

Citizen Christian: Labor and Economics

Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

MPS Christ-followers labor as the *imago Dei* to cultivate good for all and glory to God on earth as a faithful witness to Jesus.

OBJ Every person can understand the value of our labor / work for economics by four aspects.

INTRO Chariots of Fire (1981) is a movie about the life of 1924 Olympic runner Eric Liddell. In the movie Liddell makes the statement, "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." That is a powerful statement, to feel the pleasure of God in the activity of our life.

How many of you felt God's pleasure on you in your work / labor this last week? How many of you have ever sensed God's pleasure on you in your work? How many of you even think God cares about your work; is God really pleased in your work? God cares deeply about our labor because He created us to do and cultivate good in the world by our work. And salvation in Jesus Christ means that Christians join God's work for the redemption of other people by our labor.

TRANS Today in our Citizen Christian series I want us to consider "Labor and Economics". "Why talk about labor / work in a series on Christian citizenship?" The life of every Christ-follower is one of faithful witness in the world, an Ambassador, or as we like to say at LifePoint, Missioner. In every relationship, position and practice of life our priority of seeking first the Kingdom of God remains. Faithful witness defines our whole life, and first by how we live to do good. Next to family and home, labor / work, in which I will use interchangeably, forms the principle expression of our public witness as we labor for good in the world in obedience to God's command.

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All people are created in God's image, but only those who are redeemed in Jesus Christ can bring Him particular glory with our lives. This is what it means for us to live redeemed, a value of glory has returned to our life that is distinctively God's. I want us to understand that as Christian citizens who cultivate God's "good" in the world, our labor / work is the means of cultivating good. And, people cultivating good forms a foundation for economic health and thriving in the world. God wants good for all people to thrive in this world. God wants His people to thrive in this world to point others to Jesus as Lord.

A theology of labor (work) and its relationship to economics is important because when a Christian obeys God's creational command in pursuit of His mandate (Gen 1:26-28), it distinguishes that labor and its fruitful production in the world both for the individual and how it blesses others, as well as bearing a faithful witness to salvation in Jesus Christ. I want you to understand what you were created and are redeemed for; God desires for you to know His pleasure when in obedience to Him you work to do and cultivate good in the earth.

OBJ Today I want to provide **Four Aspects** that outline the value of Labor / Work for personal dignity in godly productivity and public witness by cultivating good.

1. Work demonstrates the nature and character of God.

Genesis 1:1 teaches us the first two characteristics we learn of God. "In the beginning, God created" First, by implication, we learn that God is eternal. Second, by action we learn that He works. Two fundamental characteristics introduce and frame all our understanding of Him: God is the eternally working One.

Through the days of creation we see God's majesty and magnitude in his work. God reveals that he is both infinite in scope and intimate in detail of His work in creation. And at the apex of His creation, He culminates His work in creating one like himself^{Gen1:26-27}, with capacity to work in the likeness of His work. And so God commands His creation to the work He created them to do.^{Gen1:28} Genesis teaches that God created people in His image, to reflect His nature and character through their work and what they cultivate by it. **Our work to do good demonstrates the nature and character of God.**



2. Work is a faithful expression of our identity for worship, both in creation and redemption.

“and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Paul instructs the Thessalonians in holy living. He champions work as a practice of holiness for two reasons, to live as a faithful witness and to provide for oneself. ^{1Thes4:12} Christians are commanded to model a life for God that is both created to work His creation and re-created to walk with Him in His creation. Work serves an integral part of our identity; establishing both our value and purpose in God’s creation, and our participation in His redemptive plan. We are created by God to work His creation and recreated by Him to serve His redemptive mission. Work serves both God’s creational and redemptive purpose in the life of a Christian, enabling one to fulfill God’s creational command and His commission to bear a faithful, gospel witness. *The Christian must understand that their identity is expressed through their work to fulfill God’s creational command and to bear a faithful witness of our salvation in Jesus.*

God establishes our identity as people created for worship and for work. Essential to our identity is to understand this: worship and work are not separate aspects, but two expressions to glorify God and multiply His glory. Work serves as an act of worship when it expresses a faithful witness of God by a dependency of faith in God. Work demonstrates our walk with God(worship); we work with Him because He is working(mission). Work demonstrates our worship in how we work and by what we do with our work. You must not walk into the office or shop with a different mindset or motivation and labor differently than you walk into the sanctuary to worship. The posture of your heart for worship must be applied to your work, so the labor of your work can be applied as an act of your worship. The ‘purpose of worship’ is for the ‘place of work’, and the ‘purpose of work’ is for the ‘place of worship’. You can’t ignore God and question why His blessing never rests on you or your work. God doesn’t bless what is not offered to Him. You can’t cheat your boss or employees and think God will ignore it here. God doesn’t pour His love out on those who only hoard it. THIS is fundamental to our identity; love God and love others. By God’s design, worship and work are not identical, but they are inseparable. Worship and work together establishes our witness before outsiders by how we walk with God. *Worship fuels your work because in all you do you always work for the Lord.* ^{Col3:23} *Work forms your witness because the ethic of your work is your worship in the public realm.*

Paul also says work is for self-provision. Provision that comes by our worship-fueled work demonstrates our faith in God. Work is not a denial of God, though it can be used this way, but demonstrates trust for our provision from Him. Provision is an essential aspect of work in God’s creational design for people. One author states, “The Bible is clear when it speaks of one’s command to strive to be self-sufficient. “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).¹ Laboring for our provision doesn’t say, “I am sufficient.”, but, “By obedience to God in my work, He proves sufficient for me.” *God created people to be self-sufficient in the world.*

Some say that your identity is not found in your work. While not inherent in a job it is decisively in your work. Be careful not to define your work only by a job. But be vigilant not to dismiss the role of your labor. It may be in a job or a role, but our created identity is intrinsically bound up in our work. When we are refused the opportunity to work, it strips good from us both in the glory of public worship and the dignity of self-provision. *By His creational command and purpose, God designed work as a principle expression of a person’s identity in the world. Work is a faithful expression of our identity, both in creation and redemption, for worship.*

3. Work bears the truth and goodness of the gospel into the brokenness of sin in the world.

“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.” Ephesians 4:28

According to Paul, a poor work ethic is as much a false witness toward God as a thief. Laziness tells a lie about God. Mooching and freeloading slanders God. Apathy says God doesn’t care about others. Passivity says God enjoys people’s pain. Busyness without productivity claims that God is inept. A lack of integrity says that God is not true to Himself. A weak

¹ Stevenson, Ben. The Political Conscience of the Christian. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), Loc 708.



work ethic denies God's created intention for life. Failure to work bears a false witness to Jesus Christ. Paul tells Timothy that when one fails to provide for his own, it is equal to denying the faith.¹Tim5:8 "To bear his image as Christlike imitators of God, Christians must reflect the one they worship in the way they work."² Work is hard because sin is real. But work is not sin nor sinful, and sin does not darken nor diminish the role of work in creation. Work is a purposeful and redemptive activity that produces good and cultivates it among others. [Bearing God's image by our work against the brokenness of sin in the world bears a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.](#)

By God's design, work holds a number of benefits for life. Instead of breaking God's command and stealing, a strong work ethic labors to produce good in the world, which begins with provision for oneself. And work for our provision holds not only positive results in its production, but positive outcome in its prevention. As one author notes, "The instruction to do honest work prohibits immoral and life-destroying work;... And the purpose clause at the end of Ephesians 4:28 shows that we are not to be working merely for ourselves but for the good of others. The basic idea can be captured in one word: integrity."³ Work ethic is the critical factor in our integrity, to do as we say we believe. [Work produces good in this world as it provides a host of benefit for our life, but greatest of all is that our of honesty with self we have and can share with others.](#)

TRANS Now, allow me to offer some illustration and application.

ILLUS According to a 2019 YouGov poll, 70% of millennials (23-28) in the U.S. now say they would vote for a socialist. This is an absolute travesty that I want to confront and encourage any who may be so inclined to oppose.

APPL **Biblical teaching and Economic Philosophy** Socialism is an evil against a holy God by stealing from those who produce to give to those who will not under the false claim of acting in the place of God. This does not mean people never need help. It does stand against the government becoming the source of livelihood in substitution of personal advancement and provision. Socialism always focuses one's eyes on the person richer than you in what it promises, but delivers to those less rich than you in what it provides. This strategy models the very nature of sin's covetousness. What socialism tangibly provides, in service or good, to the one that does not have, it strips the good of human dignity from both the one it takes from and for the one it gives to. Socialism is broke before it even begins, because it strips personal dignity for advancement through productivity, and through denial of opportunity to bless others by our productivity. The only person that benefits from socialism is the "re-distributor" of the wealth, and the one who is bent to never produce any good, who, according to the Bible, should be starving. Socialism is wrong economically because it is bad theologically and sociologically. But some argue today that Capitalism is a deplorable economic philosophy because greed exists. This perverts Biblical teaching both in economic principle and anthropological reality. Greed originates in the sinful nature of the human heart and gets applied through capitalistic philosophy. [Greed in capitalism is a perversion of its good, not the product of it. Socialism's philosophy of covert stealing is always sinful and prevents good.](#)

Some use Acts 2 and 4 that model the church as a "shared community" as a Biblical justification for socialism. It stands a quite the opposite. It is the mandate of the Church to practice a godliness of creation and redemption against the backdrop of sin-fueled, integrity-absent, commerce that strives to "get & accrue" above cultivate, produce and do good to live generous. The Bible is clear; people labor to cultivate good and bless others out of what they produce. What is "commonly held" is the collective product because it has been individually, willingly offered, not taken. [Socialism's propensities of social organization remain an abhorrent evil against the created design of an all-wise and glorious, holy God.](#)

ILLUS I never 'give a dollar' or 'round up' at the cash register for good causes, and I take every tax break legally allowable because I don't need a corporation nor the government dispersing the good I produced by my labor.

ILLUS **Harrison's Christian Bookstore** I am thankful for the business model that intentionally invests profits for good. If your product or service is subpar for bloated cost, that's not good. But this is not new, and didn't start with Tom, Bob, or Dan. My

² James M. Hamilton, Jr. *Work and Our Labor In The Lord*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), p76.

³ James M. Hamilton, Jr. *Work and Our Labor In The Lord*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), p78.



parents owned and operated Harrison's Christian Bookstore for 21 years. The first principle of my parent's business philosophy was to tithe off the store's (gross) revenue. People supported their bookstore by buying books, Bibles, music, gifts, and more. Many came in for personal encouragement, Biblical and theological direction, teaching and training in the aisles, and for counseling in the break room. The financial good alone produced and shared through that bookstore was far more than the spreadsheet recorded. [When Christians labor to produce good by their work, God compounds their influence far more than they ever could.](#)

[Work bears the truth and goodness of the gospel before the brokenness of sin in the world.](#)

4. [Work is our means to cultivate goodness, righteousness, and justice in the world.](#)

¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. **1 Thess 5:14-15**

Paul counsels the Thessalonians to cultivate work among them as an essential aspect of living godly lives. God created people to thrive in this world through their work as His chief regents. Sin made our work painful and hard, toilsome and frustrating, but it did not remove God's creational design for it, nor can it diminish its redemptive impact by Christians. [When we work as unto the Lord, we cultivate God's goodness, righteousness and justice in creation.](#)

When we labor as unto the Lord, we cultivate goodness, righteousness and justice in several forms. God commands His people to seek the welfare of the city because in it they will find their welfare. ^{Jeremiah29:7} The welfare of God's people comes through the city when we labor in the city for the good of the city. Christians also produce good among one another that overflows to everyone. There is a real and tangible blessing of God's from the local church to the people in the city. As Christians labor together to do good, seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherlessness, and plead the case of the widow. ^{Isa9:7}, we bring God's goodness in the world. [Our faithful labor blesses others by equipping and readying us to live generously and justly. Work is our means to cultivate goodness, righteousness, and justice in the world.](#)

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to cultivate good for all and glory to God on earth as a faithful witness to Jesus.](#)

CLOSE When it comes to a theology of labor / work, we must not disconnect it from our identity. The value of a strong work ethic is critical for the Christian, not only to fulfill God's created intention and His redemptive purpose for us, but to understand how his creational mandate is established in the world. When we live in the *imago Dei*, we live in and for the pleasure of God. When we labor unto the glory of God, we savor the *imago Dei* within us to cultivate God's glory by our labor to experience the pleasure of God upon us. Cultural transformation can ONLY occur by fulfilling God's cultural mandate through His command, to cultivate good and share the gospel. It begins and culminates in daily, faithful labor of the Christian serving Jesus as Lord in ordinary ways to bring extraordinary good to people.

