

“What’s Work For?” Part Two
 Sermon for 13 March 2016
 Galatians 3:5

Believing in Him is work. So are sanctification, obedience and service. Work is not a curse; work was cursed because of our disobedience and before that work was pure, spiritual, godly and fulfilling. It has always struck me as very difficult, this perspective from Eden in Genesis, for those who have bought the lie that man is essentially good (or even morally neutral) and that it is his environment, his social conditioning that causes man to be bad, depraved, inclined to evil. Note: the conditions were perfect in Eden; it was a perfect setting. Society had not yet arrived on the scene (God only created two—a male and a female—and until they procreated that was all there were). However, during their hundreds of years of fertility, there were many children and children of children born to Adam and Eve. And, inevitably, in the beginning, there was intermarriage and incest by necessity as it were. For those who see ‘irresolvable difficulties’ with the biblical view, we have the scientific conclusion that, in fact, there appear to have been a single, original pair and their DNA is everywhere!

Work also originated in perfection. Adam was a gardner. And Eve was working with him, tending the ground and the forests. There was no **sweat of the brow** or battle with **thorns and thistles**. No conflict between chemical and organic pesticides—and the diet was vegetarian! Man had no need to domesticate any animals, no herds, nor flocks and no slaughter house for butchering. But, long before all these complications, we might note that part of being made in God’s image was epitomized in working. As Jesus notes **the Father has been working from the beginning** and, apparently, continues to do so. God works and God rests, and so should we. The rest in God’s case is a rest of appreciation, of abstention from further creation (on the seventh day) but not from governance, provision, and oversight. From the human perspective, work became but one of three domains (the social, labor, and spiritual domains) and man’s challenge was how to balance them in daily life. *That has not changed.*

So, how do we accomplish this balancing act? Some people make lists and then they arrange their to do’s (or must do’s) in priorities order. Then, they fine tune, revise and adjust the list. But I am here to declare that “life” is not about “listologics!” And life is not even about “getting my priorities right.” *And that is great news for those of us who are caught up in that kind of stuff!* However, before we get into any of that, I want to put out there this declaration: life is about all that we do to magnify and glorify God. Work is one of those things! So is community service which lies in the social domain as well as advancing the kingdom of Christ through the local church! And, taken together, these make up our testimony. No, our testimony is not limited to our conversion experience, and not limited the private, subjective realm of faith. Our testimony is very, very public. Our faith is lived out before a watching world! Gardening is not simply about the harvest, the yield . . . it is also about the work, the cultivation, the weeding, watering and feeding. And, yes, pest control of all kinds, mildew, blight, insects and weeds (ye old thorns and thistles!). I can’t resist refreshing that wonderful quote, “Live as though you’ll die tomorrow, but farm as though you’ll live forever.” (John Marsden, 2013)

It hit me as I reflected on Eden, and, naturally enough, about the whole canopy of the created world, that our great, glorious and awesome God was never any of those things for inanimate objects, or inert matter! *That makes absolutely no sense.* No, God was awesome to awe someone; he is glorious to impress. When he discloses, manifests or displays Himself, there is always an audience in view. Incidentally, similar display features are designed into large numbers of God's creatures, across the range of species! The same principle holds, from peacocks to blushing blowfish to children showing off. There is not need to be impressive if there is no one to impress.

One of the understated purposes for the ten plagues of Egypt, clearly stated but not emphasized much (in preaching) was this **for this purpose I have raised you** (Pharaoh) **up, that I may show my power in you, and that MY Name be declared in all the earth.** (Exodus 9:16) **So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know I am the Lord, when I have gained honor over Pharaoh . . .**(Exodus 14:17-18) And while this holds on the stage of world history, it has a personal application to it as well. When we are working for the glory of God, we are as individuals enhancing, augmenting and magnifying His Glory! (See Piper Endnote 1.) AND THIS PLEASES GOD. And this propensity towards display is neither ephemeral, nor temporal; God is awesome and glorious forever. His wonders likewise are everlasting—His attributes and qualities are now and always have been what they actually are¹. God did not develop His attribute of mercy; it certainly preceded the need for it. Those who believe that God is “emergent,” *evolving* as it were do fall into many, predictable traps and errors.

A second, but related principle is this: *God is all that God is for us by grace.* We are on the grounds of complete, free and radical otherness here. God creates all that is for His own good pleasure. It was His pleasure to bring into existence otherness—so we came to be!—created as personable beings capable of loving, serving and obeying Him. His Word of revelation is aimed at making our informed response possible. Choice and free will are not, in this respect, mere, or purely abstract concepts; they are *actionable realities.* We can both know what we ought to do and we do know we are able to do it. If it were otherwise we would not be moral and we would not be accountable *and the anticipation of future judgment would be a mirage.*

Thirdly, God Himself is everything I need. His glory supplies all my spiritual resources and satisfies all my wants. My personal being, purpose and meaning all depend on Him. *It is He who defines me and not the other way around!* He has

¹ These truths establish the vacuity of “evolutionist” thinking. By this I mean that when evolution is the template used to explain everything, it ends up explaining very little. We are considering things here that do not evolve; they have always been. Curiously, few proponents of evolution seem aware that they have merely created another “god of the gaps” (such as they accuse theists of doing!). They have done so to cope with what we don't know! Contrariwise, the God we worship is plainly known to us—He has revealed Himself to us and we have record of that revelation in the Word. God's self-disclosure is not limited to the Word, but is thoroughly demonstrated there. God reveals His purposes in human history still. And He has done so in creation and in the great work of redemption. -shr

determined the limits of my human potential—specifically in terms of time, place, culture and family. He has always been religiously involved in my life *whether I recognized it or not*. I am personal because He is supremely personal. And when I work, I am a working demonstration of His divine nature, or Whom He is to all.

This then is the theological setting for us to grasp the fuller meaning of Jesus' saying, **This is the work of God . . . to believe in Him Whom God has sent**. Anything other, or anything less, such as working for work's sake, or seeing work as "self-fulfilling" is to allocate myself to all sorts of lesser things. These are not just lesser things, they can be diversions—twisting's of my proper purpose, distortions and, frankly, perversions. *Some of the force of God's hatred of idolatry lies in this!* Giving oneself to lesser things, things of the created order, things restricted to the horizontal dimension, diminishes one's sense of awe—awe of the Almighty! When and if I do this, I suffer a loss of humanity, a loss of genuine identity. Jesus knows this and calls such sub-human deployment **working for food that perishes**. Don't do that. Cease and desist from that. Rather work for bread **that endures unto eternal life**.

There is some more to be said on this matter, but it will have wait another opportunity. I urge us all to consider who we are by virtue of **believing in Him** and for us to seek the life-altering power of faith as applied to our hearts and our situations.

Amen.

END NOTE

NOVEMBER 24, 2007

Biblical Texts to Show God's Zeal for His Own Glory

Article by John Piper Topic: The Glory of God

Probably no text in the Bible reveals the passion of God for his own glory more clearly and bluntly as Isaiah 48:9-11 where God says,

For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

I have found that for many people these words come like six hammer blows to a man-centered way of looking at the world:

For my name's sake!

For the sake of my praise!

For my own sake!

For my own sake!

How should my name be profaned!

My glory I will not give to another!

What this text hammers home to us is the centrality of God in his own affections. The most passionate heart for the glorification of God is God's heart. God's ultimate goal is to uphold and display the glory of his name.

God chose his people for his glory:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace. (Ephesians 1:4-6, cf. vv. 12, 14, NASB)

God created us for his glory:

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

God called Israel for his glory:

You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified (Isaiah 49:3).

I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory. (Jeremiah 13:11)

God rescued Israel from Egypt for his glory:

Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works . . . but rebelled by the Sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power. (Psalm 106:7-8)

God raised Pharaoh up to show his power and glorify his name:

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

God defeated Pharaoh at the Red Sea to show his glory:

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord . . . And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. (Exodus 14:4, 18; cf. v. 17)

God spared Israel in the wilderness for the glory of his name:

I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. (Ezekiel 20:14)

God gave Israel victory in Canaan for the glory of his name:

Who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? (2 Samuel 7:23)

God did not cast away his people for the glory of his name:

Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord . . . For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake. (1 Samuel 12:20, 22)

God saved Jerusalem from attack for the glory of his name:

For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. (2 Kings 19:34; cf. 20:6)

God restored Israel from exile for the glory of his name:

Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name. . . . And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name. . . . And the nations will know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 36:22-23; cf. v. 32)

Jesus sought the glory of his Father in all he did:

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. (John 7:18)

Jesus told us to do good works so that God gets glory:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16; cf. 1 Peter 2:12)

Jesus warned that not seeking God's glory makes faith impossible:

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (John 5:44)

Jesus said that he answers prayer that God would be glorified:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13)

Jesus endured his final hours of suffering for God's glory:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' (John 12:27-28).

Father, the hour has come; glorify your son that the Son may glorify you. (John 17:1; cf. 13:31-32)

God gave his Son to vindicate the glory of his righteousness:

God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood . . . to show God's righteousness . . . It was to show his righteousness at the present time. (Romans 3:25-26)

God forgives our sins for his own sake:

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

For your own name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. (Psalm 25:11)

Jesus receives us into his fellowship for the glory of God:

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:7)

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Son of God:

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14)

God instructs us to do everything for his glory:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31; cf. 6:20).

God tells us to serve in a way that will glorify him:

Whoever serves, [let him do it] as one who serves by the strength which God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (I Peter 4:11)

Jesus will fill us with fruits of righteousness for God's glory:

It is my prayer that . . . [you be] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9, 11)

All are under judgment for dishonoring God's glory:

They became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. (Romans 1:22, 23)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Herod is struck dead because he did not give glory to God:

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory. (Acts 12:23)

Jesus is coming again for the glory of God:

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10)

Jesus' ultimate aim for us is that we see and enjoy his glory:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

Even in wrath God's aim is to make known the wealth of his glory:

Desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, [God] has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory. (Romans 9:22-23)

God's plan is to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)

Everything that happens will redound to God's glory:

From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36)

In the New Jerusalem the glory of God replaces the sun:

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives its light, and its lamp is the Lamb (Revelation 21:23).