

## A GODLY WORK ETHIC

### I. THE WISDOM OF GOD LEADS TO A SOUND WORK ETHIC, 10:16.

A. From the Negative Standpoint, to Refuse to Work Is a Sin.

1. We must earn our living by the sweat of our brow, Gen 3.
2. Refusal to work is a serious matter, Pro. 18:9.

B. Work should be a force for good, not evil.

### II. GOD WILL BLESS THE WORK OF OUR HANDS, Pro. 28:19.

A. God Bless Those Who Are Industrious

1. We should work wisely.
2. Working wisely can avoid waste of time, energy, and materials.

B. No Blessings Are Promised to Those that are Slothful or Lazy.

1. People who are slothful in business seldom succeed.
2. A poor work ethic can destroy a business.
3. A lazy person's family suffers.
4. A slothful person seldom gets promotions.
5. If you do less than your best it is a sin.

C. You Can Honor God By Your Work.

1. Hard work is not synonymous with Christianity.
2. Many lost people are hard working people.
3. No one goes to heaven because of hard work.
4. Our work can, and should glorify God.
5. Our work often puts us in contact with people who need a witness.
6. God can take our best effort and use it for his glory.

## Introduction

Sean Hannity recently reported on a broadcast that in a recent interview, well known actor Edward Asner, made the statement that Communism is not so bad, it has just never been applied right. That statement would explain a lot of other things Asner has said over the past twenty years. There are many areas in which Communism can be demonstrated to be not just bad, but very bad. I find it amazing that many in the news media and the entertainment industry hate Nazism but for some unknown reason have never been able to get over their love affair with Communism. For every person killed by the Nazis, Communists have slaughtered from seven to ten.

It is not in the comparison between Communism and Nazism that we can learn our greatest lessons, but in the comparison between Communism and Christianity. To whom is evangelical Christianity a threat? Who can say that about Communism -or Islam for that matter? We could look at morality, social conditions, the family, or the economy of Communist countries to make our case - just think, North Korea. However, for our purpose today, I would like for us to use the Communist work ethic as a springboard for a serious look at the how the wisdom of God may be applied to a biblical work ethic.

Karl Marx envisioned a world that was godless, classless, and stateless; a world, which could only be brought about through worldwide revolution. This revolution would mean war in many nations, but if it could be accomplished through bloodless revolution they would accept that. In industrialized nations they might accomplish their purpose through cultural revolution. This would involve causing divisions between races, generating class envy, and causing animosity between labor and management, and between organized labor and those not involved in a labor union. Let me stress here that I am not judging the differences between organized labor and unorganized labor. My purpose is not to point out the pros and cons of right-to-work laws. My purpose is to stress, not right to work, but the necessity of work and the importance of the right attitude toward work.

There is one other point that must be stressed: when the Communists tell us that the early church was a Communist society, "holding all things in common" (Acts. 4), they are lying. But then, lying is a virtue if it advances their cause. In that early Christian society, the church, members were sharing because of their

compassion for those who were in need. In Communism the people are coerced, and since human beings are viewed as machines, the ruling elite (I know: godless, classless, stateless - nevertheless, the ruling elite) used them as machines.

Since the people were used as machines they became listless, tardy, lazy, and despondent, all of which led to an abuse of alcohol during the height of the Soviet Union. Why should they work when what they made was taken from them? Christians should seek the wisdom of God when they approach their work. One consideration is the question of why should they work? Of course, they must work to make money for food, shelter, clothing, security, and other things that may contribute to their happiness. But for the Christian, there is another element. That is the opportunity it affords one to honor the Lord's Great Commission.

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## **I. THE WISDOM OF GOD LEADS TO A SOUND WORK ETHIC, 10:16.**

"The wages of the righteous is life, The income of the wicked, punishment."

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### **A. From the Negative Standpoint, to Refuse to Work Is a Sin.**

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#### **1. We must earn our living by the sweat of our brow, Gen 3.**

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#### **2. Refusal to work is a serious matter, Pro. 18:9.**

"He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys."

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

"For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thes. 3:10).

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## **B. Work should be a force for good, not evil.**

Godly wisdom recognizes this and understands that those who follow biblical principles will find many opportunities to glorify the Lord. Is it any wonder the Scripture proclaims, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10).

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## **II. GOD WILL BLESS THE WORK OF OUR HANDS, Pro. 28:19.**

"He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty."

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### **A. God Bless Those Who Are Industrious**

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#### **1. We should work wisely.**

Working wisely has a lot to do with the way you invest your time, energy, and resources. There are people who exhaust themselves with their jobs but never get anywhere. Others can do the same job and show a profit. Some work wisely, others simply do not. They may work, but they neglect or ignore sound business practices.

Working wisely goes beyond that. In another message I shared a few words about a neighbor in the community in which I grew up, a neighbor I will call George. As I pointed out, George used the word "smart" to describe one that was industrious, one who was willing to work. Well, when it comes to work, we need to be smart in the sense of being wise, but we also need to be "smart" in the sense of being diligent, or industrious.

I was pastor of the Forest Baptist Church, Forest LA, for fifteen years. Most of the older people there had migrated from south Mississippi in the early part of the Twentieth Century, bought and cleared land, and farmed it, working "from can 'til can't" (that is from can see to can't see, or from before the sun came up until after it went down). From time to time I would hear someone referred to as the "hardest working man in West Carroll Parish." The two men of whom that statement was most often made were

both members of our church, Jack Witcher and Tom Sharplin. Not only were they hard workers, their families worked hard.

When John, my older son, finished the tenth grade Tom Sharplin hired him to work on a rice farm. The first day I drove John out to Tom's house he got out of the car and walked casually - like most any teenager - over to where Tom and his sons were working on a tractor. When I picked John up that evening, I told him that from that time on, when he got out of the car and walked over to the job or to meet his employer, I would like to see a little more life in his step: "walk like you've come to work. Tom can tell by the way you walk up to him whether or not you will work." I had heard him say something like that. Within a few months, if anyone had asked Tom or his sons, they would have told you that John was the hardest working teenager in the area. He had the respect of a lot of adults because of it.

Your approach to your work may say a lot more than you think. Have you ever gone to a department store and looked around for a clerk, only to find someone whose attitude seemed to say, "Here comes another one! I am sick of fooling with these people?" Then you meet another clerk who made you feel welcome and you leave knowing you will return.

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## **2. Working wisely saves energy.**

It is not always the person who works hardest who benefits most from it. There are planners and there are plodders. Some plan their work and others just keep plodding along, day after day. Some of those people never understand what is happening, and often resent the success of those who work more wisely and have more time for leisure.

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## **3. Working wisely can avoid waste of time, energy, and materials.**

Buck Jackson grew cotton and soybeans on his farm just outside of Bastrop, LA. He produced some of the highest yields in the area, and there is some really great land in the area, especially around Mer Rouge and Oak Ridge. Bigger operators wanted to know how he did it. How could he produce over fifty bushels of soybeans per

acre? His answer, "I work my soybeans like you work your cotton." To many at the time, growing soybeans is what you did in between work in cotton fields.

But there was more to his story. He only had two John Deere tractors and they were never pampered - serviced well, but never pampered. Whatever they were capable of, he got it out of them. Then every other winter he pulled the engines and rebuilt them - whether they needed it or not. With only two tractors he could not afford a breakdown during the year.

That type planning and that kind of program are good for success, but it does not stop there. It makes a statement about the person. Your work habits and your attitude toward your work make a statement to others. For example, some of the most arrogant people I have ever known were farmers; some of the most humble people I have ever met were farmers. I grew up on a cotton and Soybean farm seven miles west of Sledge, MS, and I worked part-time for the USDA while I was going to college and seminary. I also worked agricultural surveys for the Statistical Reporting Service when my wife took off three years from teaching after John was born. I have known a lot of farmers. I cannot forget the man who was arrogant and obnoxious when I visited his farm. Then when I was asked to preach in a local church this man was leading the singing! His brother was one of the most pleasant people with whom I worked during those days. If you were a lost person, which brother would you listen to if he tried to witness to you?

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## **B. No Blessings Are Promised to Those that are Slothful or Lazy.**

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#### **5. If you do less than your best it is a sin.**

Carl Hart was a retired contractor when I met him at a deer camp. Like many employers, he had often dealt with employees who wouldn't work. However, he had discovered something that served him well. He said that if you had a job to do that was slow and tedious and required a lot of time, and you didn't have time to figure out a way to save time, just give it to the laziest man you had. He would find a quicker way or an easier way if one could be found. A number of years ago a friend told me that International Paper Company became fed up with people loafing on the job. More to the point, they were fed up with people going to sleep on the job. So the plant manager sent down the word that any employee caught sleeping on the job would be fired on the spot.

One employee had become so accustomed to taking a brief nap after lunch that his biological clock sent a signal to his brain that he was about to miss his nap. So, after fighting sleep for a little while, he sat down in a corner he thought would be safe for a brief time and bowed his head and went to sleep. At some point he opened his eyes, his head still down, and he was looking at the toes of a pair of boots. He knew it was his supervisor and that this man would fire him for sleeping on the job. He hesitated only a matter of seconds and said, "Amen!"

He immediately got up and went back to work. His quick thinking, as sacrilegious as it was, saved his job.

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#### **6. God can take our best effort and use it for his glory.**

Dr. Sam Gore was head of the Art Department at Mississippi College for forty-two years. He also gave me the oil painting I have hanging over my desk, one that I first saw hanging on a wall in his own home. He also gave me a sculpture of the head of Christ with the crown of thorns. He is an internationally renowned sculptor who has presented programs in which he sculpts the head of Christ, or one of his other favorites before some impressive audiences. Not only is Sam a former Art Educator Of The Year in American Colleges and Universities (according to one of the certificates a student discovered in that closet), he is also highly regarded by artists and loved by Christians who know him. He is also one of the godliest men I have ever known.

By the time he retired he had thrown enough awards and certificates of recognition into the of a storage closet to have satisfied the collective ego of a major university. If you ever go into the Baptist Hospital in Jackson, Mississippi, look to the left and enjoy his STUDENT NURSE. If you go to the Mississippi Agricultural Center, stop and spend some time with his AMERICAN LABORER. The sculpture is that of a man in overalls, with the top button on the side unfastened. He has been working but now he is seated on a stump, reading his Bible. The face is that of his father, Brother John Gore, who baptized my father when I was an infant.

I had the privilege of listening to Sam explain the hows and whys of each hand, arm, leg, face, and even the beagle that curled around his feet, totally at peace with his master, just as his master was at peace with his Master. I was particularly impressed when he told me that after he had finished the sculpture he decided to take off the left hand and make it larger and stronger because, "the hand that holds the Bible should not be a wimpish hand."

This sculpture is a tribute to the American worker. Now, here is a part of the story that had greatest meaning to me. For some time Sam reviewed for me the place of art and sculpture in the Bible, the contribution of Francis Shaeffer to our understanding of the contribution of art to the Kingdom of God, and the workers who had been trained in the school of artisans in the Valley of Kings in Egypt before the Exodus. If you want to make a study of the value God places on a "job well done", study the Book of Exodus, giving special attention to the work on the Tabernacle.

Before God there is no small job, no little job. If you are where God wants you, serve him faithfully. If you are a farmer, we would thank you for feeding us. If you are a truck driver, thank you for delivering our groceries. If you are a teacher, thank you for preparing us to pursue the American dream, and your dedication and service. If you work for a utilities company, thank you for keeping on the power and gas. If you are a banker, thank you for helping us when we get in over our heads. If you are a public servant, Thank you - I think! If you are a housewife, thank you for rearing your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."