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Work Matters: The Christian Understanding of Labour

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Abstract

Many Christians experience a dichotomy between their spiritual lives and their ordinary lives. On the one hand, they spend the majority of their hours at work from Monday to Friday, without understanding what God requires of them. On the other hand, they are told that what really counts is what they do on Sunday morning. Yet the Christian faith speaks of the in-breaking of God, through Jesus Christ, into the ordinary world. God, in Jesus, became incarnated in human flesh and bridged the divide between the Divine and the human. The Christian Scriptures have much to say about the spiritual nature of all our labour. Some people believe that the call to bring God's life and justice to the world is restricted to the religious sphere and the rituals of the church. Others are convinced that work is actually a punishment from God. But this is not the Biblical view of work. The Bible, from its opening pages to its end, declares that all work is a good gift God has given us. Even before sin entered the world, God was at work and He assigned work to Adam and Eve. When we enter the heavenly realms, we will have work to do. In all our work, we are asked to bring glory to God.

Work Matters: A Renewed Christian Understanding of Labour

In your lifetime, you will spend the majority of your waking hours working. This number does not include commuting through traffic and the time involved in rest and recovery from a hard day on the job.¹ The truth is that our work and how we spend our time often defines our lives and, for better or worse, our job roles are often the primary aspect of

1 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/out-the-darkness/201401/working-our-lives-away>

our identities. When we meet people for the first time, one of the first questions we ask is, “What do you do?”

This query not only reflects the spirit of the age in which we live, but it is also a reality for followers of Jesus Christ. The Barna Research group has shown many, if not the majority, who call themselves Christians are not that different from those who do not.² Christians more often take their cues from the surrounding culture rather than from their faith. For example, we spend our leisure time reading the same books, watching the same films and expressing the same attitudes about work.

Fortunately, the Bible has a great deal of material that addresses a Christian understanding of work. This paper will examine various scriptures to discover the divine calling God has placed on us. It will aim to provide a theological understanding of work so that Christians can find meaning in their work. Ultimately, it aims to provide Christians with hope in what they do.

Unfortunately, the church has not been the source of much teaching on the subject of work. Other than attempting to implicitly reinforce the idea that only work done for the church matters, the church has been silent largely. Yet many innovative Christians across the ages agree this should not be the case. Because people spend most of their time in the workplace, thinking about work from a Christian perspective should be a priority. A secular outlook on work dominates the society in which we live. Instead, the church should take the lead to provide a clear theological perspective on this subject that affects so many.

First, the long-standing assumption of our work is that it is unavoidable, and only leisure is good. As one self-help author recently wrote, “I was able to retire from my profession at 33 and you can too!”³ Even as I write this, a local bank has inundated me with marketing good retirement planning. The subtle message is that if I plan well, then I can leave my work behind and retire early. Expressions such as, “Thank God it’s Friday” only reinforce the assumption that the good life is the work-free life.

One major flaw with this perspective is that it does not align with the biblical view of work. However. However the biblical view of work is

2 <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/188-faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior#.VStb0xePLF4>

3 Fisker, Jacob. *Early Retirement Extreme* (Self-published, 2010)

different. The revolutionary idea in the scriptures, that many Christians remain unaware of, is that from the beginning, work is very good.⁴ It is not an activity we *have* to do; it is an activity we *get* to do.

One of the first things we notice upon opening the Bible is there is work happening. We barely look beyond the opening verses and we encounter a description of God's creation of the world as work. In fact, Genesis paints a picture of the magnificent construction of the universe within the confines of a seven-day work week.

Old Testament scholar Victor Hamilton writes:

“God’s creative activity is described twice as his work. The OT has two words for “labor”. The second word emphasizes labor that is raw and unskilled. The first—and the one used [in Genesis]—designates skilled labor, work that is performed by a craftsman or an artisan. Such is the measure of finesse and professional skills of God’s work.”⁵

From the beginning, the Scriptures show us God is at work. God is depicted as the first and finest worker in the universe. He is excellent at His work and exhibits competence in what He does. He is a model for us because He not only works but He also does it with a high caliber of skill and quality.

The external character of God’s work is beyond doubt. Upon observing the work of His hands, we marvel and wonder who can replicate what God has done? Yet, there is another standout feature of God’s work that is worth mentioning. We read in the text that God finds great internal joy and satisfaction in His work. He takes delight in the work He has done. The scriptures state, “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”⁶ All good and satisfying work is ultimately an extension of the worker. God’s work is a reflection of who He is so that we can know who God is through observation of His creation.

This is not true for all religions in the world. The creation narrative found in the book of Genesis, that depicts God at work, is radically different from other ancient accounts. The biblical God is unique among all the other gods. In his book, David H. Jensen writes:

4 Genesis 1:31

5 Hamilton, Victor. *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 142.

6 Genesis 1:31

“God does not sit enthroned in heaven removed from work, willing things into existence by divine fiat. Unlike the gods of the Greco-Roman mythologies, who absolve themselves of work—dining on nectar and ambrosia in heavenly rest and contemplation—the biblical God works.”⁷

As Jensen suggests, many ancient cultures had stories that depicted the beginning of the world and human history. In the Babylonian creation account, the *Enuma Elish*, creation is accomplished in the aftermath of a battle by two rival gods for control of the pantheon and the cosmos.⁸ In one Egyptian creation account, humans were created from the tears of the god of the sun⁹, in another, the god Atum created the world through semen released during masturbation.¹⁰

The biblical creation account is unique among the alternatives offered by other cultures and religions. Creation is not the result of conflict and it is not part of God’s body. According to the Bible, creation is nothing less than the work of a master craftsman. Because of this, we can study creation and learn about the character of God. God is the one who works and takes great pleasure in what He does.

Theologian Gordon Wenham, in commenting about the serendipitous reality of God at work, writes this, “It is wholly unexpected that the extraordinary divine activity involved in creating heaven and earth should get His hands dirty.”¹¹ It is astounding the scriptures open up with the picture of a God at work.

Work was not God’s Plan B for a mistake made by the original humans. Genesis clearly shows us it was not something He gave human beings to do because He was too good to do it Himself. God worked because there is something inherently good in work. There is something intrinsically good about work and we sense it whenever we buckle down and accomplish a task.

Work has been and is now part of the blessedness of creation. God created a beautiful and diverse universe and declared it to be “very

7 Jensen, David H. *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2006), 22.

8 Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2009), 31.

9 Longman, Tremper *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove: Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2005), 74.

10 Waltke, Bruce *Author’s Personal Lecture notes from Regent College*, 1995

11 Wenham, Gordon *Genesis 1-15*, Vol. 1 of Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville, 1987), 35.

good”. God was and is the ultimate worker. However, that is not all. When God became a man, in Jesus, we notice the interesting choice that was made. God did not come from heaven to earth as a philosopher or as a politician. He came to earth as a carpenter and worked with His hands for several decades in a carpenter’s shop. Jesus was a hardworking man. Jesus said, “My Father is always at His work to this very day and I too am working.”¹²

Contrary to the popular deist idea, God did not build the universe in the beginning and is now resting. The Bible describes a God who works. It presents dozens of images of God as a worker such as: a gardener¹³, a shepherd¹⁴, a potter¹⁵, a metalworker and a refiner¹⁶, a physician¹⁷ and a teacher¹⁸. God is as active and creative today—creating, sustaining, redeeming and consummating—as He was when He began to make the universe.¹⁹

While it is essential to recognize that God is the ultimate worker, it is equally important to state that the work we do as Christians, matters to God. Not only do the scriptures show us that God is a working God, but He also commissions humanity to carry on His work. For instance, in Genesis 1:28, He instructs human beings to “fill the earth and subdue it” and in Genesis 2:18-20, He brings animals so that man can name them.

The book of Genesis impresses upon us that work was a part of paradise. Ben Witherington writes, “It is perfectly clear that God’s good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest.”²⁰ Unique among all religions and cultures, is the biblical perspective that work is part of God’s perfect plan for human life.

This fact throws us off balance because we believe work is a punishment from God. One Kenyan pastor recently said, “Work is just

12 John 5:17

13 Genesis 2:8

14 Psalm 23

15 Jeremiah 18:6

16 Malachi 3:2-3; Ezekiel 22:20

17 Matthew 8:16

18 Psalms 143:10

19 Stevens, R. Paul *Work Matters: Lessons From Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle Edition, Loc. 92.

20 Witherington, Ben *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Eerdmans, 2011), 2

one of those things that is necessary for us to do.” Yet, even before the fall, work was part of the blessing of the Garden of Eden. Work did not enter the world as a consequence of sin; rather work is a blessing from the hand of God like the other blessings of food, rest, friendship and sex. It enables us to be fulfilled and it ought to be a source of great joy.

The result of the fall is not work. The result of the fall is a curse that made work more difficult, more demanding, more disappointing and maybe painful. God works and because we are created in His image, we find meaning, satisfaction and delight in our work. In fact, without work to do, we experience significant internal discouragement, emptiness and even despair. Those who are retrenched, face retirement or become injured (and are no longer working) report how much they require work to thrive emotionally, physically and spiritually.

We have been looking at the book of Genesis to understand the idea that God is a master worker. However, we will now turn our attention to a text in the New Testament to think about how our work matters to God. The biblical view of work is that *all* work matters to God. Whether our work is simple or sophisticated, our work matters because it reflects the image of God the Creator.

Paul echoes this idea in his writings and provides us with more insight into how God provides purpose and meaning to our work. The radical thinking of the Bible is that no task is too small to contain the dignity of God. Digging a good hole is God’s work and it is no and it is less than the formulation of a mind-blowing theological truth.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:17:

“Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called” (NASB).

In the midst of a passage that essentially deals with issues about marriage and singleness, the Apostle says something significant about work. What is he saying? Even though there might be some discussions that need to take place, followers of Christ should remain in the life

situation they are in when they experience conversion. In other words, Paul states it isn't necessary for Christians to change what they are currently doing in life—their marital state, job or place of residence—in order to live their lives in a way that pleases God.

Paul makes use of two important Greek words to describe ordinary work. The first word is “*merizo*” which translated means, “assigned” or “distributed”. The second word is “*kaleo*” which translated means, “called”. This is not the only place in the New Testament where these words are used. In Romans, Paul uses the same word to describe God calling people into a saving relationship with Him. In 2 Corinthians, he again uses the word to describe the assignment of spiritual gifts.

To be sure, Paul is not restricting this call to church ministry. It is often taught from the church pulpit that the best jobs in God's eyes are those found in the church or in other forms of Christian ministry. Yet, this passage suggests that God is more concerned that we make the most of every job—no matter what it is—and work with our best effort to please him. Any kind of work, that does not violate biblical teaching, is able to fulfill God's calling. Contrary to what many pastors teach, there is no pecking order or rank of more godly and less godly work from God's perspective.

The implications should be startling obvious

Just as God calls and equips certain Christians for building up the body of Christ, so He also equips all people with talents and gifts for various kinds of work. God is the giver of all good gifts and through His common grace; He provides skills and abilities to everyone. The purpose of this is to build up and sustain the human community. Paul supposes the idea that God has assigned talents and called people to work in jobs that are not in the church.

Few theologians have taken hold of the idea that God calls everyone to a certain kind of work more than Martin Luther. He unpacked Paul's thinking and applied it to the culture of his day. He organized a campaign against the prevailing view of vocation in the medieval church.

In Luther's day, the church occupied the centre of the public square. It understood itself to be the entirety of God's kingdom on earth. Among other things, this meant that only work done *in* and *for* the church counted as God's work. The only way for a person to be called by God

into service was as a monk, priest or a nun or in some other ministry-related capacity.

In other words, the culture placed a high value on your work if you worked in and for the church. Church work was special and called the Spiritual Estate. Work outside the church was worldly. There were certain professions that a true Christian would never take on—such as serving in the military. If you could not do God’s work in the church, then you would have to settle for second best—secular labour.

Luther attacked this idea, and wrote in his *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*:

“It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the ‘spiritual estate’; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the ‘temporal estate.’ That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. Yet no one should be frightened by it; and for this reason—viz., that all Christians are truly of the ‘spiritual estate,’ and there is among them no difference at all but that of office, as Paul says in I Corinthians 12:12, we are all one body, yet every member has its own work, whereby it serves every other, all because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all alike Christians; for baptism, Gospel and faith alone make us ‘spiritual’ and a Christian people.”²¹

How do we understand what Luther means? Luther is telling us that all work is divine. Because we are all consecrated priests by baptism²², there is no work that is not worthwhile. Washing dishes is important work that should be done for the glory of God. Changing a baby’s diaper is important work that should be done for the glory of God. Teaching others is important work that should be done for the glory of God.

Luther continues in his *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*:

“Therefore, just as those who are now called ‘spiritual’—priests, bishops or popes—are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are

21 <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-03.html>

22 1 Peter 2:9

charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities—they bear sword and rod with which to punish the evil and to protect the good. A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way, many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another.”²³

God calls every Christian equally to their work. It does not matter whether you work as a pastor in a church or as a gardener in an estate. God has called you to the task and it should be done for His glory. The dichotomy that many Christians experience between their Sundays and the rest of the week is false. Too often, the church has been guilty of perpetuating the unbiblical idea that what really counts is what happens on Sunday. Luther is saying that the whole week matters to God.

Luther was a catalyst in breaking down the artificial barrier between “sacred” and “secular” work. In God’s economy, all work done in faithfulness to Him should be seen as a call God has placed on our lives. Furthermore, as Luther read through the Scriptures, he found further evidence of what it means to say that God has called everyone—not just church workers—to their work.

For instance, in *Luther’s Works*, he puts forward an exposition of Psalm 147. This passage states, “He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you.”²⁴ Now how does God strengthen the bars of the city? The ever-perceptive Luther explains the following implications from this verse. “By the word ‘bars’ we must not only understand the iron that a gate that a welder can make, but everything that helps to protect us.”²⁵ This includes everything in a city that provides protection such as good government, city ordinances, and enforcement of these laws by police. All of this, according to Luther, is what the Psalmist implies by God strengthening the bars of the city.

23 <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-03.html>

24 Psalm 147:13 (NIV)

25 Luther, Martin; Pelikan, Jaroslav, editor *Luther’s Works*, Volume 14: Selected Psalms III (Concordia, 2007) Kindle Edition.

Dr. Gene Veith, expands on Luther's thoughts, and writes:

"God works through people, in their ordinary stations of life to which He has called them, to care for His creation. In this way, He cares for everyone—Christian and non-Christian—whom He has given life. Luther puts it even more strongly: Vocations are 'masks of God.' On the surface, we see an ordinary human face—our mother, the doctor, the teacher, the waitress, our pastor—but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations."²⁶

Is this not an incredible thought? God is hidden in the work of good leaders, lawmakers, police officers, educators and government workers. God cares and shows compassion for the needs of humanity through the work of other people. God calls certain people to certain kinds of work in order that he might accomplish His will through them.

Luther went on to ponder not only how God provides security to a city but also to ask how He provides for our "daily bread". Luther states, "When you pray for your daily bread, you are praying for everything that contributes to your having and enjoying your daily bread... You must open up and expand your thinking, so that it reaches not only as far as the flour bin and baking oven but also out over the broad fields, the farmlands and the entire country that produces, processes, and conveys to us our daily bread and all kinds of nourishment."²⁷

Luther expresses the idea that God uses the work of other people to provide for our daily bread. Everyone—no matter what kind of work they do—who contributes time and energy towards making our "daily bread" is being used by God to care for our needs. The people who do the simplest of work are actually God in disguise. Let me be clear: people are not God, but God chooses to accomplish His will through the good work of people.

Could God do it differently? Is it not possible for God to provide manna and quail from heaven? Could God not miraculously provide food without the need for plowing and planting? God is sovereign and He could have done it anyway He wanted. However, He wants us to be involved and become co-labourers with Him.

26 Veith, Gene Edward "The Masks of God" in *The Lutheran Witness*, Vol. 121, No.8 August 2001, 16.

27 Janzow, F. Samuel *Luther's Large Catechism: With Study Questions* (Concordia, 1978), 90.

Whether we are in the garden, in the office, in the government or at the gate as a watchman, God takes delight in involving us in the work He wants to do. These are the “masks of God” that Luther writes about “behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.”²⁸

The next section will deal with how God must matter to our work

I heard a song on the radio the other day. The lyrics said, “Everybody is working for the weekend.”²⁹ Like this artist, many people today think the goal of life is to make enough money so that you can do nothing. This way of thinking contradicts the teaching of Scripture that states, “A lazy life is an empty life.”³⁰ The aim of life is not to do anything because if you have nothing to do, life loses meaning, direction and purpose.

A recent study³¹ backs up what Scripture says. Too much free time might actually increase the level of depression experienced by young people. The study claims that there is a time to work and a time to play. The authors conclude, “Living with a sensible, balanced amount of free time promotes well-being not only directly, but also by helping to alleviate some of the negative side effects associated with living in our consumer-orientated society.”³²

We were designed by God to work and to use the gifts He has given to us to make a difference for God’s kingdom. We were not designed to be working all the time. As God rested on the seventh day, so He has designed us to need rest and leisure. We take time to relax from our work so that we are more productive when working.

Another element in today’s culture is the enormous pressure on organisations to succeed. More and more, success is the goal no matter the cost. Winning is the only thing that matters. This can put enormous pressure on employees and lead to stress and burn out. In this kind of environment, employees may be tempted to take short cuts and engage in unethical behaviour in order to improve their standing and get ahead.

28 Luther, Martin; Pelikan, Jaroslav, editor *Luther’s Works*, Volume 14: *Selected Psalms III* (Concordia, 2007) Kindle Edition.

29 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Working_for_the_Weekend

30 Proverbs 12:27 (MSG)

31 <http://www.springer.com/?SGWID=0-102-2-1280921-preview&dynamic=true>

32 *ibid*

Because our culture increasingly tells us that morality is relative and it is only wrong if you get caught, even Christians make choices that are unethical. Christians are not immune to being tempted to behave without integrity. Followers of Christ sometimes allow the world to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

Yet, Christians must think differently about their work. They must allow the Scriptures to transform the way they think. They must not only be honest but they must also be competent in the tasks that God has called them to do.

What are some ways that the Scriptures speak to us as Christians? There are a myriad of ways but let us focus our attention on a couple of important ones.

Firstly, Christians must nurture a capacity for self-perception and self-understanding. Christians must know who they are if they are to be effective in the workplace. If we want to experience true significance in this world, our only hope is to live our lives in agreement with who we are. Only the Bible can truly tell us who we are. We are children of God. God is the ultimate worker and He has created us in His image. We discover who we are by knowing who God made us to be and how God has gifted us.

The Scriptures tell us that God knit us together in our mother's womb.³³ Does this truth resonate in the hearts of most Christians? Or does it seem hard to believe. As one person recently told me, "My birth was an accident and my life is also an accident." The author of the best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, stated, "God has given each of us a particular shape."³⁴ By shape, he means that God has given us certain skills, heart passions, abilities, personality and experiences and he wants our lives to have a particular purpose. God wants us to be good managers of the gifts, talents and abilities He has given us.

When Christians find their identity in Christ, they are free from having to prove themselves to themselves and to other people. They no longer need to feel pressured to perform in order to demonstrate they have value. Too many Christians turn their careers into idols and spend inordinate hours paying homage to unworthy ambitions. Good things—

33 Psalm 139:13

34 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

like work and career—can become ultimate things and this is not honouring to God. Only when we truly recognise and understand who we are in Christ, are we able to fully invest ourselves in the purposes He has called us to—even before we were born.

Another area where a biblical theology of work can influence our thinking is in regard to the future. Everyone—whether or not they are Christians—wants to accomplish something meaningful in their lives. It is inbuilt into what it means to be human. Everyone finds himself or herself struggling to accomplish everything they want to do in their work. We just do not seem to have enough hours in the day or energy in our bodies. We become discouraged because we do not see the point of it all.

If this world is all there is and everything will burn up, it can lead to despair. Who wants to polish the brass on the Titanic if it is going to sink? Unless there is a God who will redeem our best efforts, then there is no hope. Without the promise of God, ultimately, everything will be forgotten and nothing we do will make a lasting difference. However, if the Scriptures are right³⁵ and God is planning to bring a heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, down to earth like a bride dressed for her husband, then Christians find great hope in their work.

More than anyone, Christians can infuse the work they do with deep and significant meaning and purpose when they begin with the end in mind. Christians need to think long-term—they need to think with an eternal perspective. They must be willing to believe the vision that Scripture presents about the future. Our work has ultimate significance because it has an eternal nature. Work that is done for God's glory here on earth will one day be redeemed by God and make a significant contribution to the New Heaven and New Earth.

Miroslav Volf reinforces this idea when he states, “the key issue in developing a theology of work is the question of continuity or discontinuity between the present and future orders.”³⁶ He is convinced the ultimate significance of human work is contingent upon answering eschatological questions.

35 Revelation 21-22

36 Volf, Miroslav “Human Work, Divine Spirit and New Creation: Toward a Pneumatological Understanding of Work” in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Fall 1987, 175.

For example, if at the end of time, the world will be annihilated and a new one created *ex nihilo*, then our work has a limited life span. Everything we do has finite worth. It is as though God will take everything like a crumpled piece of paper and throw it in the trash before starting afresh. However, is that what God is like? Volf counters, “If the world will not be destroyed but transformed, then human work is of eternal significance in a direct way, then nothing is wasted.”³⁷

All of our work done for His Kingdom purposes will be used by God to become part of the new creation. In other words, Christians can be confident that all of their best efforts will act as building materials and one day be transfigured to become part of the “glorified world”. After all, goodness is an element not only of the original creation, but also of the present creation. It is unlikely God would reject creation but instead “consecrate it.”³⁸

The Scriptures tell us, that in the future, God will bring His Kingdom from heaven to earth. As Anthony Hoekema has rightfully stated, “In his redemptive activity, God does not destroy the works of His hands, but cleanses them from sin and perfects them so that they may finally reach the goal for which He created them.”³⁹

We learn that in the same way Jesus was resurrected, so the physical creation will be renewed in a significant way. The disciples were able to recognise Jesus after His resurrection, yet He was transformed and able to walk through doors. The same thing will happen to all of creation. Creation itself, including all our work, will be renewed—even resurrected—and set free from its bondage to evil and decay. This provides both a great reason to engage in work here on earth and hope that our work will somehow last into eternity.

Let me close with a quote from N.T. Wright:

“How does believing in the future resurrection lead to getting on with the work in the present? Quite straightforwardly. The point of the resurrection, as Paul has been arguing throughout the letter, is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die. God will raise it to new life. What you

37 Ibid, 176

38 1 Timothy 4:4

39 Hoekema, Anthony. *The Bible and the Future*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 73

do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it. And if this applies to ethics, as in 1 Corinthians 6, it certainly also applies to various vocations to which God's people are called. What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself—will last into God's future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether (as the hymn so mistakenly put it, “Until that day when all the blest to endless rest are called away”). They are part of what we may call *building for God's Kingdom*.⁴⁰

40 Wright, N.T. *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One), 275.