

# The Calling and Purpose of Work

*Finances Conference*

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**Bible Text:** Proverbs 6:6-11; Proverbs 23:4-5

**Preached on:** Friday, October 9, 2009

## **Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed**

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Well, let's begin. Thanks for coming tonight. And we will begin by reading from Proverbs chapter six beginning at verse six and we will read through verse 11. Proverbs six verse six through 11. The subject tonight is the calling and purpose of work. Proverbs chapter six verse six through 11.

Well, let's begin reading at verse one. Proverbs six beginning at verse one.

My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.<sup>1</sup>

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that we can be here this evening to open and discuss thy Word. And we pray, Lord, thy blessing on us tonight. Use also the work that we do tonight for the furtherance of the gospel and the gathering of thy Church. We ask, Lord, thou wilt bless and care for all of thy saints in their different needs and as thy Word comes to us tonight with application and admonition, give us meekness and humility to bow before thy Word. We pray it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 6:1-11.

As I said, tonight the subject is work and the calling and purpose of work. And those are really the two areas of the speech tonight, the two main points.

I want to tie this into what we talked about last time to begin with. Last week we talked about stewardship and the sovereignty of God and we saw that really the fundamental principle for all finances is the principle of the sovereignty of God. God is the maker of all things. God is the owner of all things. And God distributes wealth as he sees fit as the sovereign God.

And God himself we should see, as we begin tonight, as the sovereign God is also working God. Jesus says in John five verse 17, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”<sup>2</sup>

And then we read very early in the Scriptures in Genesis chapter one, the God who made everything also made man with an original purpose in the creation and that was described God in Genesis one verse 28. Part of man’s purpose in God’s creation is that man would work.

God said to Adam in Genesis one verse 28, immediately after he had created him, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and [then this] replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”<sup>3</sup>

And God there, as a working God and as a sovereign God, tells man as he created him that he must work. And God reiterates that to fallen man in Genesis chapter three verses 18 and following.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.<sup>4</sup>

And so on.

And we should understand, looking at these two texts in Genesis chapter one and chapter three that work was part of God’s original creation and purpose for man. Work is not itself a part of the curse and the fall. It is the attitude, perhaps, and the hard labor that is a part of the fall that makes it difficult for us. But work itself was originally created by God as part of his purpose for man.

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<sup>2</sup> John 5:17.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:17-19.

And it is important for us to see that it doesn't matter what our work is. That is the teaching that Paul gives in Colossians chapter three. It doesn't matter what your labor is, what your work is, you must do it heartily as unto the Lord.

Colossians three verse 22.

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.<sup>5</sup>

And so you have in the Scriptures this calling that God gives to us to work and that is a part of his original creation and purpose for man.

Now this is unusual. This is different than the thinking of the world in which we live today. The world looks at work as a necessary evil, something that we have to do, but that people would rather not do. But we must not, as we saw last week, lean on our own understanding, lean on human understanding, but the teaching of the Scriptures and the Word of God.

Now the subject of work in the Scriptures is a massive subject and I mean by that it is all through the Scriptures and the Bible is full of teaching about work. And we will see a lot of that tonight, but what I want to do is focus especially on two passages of Scripture in the book of Proverbs that have to do, that look at the two great dangers that we face in this area of work.

We are talking about Christian stewardship and we are talking about financial principles. And this is one of the main things that we must understand as I have laid it out. God has created man to work.

There are two dangers. One is laziness, the passage we read from Proverbs chapter six. And the other is working for the wrong reasons and with the wrong goals. And we want to look, first, at Proverbs chapter six and the teaching there of Solomon and the Holy Spirit concerning work.

And Solomon calls us there to look at two different things and learn from them. First of all, the sluggard. What is a sluggard? He addresses the words of the text to the sluggard.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard.”<sup>6</sup>

Well, a sluggard is simply a lazy man, a man who has work to do, he has the abilities to do it, he has the time to do it, but either he can't be bothered doing it, he is not interested in doing it or he makes all kinds of excuses or he has the wrong attitude towards his work while he does it. He does his work simply because he is compelled to do it or it is necessary for him to do it, not unto the Lord.

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<sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 6:6.

Now the book of Proverbs gives us at least four characteristics of the sluggard or the lazy man. It describes him to us very carefully. And, first of all, this characterizes him. He is a man who procrastinates in verse 10, Proverbs six verse 10.

“Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.”<sup>7</sup>

He puts things off.

Soon the day passes and he has done nothing useful and nothing productive.

In the second place the sluggard is described in the book of Proverbs as one who begins, but doesn't finish the work that he has to do. He may even begin it with enthusiasm, but the novelty of what he has to do wears off and the effort is too much and so he gives up.

Proverbs chapter 12 verse 27 puts it this way.

“The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious.”<sup>8</sup>

And it is saying this. Perhaps he was enthusiastic, energetic to go out hunting. That sounded fun to him. But once he got out there he killed an animal and now what is he going to do with it?

And so rather than eating what he took in the hunt, he lets it go to waste. He is slothful.

Proverbs chapter 26 verse 15 also describes the slothful man this way. He doesn't finish what he begins. And, really, it describes here the tragedy of a slothful lazy man.

“The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.”<sup>9</sup>

And the word that is translated there “bosom” is the same word for bowl. And perhaps you have seen this before in a very young child sitting in a high chair late in the evening. No nap and they are very tired. And they put their hand in their bowl to bring the food to their mouth and they can't get it there. That is how it describes the slothful man here. He is the one who begins, but he doesn't end. He is too lazy even to bring the food to his mouth.

The third characteristic of a slothful man in the book of Proverbs is this that he has many excuses. Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 23.

“In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury,”<sup>10</sup> or poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 6:10.

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 12:27.

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 26:15.

There is a contrast here between somebody who works hard in all labor and somebody who talks a lot, has lots to say, but doesn't get anything done.

Proverbs chapter 26 verses 13 and 22 and verse 13 describe the slothful man as one who makes excuses this way.

He says, "There is a lion in the way,"<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 26:13.

And then Proverbs chapter 22:13 he says, "It is not safe to go out in the streets."

He says, "I shall be slain in the streets."<sup>12</sup>

And so he has excuses. He doesn't know if there is a lion. It is imagined. It is perhaps. But he uses that as an excuse against going out to work.

In Proverbs chapter 20 verse four it says of him, "[He] will not plow by reason of the cold."<sup>13</sup>

It is too cold. And then the next day it is too hot. And then it is too wet. And he never gets anything done because of his excuses and really at bottom his laziness.

The fourth characteristic of the slothful man is this, that he is an unhappy, a dissatisfied man. Proverbs chapter 21 verses 25 and 26.

The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not.<sup>14</sup>

And it describes him this way. Someone who is covetous, but at the same time lazy, someone who is full of desire, but desire that kills him.

And it means this. He is looking at what other people have and he wants what they have and he is covetous. He is envy. He is jealous. He is envious. He is jealous of what others have, what they have got, what they have done, what they have accomplished and instead of going out and working he has nothing to show for it himself. He feels like a victim.

Now we should ask tonight, why does the Bible spend so much time now here just in the book of Proverbs describing this slothful, lazy man to us? And the reason is this, that we should learn from the slothful man.

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<sup>10</sup> Proverbs 14:23.

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 26:13.

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 22:13.

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 20:4.

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 21:25-26.

Proverbs chapter 24 verse 30. Solomon says:

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.<sup>15</sup>

This is why the Bible describes to us the lazy man, so that we can be instructed, so that we can learn.

And there are some things right here in Proverbs chapter six that we can learn. The first is this that laziness will lead to poverty. Laziness will lead to poverty.

Verse 11.

“So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.”<sup>16</sup>

And the idea of one that travelleth is like a gypsy, an armed man like being raided by thieves.

If you are traveling, maybe, let's use the example of the prodigal son. He just traveled. It is as though he was always on vacation and soon he ran out of things as one that travels.

“And thy want as [from] an armed man.”<sup>17</sup>

The thieves come and they take everything and you are left with nothing and laziness will lead to poverty.

But it is not just to a physical poverty that comes. It is spiritually destructive as well. The prodigal son wasted his living with bad company. And it led him to all kinds of trouble in his life. And Jesus, I think, is building the parable of the prodigal son on one of the Proverbs, chapter 28 and verse 19.

“He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough.”<sup>18</sup>

And, again, you have the contrast. Someone working and someone frittering away their time with foolish and vain people.

And this is what happens when we are not doing something productive. Idle time, then the devil comes and he fills that void with lusts and temptations and gossip and all those

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<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 24:30-32.

<sup>16</sup> Proverbs 6:11.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 28:19.

kinds of things and that is exactly what Paul addresses in the New Testament when he talks about the man who doesn't work, that man shouldn't eat.

This is what was going on in Thessalonica. There was a theological error in the church. They thought that Christ was coming very soon and they thought, well, if he is coming so soon we can forget about everything here in the earth. We don't even have to work anymore. He is coming.

And then because he didn't come, they got themselves into all kinds of trouble.

2 Thessalonians three verse 11.

“For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.”<sup>19</sup>

What did they do with all their time? Well, they stuck their nose into other people's lives and caused trouble. And that is what Satan will do with idle time. He will use our thoughts. He will use our hands to sin. And that is what happens with idle time.

Now it is important for us as we think about the lazy person to realize that laziness is a sin, first of all, in the heart. It is something that we can see in ourselves, something that we find in ourselves as we examine ourselves. How often don't we take the easy road? Aren't you sometimes jealous of how well others have it, how little it seems they have to work, how good of a job they seem to have? How often don't we make excuses for not being productive? Are we always, are you always faithful to your employer?

And this laziness begins in our own hearts with a discontent, not just with what we have now, but with what God has given us to do.

And so Solomon says to the sluggard, “Go to the ant.”<sup>20</sup>

Now, if you think about that, that is a very humbling thing. Here God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, the sovereign says to the creature that he made in his own image most like him, “Go to the ant,”<sup>21</sup> this very small, one of the smallest of the creatures and look at the ant and learn something for yourself.

God is saying, “I made you like the ant. In the beginning when I created you, I made you like the ant.”

Look at the ant. What do you see? He is industrious. He is cooperative. He is motivated. He is persevering.

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<sup>19</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3:11.

<sup>20</sup> Proverbs 6:6.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Children play with ants and you try to stop the ant in the way that it is going and it finds another way. it doesn't stop moving. And that is the ant. The text, Proverbs six says it has no guide or overseer, but provides its meat in the summer and for the winter.

Consider the ant and be wise. Be wise.

Now what is wisdom?

Wisdom is simply this, practical knowledge that takes God into account. Takes into account, now, looking at the ant, God's creation of us and that God created us to be like the ant.

Consider the ant, he says. He doesn't say, "Well, go and look at the snail and go and look at the sloth and go and look at the turtle." But he says, "Consider the ant and learn from the ant."

God has designed man, like he did the ant, to work for his food. And God has created man to be an industrious creature. This is his original creation for man. And that is the way the Scriptures will explain it to us. God expects diligence from us in our work.

Ecclesiastes chapter nine and verse 10 puts it this way.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."<sup>22</sup>

God created us to be diligent workers. He designed us this way.

And if a man doesn't work, the Scripture says, that man shouldn't eat. Now we should see as well that God rewards diligent labor. This is part of just living a happy life.

"The sleep of a labouring man is sweet,"<sup>23</sup> Solomon says, "whether he eat little or much."<sup>24</sup>

Your contentment, your peace in life—we said this last week—is not determined by what you have, but it is an inner peace. And Solomon says whether you have much or little, that isn't what determines the sweetness of your sleep, your restfulness. But that you have worked.

And in the context of all we have said that you have done your labor as unto the Lord, if it brings in little, if you are still hungry, because you have done it unto the Lord, the sleep of a laboring man is sweet.

And these are the things that we must put into practice, that we must learn. This is wisdom, practical knowledge in a world that teaches us exactly the opposite, in a world

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<sup>22</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:10.

<sup>23</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:12.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



that says, “Well, work is simply a necessary evil and life is about vacations and the weekend and pleasure and wealth and relaxation and retirement. These are the goals of life.”

The Scripture says, labor, work, that is the calling, that is the purpose of God for man in the earth.

But now I should want to point out that our labor is not just in our occupation. There is also spiritual work that God has given us to do and this spiritual application here as well.

First of all, this, there needs to be a balance in our life between the work that we do with our hands or on the job and the spiritual responsibilities that God has given us to do. We have family. We have children. We have church. We have marriage. And these all require our attention, too. And God demands, commands us to be diligent in these areas of our work.

And we must not work to the point that we jeopardize the well being, the health and especially the spiritual condition of ourselves and our families and homes by our work. The diligence that God requires on the job.

Proverbs chapter six. There is a diligence that God expects of us also with regard to spiritual responsibilities that we have in our life.

And you will find that a workaholic is somebody who is negligent or lazy in other areas of his life.

And so the Bible demand diligence in spiritual things. We must be fervent in prayer. We must be zealous of good works. We must search the Scriptures daily. We must love one another with a pure heart fervently. All these things that the Scripture lays before us for the well being of our soul, for the spiritual well being of our homes and of the people of God. There is a diligence, a work that is required in these areas as well.

And there is an urgency about this.

It has been said before that the road to hell is paved with many good intentions. And isn't this exactly what Jesus addressed in his ministry?

Follow me.

Well, I have just gotten married.

I have to bury my parents.

I have just bought a field. I have just bought a cow.

There is other things in the realm of the earth that I have got to do. I don't have time for spiritual work, spiritual labor.

And there is an urgency that we must labor.

“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,”<sup>25</sup> says Jesus.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”<sup>26</sup>

So that passage, Proverbs six, addresses the first danger, laziness. And we see that there is a diligence that is required of us in the work of our hands, in spiritual things as well.

And that brings us to the second passage that I want to look at tonight and that is Proverbs chapter 23 and verses four and five.

The other danger is this, that we work with the wrong goals and the wrong purpose. We work for the wrong reasons.

Solomon says in Proverbs 23 verse four and five:

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.<sup>27</sup>

Now we have to begin by saying this verse does not say that work is wrong. We have just seen it. The Bible is clear. We must work. And this verse does not say either that wages are wrong. The Bible talks about wages. Jesus uses parables in which he talks about wages. And we have to work. We have to use the gifts and talents that God has given us expecting that in the use of them God is going to give us wages and means to meet our needs.

And also this text when it says, “Labour not to be rich,”<sup>28</sup> is not against wealth. The Bible is not against wealth. The Scriptures say that God, in 1 Timothy six, hath given us all things richly to enjoy.

So what you have been given by God he has given to you for you to enjoy. It is not wrong in itself to be wealthy and rich. Rather, what Solomon is getting here is the attitude of heart and the purpose of mind of one who works.

The text sets before us a man who is working. And you come to that man and you say to

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 9:62.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 8:36.

<sup>27</sup> Proverbs 23:4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Proverbs 23:4.

him, “Why are you working? What is the purpose? What is the goal? What is the reason for your working?”

And he says, maybe he doesn't say it in words, but this is in his mind. “I am working to be rich. That is my goal. That is my purpose.”

And the Scriptures say, “Labour not to be rich.”<sup>29</sup>

Categorically. It condemns that attitude, that approach towards work

1 Timothy 6 verses nine and 10.

They that will be rich, those who desire to be rich, “ fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts.”<sup>30</sup>

Proverbs 28 verse 20 speaks of those who haste to be rich. This is what they want. This is what they are hurrying about in their life for, to get rich. The Scriptures condemn that purpose and that goal in living.

Now that is surprising, isn't it? That is startling. That is convicting. And it is different, different than our whole culture and our whole society and our whole world that we live in. Why do you work? Well, of course, you work to be wealthy. That is what you want. That is your goal, isn't it?

And the society that we live in says, “If you work it is possible for any one of you and every one of you to become wealthy by diligent work. You just have to work.”

And the Scriptures say you have to disconnect that purpose as well from work. And work without wealth, without riches in mind. That is not the goal. That is not the purpose of our work.

Now perhaps that raises a question. You are a businessman or you are getting an education and you say, “But shouldn't I use my talents? Shouldn't I use my gifts in the best possible way and that will mean more money, more wealth for me, wont it?”

And the answer to that is yes. You use your gifts and you use your talents in the best possible way, but again, not for work, but, Colossians three, for the Lord. There is the purpose. Not for money, but simply for the Lord.

And this is getting, again, Proverbs 23, getting at the heart, getting at the desire, getting at the will of the one who is working. And the point is this, that we should examine our own hearts.

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<sup>29</sup> Proverbs 23:4.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9.

Am I greedy? Am I covetous? Does everything in my life come down to money? Am I always thinking about how I am going to be able to spend my money? We have to examine our mind. We have to examine our thoughts and we are guilty of this sin of laboring with the wrong goal when thoughts of money consume our day, when the success of another makes us envious, when we define success by what I have and not who I am in Jesus Christ, when I neglect spiritual responsibilities for money, when it is difficult for me to let go of money for somebody else who is in need.

Then I am laboring for my own accumulation of wealth. That is the attitude that this is getting at. It is not wrong to work. It is not wrong to increase in things and riches, but is this my purpose? This is why I am working, to get these things for myself.

Where is the Lord in my thinking? And that is really the nub of it here. This man labors to be rich. The Lord is not at all in his mind, like the rich fool in the parable of Jesus in Luke 12.

There is a very interesting and probably one of the most difficult prayers in all of the Scriptures to pray, Proverbs chapter 30 verses eight and nine. This is a prayer.

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and  
say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of  
my God in vain.<sup>31</sup>

How many of us have really prayed that? Give me not poverty. We understand that. Nor riches. How many of us have really prayed that? Don't make me wealthy. Don't give me riches.

Now there are two reasons given in Proverbs 23 why we should not labor to be rich. And the first is this that riches are transient. Riches are temporary. Riches are... they can vanish in a moment.

In verse five Solomon says, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?"<sup>32</sup>

He is saying, "You are looking at something and it is not real. It is not there. It is not going to last. It is an illusion. It is a mirage."

If you have driven in the hot sun in the summer on the highway and off in the distance, a half a mile or a mile ahead of you you see what looks like water on the road and you get there and it is not there. That is what Solomon is saying riches are like. You are setting your eyes on something that is not. Riches are always going to disappoint you. They are always going to let you down. They are never going to bring to you the things that they promised to bring to you. Happiness and pleasure and peace do not come from riches. Quantity of things doesn't bring quality into one's life.

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<sup>31</sup> Proverbs 30:8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Proverbs 23:5.

That is what Solomon is saying. Don't set your eyes on that which is not. And he goes on to say in the next verse, "They take wings." Riches certainly make themselves wings.

"They fly away as an eagle toward heaven."<sup>33</sup>

He is saying, listen. You know, maybe you catch a little bird and it falls out of the nest and you put it in a box and what happens? Well, the wings grow and the bird flies away and riches are just like that. You might have them for a little while, but there is going to come a day when they are all gone. And that day could come very quickly and they can all be lost in a moment, in a week.

I think this week is a year since the massive stock market crash, Wall Street. And how many people didn't lose 30, 40, 50 percent of their saved up IRAs and retirement funds or assets or all gone. They take wings. They fly away in a moment.

"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver,"<sup>34</sup> says Solomon.

There is an emptiness. It is vanity. It is more certain that you will lose them than keep them.

And also this. They disappoint with respect to eternal things. There is no profit of them in the life to come, Proverbs 11 verse four.

"Riches profit not in the day of wrath."<sup>35</sup>

And, I supposed, maybe that is talking about on the earthly level. A very wealthy man is charged with a crime and it is very obvious he is guilty. Well, that doesn't stop him going to jail. And the same in the judgment day. You stand before God with all the riches of the world and it doesn't help you a bit. It profit not. You can't take them with you.

To the rich fool God says, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be?"<sup>36</sup>

It doesn't help. You can't take them with you. You might put them in your casket, but they just rot in the ground with your body. They profit not. They are worthless.

And, again, contentment isn't determined by what you have. Peace doesn't come by obtaining things. But these things can even bring ruin.

And then they pose spiritual dangers as well, riches do. They are not only disappointing in this life and with respect to the life to come, but there is a spiritual danger involved.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ecclesiastes 5:10.

<sup>35</sup> Proverbs 11:4.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 12:20.

Paul says, “The love of money is the root of all evil.”<sup>37</sup> And you can think of examples of that in the Scriptures.

Think of the rich man and Lazarus in Jesus’ parable. Because of his riches, he despised the poor and it brought peril to his own soul. Think of Judas and his love for money and his covetousness and greed led him to betray the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the price because of they wanted it for themselves and they lied about it and they died for it before the apostles.

The love of money leads to all kinds of trouble. It can break up families, marriages. It can break up a person’s own mental well being.

You have only to think of, for example, funerals. Funerals will sometimes bring out the best in people. But they can also bring out the worst. Dad and mom die and they are brought to the grave and the children turn into savages at each other.

People will divorce for money. The love of money leads to all kinds of other sins and it creates spiritual barriers for us as well in our own lives.

Jesus says, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”<sup>38</sup>

We must not labor to be rich.

“The love of money is the root of all evil.”<sup>39</sup>

The danger is that we forget God. We accumulate wealth and we say, “My hand, my strength, my might has gotten this.”

We enjoy pleasure. We neglect the spiritual duties and responsibilities and necessities of our life.

And the alternative for the Christian is what, the alternative to laboring to be rich? Well, it is not to stop working. It is not to squander what God has given you. It is not to say, “Well, I am better off being poor because there is some virtue of some sort in poverty.”

No. We are called to work. We are called to keep using our talents and gifts. But we have to understand this, that God hasn’t given us things for us. The things that we have—last week we saw—are not our own, but they are the Lord’s. And God gives much to some in order that they might give to others.

Ephesians four puts it this way.

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

<sup>38</sup> Luke 18:24-25.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10.

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, [why?] that he may have to give to him that needeth.”<sup>40</sup>

And after Paul in 1 Timothy six has warned against those who will be rich and fall into temptation and a snare and many hurtful lusts, he says, “This is what they should do.”

They should “do good... be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”<sup>41</sup>

This is what is required for the wealthy, not that it is wrong for them to be wealthy, but they must be generous. And we will talk more about that next week.

And then the second thing that we should remember is that we should work not for earthly things, but for eternal things. And that means in all our labor we labor as unto the Lord and that means this, that when there is earthly return on our labor, its number one purpose has to be the eternal things.

Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

Isaiah asks, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?”<sup>42</sup>

Jesus says, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.”<sup>43</sup>

And everything that we have, everything that God gives to us should be pressed into the service of and the pursuit of eternal life and the glory of God.

And maybe this is the way for us to think of it. When God gives us wealth, when God gives us more than we need, he is testing us and he is giving us a tool, a tool to serve him, but a test also of our faith and of our commitment to him.

“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.”<sup>44</sup>

“Labour not to be rich.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 4:28.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Timothy 6:18.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 55:2.

<sup>43</sup> John 6:27.

<sup>44</sup> Proverbs 3:9.

<sup>45</sup> Proverbs 23:4.

Biblical Principles for Personal Finances  
“The Calling and Purpose of Work”

**Introductory Comments**

- I. The Calling to Work (Proverbs 6:6-11)
  - A. Learning from the sluggard
    1. Characteristics of the sluggard
      - a. Procrastination
      - b. Not finishing what he starts
      - c. Many excuses
      - d. Unhappy person
    2. Lessons from the sluggard
      - a. Laziness leads to poverty
      - b. Laziness is spiritually destructive
      - c. Laziness is a heart sin
  - B. Wisdom from the ant
    1. God designed man to work (as He did the ant)
    2. God designed work as the way to meet our needs
    3. God rewards diligent labor
    4. Diligence in spiritual activities
- II. The Purpose of Work (Proverbs 23:4-5)
  - A. “Labor not to be rich”
    1. This verse is not against work and wages and wealth
    2. Rather, it gets at the attitude or purpose of heart of the laborer: why do you work?
  - B. The reasons we should not labor to be rich
    1. Riches are transient
    2. Riches pose great spiritual danger
  - C. So, why work?
    1. Because we are stewards who must honor God
    2. For eternal purposes