of our worship. Yet sometimes we go too far with our frustrations and grow blind to God’s aims for us in our work. We let our frustration control us and infect our hearts with bitterness and anger. For

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/towers/towers-issue/2017/june-july-2017/dna-christian-work-ethic/>

¹⁰ Joel Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 352.

¹¹ Traeger and Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work: How Working for King Jesus Gives Purpose and Meaning to Our Jobs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

those who recognize that satisfaction and purpose come as gifts from God, the frustration we experience at work shouldn't lead to discouragement. Our frustration turns our eyes back to God, increasing our dependency on him, and reminding us that our responsibility is to do our work in service and as an act of worship to him.

- **Your work becomes divorced from your Christian discipleship.** More than a few Christians think of their work as something they have to do from nine to five, Monday through Friday, so they can do the real work of being a Christian in the evenings and on weekends. If this describes you, read Colossians 3 again. Our work is not something we do in addition to our growth as a follower of Christ. Our work, here and now, is an expression of our Christian faith. Everything we do is an act of worship to God and an act of following Jesus, whether it is at home, at work, or at church.

HOUSEWIVES, MOMS, WIDOWS, RETIREES, AND SELF-EMPLOYED

- Even though you may not have a direct “boss” to whom you report, ultimately you are going to give an account of your work before the Lord.
- **Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”**
- Our responsibility to work hard is not just in force when we have a “job” to go to or when we are employed by someone else.
- As we have read in the above verses, God still requires us to work hard for His glory and because of our great salvation.
- There is never a time in our life where we have *earned* time to simply live for ourselves. From the time we are born until the Lord calls us home, our life should be focused on God and living for His glory.
- If you are in a position where you have people (adults or kids) that are under your care, remember that the Lord holds you responsible for their proper treatment.