

Doing God's Will in our Daily Work

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Let's turn now to the book of Romans, the epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter 11 and verse 36.

36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

I'm just a plumber. I'm just a secretary. I'm just a homemaker. Many times have you thought that, said that, heard that. Oftentimes we look at our own job and we look at other people's jobs and we say, "Well, in comparison to that, I'm just a fill-in-the-blank." But these are statements that are heard especially by pastors. I've lost count of the number of times somebody said to me, "Well, I'm just a salesman. I'm just an accountant. I'm just a..." and so it goes on, name the job. And this is said especially to pastors, I believe, because many Christians think that only a ministerial calling is a divine calling; that only ministry work can really be called Christian work. And as a consequence, really, Christians end up in this idea that for six days a week they're doing their own work and only one day a week are they serving the Lord. I believe that's a completely unbiblical view of our work and I want to try and give you a much more biblical view of work by using Romans 11:36 as a lens with which to view our work in a much more biblical way. Children, you know what a lens is. You might be looking at something and you can't really see much, it might be a leaf or an insect, and then you put it under a microscope, you look down through the lens and, whoa, you see a completely new world, you see things you never saw before, and that's what I want Romans 11:36 to be for us.

It's a verse that is not obviously or even contextually directly related to the idea of work. It's a verse that sums up Romans 1-11 which is primarily focused on God's great plan of salvation and how in speaking of salvation we can see, "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." But this verse is true not just of salvation but of providence and especially the providence of our everyday work. It's a lens, yes, we can apply to salvation, but we can also apply it to providence. It's a lens we can apply to God's work in saving people but also God's work in our work and that's why I think the Lord's Day that we read is so significant, isn't it? It's sort of almost surprising the way this is brought into it. We often think, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven," that it's speaking of God's will, obeying him, keeping the commandments and so on and

so forth and that's there, renouncing our own will, performing his will, but what's so interesting is the way it goes on to say that's so. So it's an outflow, it's an application of that principle. That's so everyone, not just ministers, that everyone may attain to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willing and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

So let's use this lens and notice, first of all, that your work is from God. That's the first thing it says, doesn't it? For of him are all things, including the things of our daily work. Your work is of God. There are two things we can see. First of all: work itself in general is from God. Then secondly, your work specifically is from God.

Let's look at it in that order. First of all: work in general is of God. That's why we read Genesis 1. What did we notice there? We saw God created the world but God also created work and called Adam and Eve to work in his world. Therefore notice work is not a punishment. Work is not evil, as such. It was part of the pre-fall world. It was part of the "very good" that God pronounced over the earth. In fact, we could say God was the first manual worker. He made things, didn't he? He produced physical things and then called Adam and Eve to continue that work, in general with that often-called cultural mandate to subdue the earth, replenish and fill it, and then specifically in keeping and tilling the garden. Work therefore is part of our basic humanity. It's a basic human need. It's as much a human need as eating and drinking and sleeping and socializing. It's part of God's original creation, in fact, it's one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. It's part of being fully human. It's an essential part of human flourishing in general.

Remember when we're talking about work here, we're not just talking about paid work, we're not just talking about employment, we're not just talking about what you do between the ages of 20 and 65, we're talking about our daily calling whether paid or not, whether in employment or not, whether retired or not. It's whatever God has called us to do in our daily lives. It might be caring for an invalid husband or wife. It might be volunteering in the community. There are so many different things that come under this. Everything does.

So notice that, first of all: work in general is from God. It's a good. It's a need. It's a blessing. But then, secondly: your work in particular is from God. If we are doing lawful work, that's a big "if," isn't it? You have to ask that first of all. God doesn't give us unlawful work. If we are doing lawful work and if we are doing the work that God has called us to, then our specific work is specifically from God. If we are doing lawful work and if we are doing the work he has called us to, then we are doing work given to us by God. You see, but that's a second "if" in that. You said, "If we are doing the work that God has specifically called us to. How do I know? How do I know that I am doing this particular work that God has called me to? How can I be sure?" Well, I want to just give you a few questions that is a sermon in itself, really, but I want to give you a few questions that I often give to especially young people, but not always young people who may come and ask for advice on something like this. "How do I know what God wants me to do? Or how do I know if I'm doing what God has really called me to?" These questions, I hope, are drawn from biblical teaching.

Can I glorify God in this job? Can I glorify God in this job? Does this work help me to live a holy life? In other words, does it involve me in sin or not? Thirdly, does it compromise my commitments to God, to family and to serving in the local church to some extent? Does it compromise my commitments to God, family and church? Fourthly, does it provide for my needs and the needs of those who are dependent upon me? Fifthly, does it help me be a blessing to others? Does it help me serve others? Does it make a positive contribution to society? Does it use my God-given talents? Is there opportunity to do it? God hasn't called us to do something if there's no opportunity to do it. Do I want to do it? God usually calls us to do something by first of all giving us the desire for it. There may be times, may be when we're called to do work that we really do not want to do but, on the whole, I think it's an indicator, a helpful indicator taken together with these other questions of God has given us a strong desire that this may, indeed, be of God's will. And maybe I'll just give you one sentence which sort of sums it up: how with my existing abilities and opportunities, how with my existing abilities and opportunities can I be of greatest service to other people knowing what I do of God's will and of human need? There's a lot packed into that. How with my existing abilities and opportunities can I be of greatest service to other people knowing what I do of God's will and of human need?

So we go back to that statement: if I am doing lawful work and if I am doing what God has called me to, then I can view my daily work as something directly from God. Of him. Something he has specifically called specifically me to to specifically do. And therefore in our everyday work, doing our everyday work, we are reflecting God's sovereignty over the whole of life. We are, you could say, doing the good works that he has prepared for us to do before the foundation of the world. That's how significant your daily work is, it's doing good works. Good works aren't done after 5 o'clock or on Saturday or Sunday, they're done 24/7, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Our work is part of the good works God has called us to do.

So your daily work is good work. God-given work, therefore, good work and this was one of the very strong emphases in the Reformation. Before the Reformation there was a very strict division in the Roman Catholic Church between sacred work and common work and only ministry work was good work and the rest, they didn't call it evil but they called it sort of neutral, okay stuff. But only ministry work was good work and the Reformers came in and said, "No, no, no, no. If our work is of God, it is good, in fact, it is equally good as ministry work."

I want to give you a couple of quotes to underline that. Martin Luther wrote this, he said that the work of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but all works are measured before God by faith alone.

William Perkins, the English Puritan, said the action of a shepherd in keeping sheep performed as I have said is as good a work before God as the action of a judge in giving sentence or a magistrate in ruling or a minister in preaching.

Isn't that encouraging? Isn't that a wonder way in which to view our daily callings? Doesn't that exalt the dignity of everyone's work? You think of Jesus, he was a carpenter for longer than he was a minister, you could say, 30 years before he started in the ministry. Was his work as a carpenter any less holy than his work as a preacher and a healer? No, it wasn't. They were equally holy, equally part of his service, all of it his good work rendered to God as his obedience.

So your work, your work and your place, is of God. Of him are all things but notice said secondly: and through him are all things. So we can see your work is through God and, really, that means done in dependence upon him. Let me try and unpack that a bit. How do we go about our daily work? We come to church and we pray, don't we, "God bless us here. Bless us this time. Bless this place. Bless this people." Why any less in our own homes? In our factories? In our building sites? In our offices? Wherever God has called us to be? Do we need God's blessing less there? Do the people there need God's blessing less? Does our work need less blessing? Our active work than our sitting here passively receiving? Of course not.

We look to him. We go about our daily life and we seek to praise him in our work and through our work. We confess our failings in our work to him. We thank him for our work. We thank him for helping our work. We supplicate. We ask his help with many of the challenges and difficulties and thorns and thistles that we come up against. If Adam and Eve did their work through God, how much more should we who are now facing a world upon which there is a divine curse as well? How can we go about our work with any less prayer? With any less dependence? With any less sense of need? We can't. We shouldn't. And you add on top of that, I'm sure most of you if not all of you have found out who are adults the perplexing ethical dilemmas and moral challenges that we are facing more than ever before. We need the Lord's help. We need the Lord's blessing as much in the field, in the factory, in the office, at the sink, as we do here in his church.

And this is a wonderful thing too because if we can do our work through God, by God, with God's help, in communion with God, prayerfully, our hope of sanctification multiplies and magnifies. If your only hope of sanctification is the hour or two you're here every week, not much good is going to be done, is it? If our sanctification is dependent on the minutes we find in the morning and the evening to have worship ourselves and with our families, well, that's still such a tiny proportion, isn't it? But if our work in which we are engaged for hours, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, I don't know how many hours every week, if that can become a means of communing with God, drawing near to God, finding help from God, praying to God, fellowshiping with God, how much more is our sanctification accelerated?

It's interesting, you know, some people think of a minister, "Well, you know, that must be just such a holy job. You know, he's just praying all the time and worshiping God. I mean, that just must be, that minister must be so holy." Do you know this? He can do all of that and not have one prayer to God. I could have come here this morning, preached this sermon, prepared this sermon, preached this sermon, without one ounce of leaning

and depending upon God; without one prayer for his help. It can be done. It can be. It's frighteningly so and it is so in many, many cases too. Ministry can be done without God, at least for a time. It might stun us, shock us perhaps how much ministry is done without God and equally surprise how much non-ministry is done depending on God, looking to God, seeking God's blessing. Somebody who is doing their daily work whether it's filing papers, washing clothes, greasing engines, writing reports, laying bricks, fixing machines, changing diapers, the person that is doing that daily work through God is glorifying God a million times more than any minister who is doing holy things without God.

Who is glorifying most? Take this as a contrast: here you've got an entry-level office assistant, let's just say, and their tasks are just so mundane and boring, it's filing, it's shredding, it's running errands and over here you've got a manager. They are both Christians, okay? Here you've got top-level management but this manager is spending half his day or a lot of his day trying to evangelize his staff, trying to witness. Who is glorifying God most? The office assistant. The office assistant because this man's task is primarily to build a team, to produce productivity, to produce goods at the lowest price and the fastest service, to please customers. That's his primary calling, not evangelism. And if witnessing and evangelism is pushing out daily responsibilities, God is not pleased with that. He is to do his work, his daily work, his daily vocation, depending on the Lord, looking to the Lord, praying for the Lord's blessing, seeking to glorify God, and that can all be done by doing a good job in the calling that God has given us. It doesn't mean we don't take opportunities as they arise but the focus has got to be the job that God has given us.

Your work is through God. There's a connection and we don't have much time for this, but I think it helps also to see this as a two-way transaction. We're not just working through God, so we're here on this earth, we work through him, we go through him, we seek his help, we want him to go before us, we want him with us, we go through God but God also goes through us. God works in this world through those who work through him. God cares for this world and does his work in this world, his will is done in this world by those who do his will in their work. I think that's a beautiful connection that's made in that Lord's Day. The Reformers used to speak of that we are God's fingers. That we are God's fingers. Think of that. Wherever God has placed you in life, whatever your calling that you are God's fingers working in this little corner of the world. It might be a basement, it might be a filthy building site, it might be in the midst of dirty washing and diapers and dishes and you are to be God's fingers.

He works through you in that particular place. In other words, he doesn't take pleasure just in church and just on Sundays, he takes pleasure in everyday work. Do you remember that Proverb? Unjust scales are an abomination to the Lord. Unjust scales are an abomination to the Lord but a just weight is his delight. It's incredible, isn't it? A just scale is his delight. How can basic honesty, truth-telling, fair dealing, God doesn't see that, does he? He does and takes delight in it. He's not neutral. He's not, "Well, whatever." It's pleasure. It's smile. It's delight.

He works through you. He cares about the office. He cares about the factory. He cares about the home. He cares about the yard. He cares about every domain where he has placed his people to work. Does that not change the way you view yourself and those you work with? Whether Christian or not, God is working through people. God is caring for his world. God is advancing his will in the world through the work he gives to everyone.

You remember the film "Chariots of Fire," Eric Liddell the athlete, and his sister was trying to persuade him to give up his athletic career in order to become a missionary in the Far East. And Liddell wanted to be that missionary and one day would at the cost of his life, but at that time in his life, no, he didn't see it. He didn't believe it was God's calling on him and this is what he said to his sister when she was pressurizing him, "I believe God made me for a purpose but he also made me fast and when I run, I feel his pleasure." Can you make that sentence about your own life and work? He felt God working in him, God working through him.

So your work is of God, your work is to be through God, then, thirdly: your work is to God. Of him, through him and to him are all things. To him are all things. We can't spend much time here unfortunately, but let me refer you to Colossians 3:23-24, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." What is this telling us? It's saying whatever you do, whatever, choose your job, choose your calling, whatever stage in life, whatever you do, he says, do it heartily as to the Lord. And just to put it very bluntly, this is basically saying: work as if God was your boss; as if God was your manager; as if God was your employer. You can change tires in a different way when you do that. You can clean the dishes. It's basically saying I'm imagining this is the Lord's car and he's about to drive it. Or I'm washing these dishes and I'm preparing this meal as if the Lord himself was coming to my house to eat this meal. I'm writing this report as if I'm about to submit it to the Lord. I'm fixing this computer, writing this program, as if the Lord himself was going to sit down and use it.

Everything to him as unto the Lord. Somebody put it like this: we don't work primarily for money, that's a job, for promotions, that's a career, or for a way to fill the time, that's an occupation, but for the Lord, that's a vocation. For the Lord. To the Lord. We wash dishes, we change diapers, we prepare sermons as if for the Lord himself and that means our work becomes, whatever our work is, a religious act. Your work can be as religious an act, as holy an act, an act as much a good work as any sermon of any minister, any service of any missionary, to him. To him.

If you speak to a carpenter, do you know what the message of the Bible is to him? The best thing you can do is make the best chair you can do. Speak to a gardener, someone who mows the lawn, the best thing you can do, the thing God is calling you to do is mow these lawns better than anyone else because I'm asking the Lord to look at this, to see me in my work and take pleasure in it. To the Lord.

It reminds me of another quote of William Tyndale this time: if our desire is to please God, pouring water, washing dishes, cobbling shoes and preaching the word is all one.

Do you believe that? If our desire is to please God, pouring water, washing dishes, cobbling shoes, preaching the word is all one. And Luther, usually very earthy, he wrote this: God and the angels smile when a man changes a diaper. And it wasn't because a man's doing what he doesn't usually do, it's a man doing the most, let's just say it, disgusting act. Luther says God and the angels smile. It's remarkable, isn't it?

Does that not change the way you view your work? Isn't this a beautiful lens? Of him, through him, to him are all things. And it all comes to this great climax, our fourth point here: your work is for the glory of God. It kind of flows very naturally from this. It's of him, it's through him, it's to him, to him be the glory. It's saying your work is a theater for God's glory. You walk through that door everyday, what's the first thing you see? "Oh no, not here again." No, it's, "This is the theater of God's glory. This is the place I have been called to serve the Lord to his honor and to his praise." And that means we try to see God in our everyday life, we try to see his wisdom in the machinery that we're working with, in the computers that we work with. We try and see his power and the energy that's required for our work and the energy that he gives to us. We try and see his wisdom. We try and see his power. We try and see his mercy. We try and see his love in things, in people, in relationships in success, in failure. We seek to praise him and glorify him.

We want to see God and we want God to be seen. Isn't that one of the greatest ways we can glorify God? Not just in us seeing him in everything but others seeing God in everything we do. The best Christian witness that you can witness is to do your work with diligence and with excellence, to seek to excel for God's glory. This transforms every aspect of work, doesn't it?

It's interesting, there was a book written a few years ago by Shawn Achor, he went on to become a New York Times bestseller, it was called "The Happiness Advantage," and he's a psychologist at Harvard and he said that he had been hearing all this all his life, "If I could only succeed, I will be happy." So that's what drives so many, isn't it? "If only I could get this job or get this salary or achieve this success, then I will be happy." How many have ever got there? Well, this psychologist did a number of experiments, did a ton of research, and he found that it was exactly the opposite way around; that the happiest people are the most successful people. In other words, those who have a deep inner joy tend to excel, tend to succeed in ways that others don't. Now, if that's true in a secular sense without God in the picture, how much more should it be with God, with Romans 11:36 at the center of our lives?

If this doesn't change and transform the way that we view our work, what can? If this doesn't give you a joy and a happiness, this doesn't put a spring in your step on Monday morning, nothing will. But if it does, how much more energy, how much more drive, how much more enthusiasm will you approach your work with? And that's true, young people, for yourselves as well. Don't wait until you get your big job, do it whatever you're doing for minimum wage or even below. Do it in serving your parents under their authority. You're asked to do chores and daily tasks without pay. It doesn't matter. Whatever we're doing, if we're mowing the lawns: of him, through him, to him and for him are all things, to him be the glory. Or washing dishes: of him, through, to him are all things, to God be

the glory. If we're writing: of him, through him, to him, for him are all things, to him be the glory. Whatever we're doing, let this be the lens that we use, Romans 11:36. Your work is of God. Your work is through God. Your work is to God. Your work is for the glory of God. And to him be the glory now and forever. Amen.