

Topic	Work That Glorifies
Reference	1-Thessalonians 4:9-12
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How can we have much higher view of work based on scripture?

Why did Paul talk about the need to work hard? Why suddenly this need to tell the Thessalonians to work hard. It turns out that there were believers in the Thessalonian church who were too lazy to go to work because in the next chapter Paul wrote

1 Thessalonians 5:14a

And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, ...

So in our text today Paul was actually speaking out against laziness.

On my trip to Europe I saw able-bodied people begging on the streets, they carried signs like, so broke, it hurts, far from home, broke and hungry and I just couldn't understand why they refuse to find a decent place and get a decent piece of work to feed themselves, instead of sitting on the sidewalk begging for alms and not just sitting.

12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody

The bible teaches us to be compassionate especially towards those who are poor and disadvantaged, those who are sick and old, those who are disabled or handicapped but scripture is against laziness, living at expense of others, not because of your circumstance but out of choice and those able-bodied beggars who were on the street by choice.

Just like the evil of terrorism, the evil of socialist ideology is spreading and will soon reach our shores, may be its really arrived. To set an example, people on the left often have this bloated sense of entitlement, they feel they are entitled to healthcare, to foot stamps, to university placements etc., but if you have not noticed there are also many people in this country who harbor similar inflated sense of entitlement.

Lessons from 1 Thessalonians 4:9~12

1. Work and Society (looking horizontally)
2. Work and Rest (looking internally)
3. Work and Creation (looking vertically)

WORK AND SOCIETY

We all have a very distorted view of work. Our attitude to work, our concept of work, they are far removed from the biblical doctrine of work. Dorothy Sayers said, *Work is the gracious expression of creative energy in the service of others.*

Basically, what she is saying is that society as a whole is hurting, because it doesn't espouse the revolutionary biblical doctrines of work, because in our mind the bible contains some revolutionary ideas on work and she thought that people were suffering or stressed out from work because they lack an understanding of these ideas.

Modern doctrine of work is; work is what you do for the living to derive an income in order to survive or even to thrive. At its most basic level, work is done so that we can put food on the table, to feed our family. At the secondary level it allows us to do what we want to pursue our dreams.

The modern doctrine of work is self-centered in nature. The money that I earn is for me and my family to spend and enjoy. We may describe this as a kind of entitlement mentality and I touched on this briefly just now, how people in the political where they think this way, I am a citizen of this country and therefore I am entitled to this and that and many people in this country as well they also think this way because I belong to a certain ethnic group I am entitled to this and that. This entitlement mentality is also evident when we work for money. I work hard for my money, this is the fruit of my labor and therefore only I am entitled to it, you didn't work for it and so you are not entitled to it. That's why it is very hard for someone and especially a Chinese to part with this hard earned money to give to others.

I am not teaching you to be more charitable, that's not my point. I am merely emphasizing the self-centered nature of modern work and hence today we find doctors practicing medicine, not because he wants to relieve sufferings, but because he can make a lot of money. When the patients are just an excuse or means to a self-centered end. We also find architects designing nice buildings simply because it is a lucrative business. The occupants of the buildings are just means to make money.

Now in reflection of what Dorothy Sayers is saying here, where it is written in the Bible that work should be done in the service of others. The answer is not explicitly but implicitly. If you scrutinize our text, there seems to be a dividing line between verses 9 and 10 and verses 11 and 12. It appears that we have two separate and unrelated halves. The first half talks about love while the second half deals with work. It looks like Paul is addressing two different topics here, but I can assure you both are connected in a surprising way. If you notice verse 11 does not start with a new sentence, rather is a continuation of the sentence in verse 10. So the whole text is

based on a single thought. Paul starts by talking about their love for one another, in fact the word love appears three times in the first two verses.

9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you,

It means that when it comes to loving one another, you don't need me to tell me what to do. In verse 10

10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more,

In verse 9 Paul also writes, **for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.**

So this is really the basis for what Paul is saying here. This is the axis around which the whole text turns. But when did God teach them to love one another. If you recall during the last supper Jesus proclaims

John 13:34: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Why is there a need for a new commandment when we already have the other commandment to love our neighbor? Isn't one another part of word neighbor or including the word neighbor. In Matthew 22 when Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment, Jesus answered

Matthew 22:37~39 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

In fact, Jesus later elaborated on this second greatest commandment to love our neighbors by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. It turns out that neighbor includes our enemies, those we don't particularly like and so the term neighbor in the second greatest commandment is very broad. It includes one another on one hand and enemies on the other hand, but back to the question why the need for a new commandment when we already have the second greatest commandment.

There is a surface reason and there is a deeper reason. Jesus gave us the new commandment to love another because if you can't even love your brothers and sisters in Christ, those in God's family, what is there to talk about loving your neighbor, let alone your enemies and hence I have always seen the new commandment more like a precursor to the second greatest commandment, love one another first within God's family and then you will find it easier to love your neighbor.

Coming back to our text, here Paul is saying that the two are closely intertwined. Your work should be a demonstration or a manifestation of your love for one another or on a broader scale your love for your neighbor or even broader your love for society. When you love others, you don't mind laboring for the sake of their comfort, their wellbeing or benefit, work is an expression of love. Paul puts this across more explicitly in the next chapter. In verse 12, he says

1 Thessalonians 5:12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord...

That's how Dorothy Sayers derive the definition of work from a biblical standpoint that work is a gracious expression of creative energy in service of others. Now when you compare this with the modern doctrine of work, you would appreciate the radical nature of biblical view of work. when you work purely for money, you will never be satisfied, it will be an endless chase for more and more income but when you work to serve others, the sense of satisfaction can be tremendous and it is based on this secret of happiness we find in Acts 20:35 where Paul write

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

This is the biblical secret of happiness. The satisfaction equation is really quite simple, higher level of service plus less focus on money equal greater sense of satisfaction. When you work, your primary focus should not be money, in your work you should ask, is my job making myself useful to others, useful to society, but if you can make a lot of money along the way, good for you but money should not be the primary motivation.

What can we do so that our work can exhibit a greater degree of service for others? How can we subscribe more to the biblical doctrine of work in what we do currently.

The idea of serving and to contribute and that's why Paul has harsh words for those who are lazy, those who refuse to work by choice, because they are not contributing to society or adding to the common good, instead as we saw in the last verse of our text they become a burden to others by taxing their resources.

Going by the biblical view of work, one should never fully retire unless you are too old or frail to work. If you are still physically or mentally capable, do something useful, join an NGO, contribute to the common good, be a positive factor or member of the community, do something useful even for no pay, don't just sit at home reading a newspaper again and again, washing and polishing your car every day, continue to be a useful member of the community in the service of others.

WORK AND REST

11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business

This seems to square with the verse in chapter 5 where Paul warns those who are idle and destructive. If we dig deeper all we can glean from this verse is that, there should be this peace and quiet, this tranquility in our hearts or a special kind of spiritual rest. The bible teaches that work should arise from this type of rest, versus the worldly kind of work that produces only restlessness. Notice the reverse sequence.

First we find our rest in God out of which flows our work and our labor instead of working to seek that illusive rest only to end up feeling restless. So the question to ask is, do you have this quiet spirit in your life. Does your work arise from that peace and rest in your heart? If not, then you have got the sequence wrong and you lack the biblical foundation of work. Of course, after a period of hard work we need to take rest, after working for five days we have our weekend off, we need to give our bodies a rest. That is an intermission in work, I am talking about something far deeper.

Sabbath: Taking a break from work on weekends that is really based on the idea of the Sabbath. The Jews are very serious about keeping the Sabbath. The origin of the Sabbath is of course, is in Genesis when God created the world in six days and he rested on seventh day and God then instructed the Israelites to do likewise. You work for six days and you rest on the seventh. There may be a physiological reason behind this, you get tired after six days of work and your body needs some rest but that's the surface reason. There is a deeper reason beyond just preventing physical exhaustion.

The real reason was to remind them that He is the one who will give them the ultimate rest. That is the rest I am talking about. No amount of work can earn you a rest from which all our labor springs. Hebrews chapter 4 repeatedly describes believers as entering God's rest or finding rest in God. Interestingly in verse 9 it is called the Sabbath rest. If you have truly entered into God's rest, you have no interest at all joining the rat race for status, identity and security, because you already have status as really people of God, you already have identity as children of God, you already are secured in his love and promises. You will not participate in the endless and restless chase of money because you already have something far more precious.

In the course of our day to day work, we face various challenges and we experience all kinds of tensions, the result is stress and pressure, anxiety and frustration, you feel drained and after a while it is the unavoidable part of working life, but this is what you do, you have to frequently run to God to recharge your battery, to refresh your spirit.

Matthew 11:28~29 Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

WORK AND CREATION

This is based on the end of verse 11. **work with your hands, just as we told you,**

This verse is a reference to the creative aspect of work, meaning that when you work, you are creating something, not necessary something physical but something of value, you are creating value. Biblical work points ultimately to the work of the creator, in fact God is sometimes referred to as the potter. Our work should mirror the work of the creator.

Before God began his creation work the earth is described in Genesis as formless. So during the six days of creation essentially God made order out of chaos. At the end of each day of his creation work God stood back and saw that it was good. At evening of each day for six days God saw what he made and said it is good.

Our work should reflect the nature of our creative God. We create value with our work, we create something worthwhile so that we can step back look at it and say, it is good. That is to say we put in our creative energies into our work, we put in our best in what we do, so that the outcome is admirable. Our work ethics should be based on nothing less than excellence and quality, so that we may win the respect of others as Paul puts it.

Jesus was a carpenter before he started his earthly ministry. There is very little in the Bible about his life as a carpenter but that didn't stop people from imaging that Jesus must have made the most beautiful furniture or other wooden implements, each time Jesus made something in his workshop I can imagine him standing back saying, this is good. He didn't cut corners or did a sloppy job, neither should we.

My second advice for you is to emulate our creator God in creating order out of chaos. How do we do that in our work. At the end of each of Jesus's miracle, things became better than they first started. Same as that because of your work people become better, the situation become better.

Our salvation is not by works, we are already redeemed people of God, we do all of this because we already have tasted the grace of God, it is the gracious expression of our salvation, it springs out of our joy of salvation.

Lessons from 1 Thessalonians 4:9~12

- The function of our work is to serve others.
- The foundation of our work is rest in God.
- The final goal of our work is to make things better.