

The Theology of Leisure
Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training
(July, 2006)

Introduction:

The Bible has much to say on the subject of work. Work is an essential element of the human existence and there is great value placed on a personal commitment to work. As the Christian discovers more of the kingdom of God in his work he discovers new ways to enjoy God through his work—he finds great joy and fulfillment through his work. A commitment to the biblical teaching on work, however, does not mean all work without any time for leisure and recreation. As the Bible sets the parameters for our work, it also provides direction for our leisure.

The purpose of this study is to examine the proper balance between work and leisure. Many struggle with a proper understanding of leisure which often leads to feelings of guilt. In this study we will study work and leisure from a biblical perspective and see that God commands that both be used for His glory.

I. The Theology of Work

A. What is work?

1. Work is God's appointed activity for men upon the earth
 - a. Work is a creation ordinance – it was ordained at creation to be continued as long as man dwells upon the earth. Work is a divine mandate.
 - b. Adam was placed in the garden to work – he was its keeper
Genesis 2:15 – “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.”
 - c. After the fall work was designated as a life-long activity. There is no indication in Scripture that there is a period in life in which work ends.
Genesis 3:19 – “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.”
2. Work involves the fulfillment of our Divine calling or vocation. Within God's divine mandate to work He enlightens our mind to understand which specific forms of work we should focus on. We can see this taught in **1 Corinthians 7:17-24**
NAS **1 Corinthians 7:17** – “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.”
 - a. Christian conversion does not necessarily change the vocation God had already assigned to them.
“Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.”
 - b. After salvation Christians seek to honor God in their calling.

- c. Matt Perman: “Unfortunately, our society today generally neglects God and so does not see work as a calling and stewardship from him. The result is that the diligence that was once inspired by the knowledge that work is a calling has vanished. Rather, the diligence has taken on a different form and goal. Instead of to please God, the goal is to build a successful career and make money.”
3. Work is the God-appointed means of providing for our needs
2 Thessalonians 3:10 – “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”
 4. Work is the God-appointed means by which we might acquire wealth. (Even inheritance should be the result of the work of our family)
 5. Work should have a focus of promoting the kingdom of God
For example, when we mow our lawn with excellence we are promoting the kingdom of God by reflecting the glory of God in it.
When we work at the office we are working as to the Lord and so the glory of God becomes our chief focus.
Ephesians 6:5-7 – “Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; ⁶ Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; ⁷ With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:”
- B. All work should be done to the glory of God
1. We must guard against the strict categorizing of our life. There should not be a strict separation between the secular and the sacred.
 - a. If a Sunday School lesson or a sermon is labored over with great care and excellence to the glory of God it is a holy activity.
If one’s daily work is accomplished with honesty, integrity, and excellence to the glory of God it is also a holy activity.
1 Corinthians 10:31 – “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”
 - b. It is wrong to assume that we are not serving God in our secular job unless we are witnessing. The work itself is a spiritual activity as we do it to the glory of God.
 2. We should not necessarily see a strict distinction between “work” and “job.” Work involves more than our job or the way we make our living. Work includes mowing the grass, making the bed, carrying out the garbage – all of which should be done to the glory of God
Our “job” is not necessarily something for which we receive pay. For example, a mother’s job demands much work, yet she doesn’t receive a paycheck for her service.
 3. This doesn’t mean that all work is of equal importance or should receive equal priority in our lives. Although we should mow our lawn with excellence it doesn’t receive as high a priority as the work that is the means of supporting or caring for our family.

- C. We should find fulfillment in our work
1. We promote the kingdom of God in our work. The kingdom of God is the manifestation of God's rule and dominion over all things, particularly in the lives of His covenant people. The Christian manifests this dominion in everything he does and finds great joy in it. Our work becomes another means through which we enjoy God.
This is why the hatred of work is so evil.
 2. God has appointed work as an important aspect of our human nature – we are born to work
Bruce Ray describes the importance of work to human welfare – "We live in a world where people think that the less work you can do, the better off you are. But God, who made the world, says that the meaning of our existence is inseparable from the work we do. To deny the importance of work is to deny ourselves and eventually to destroy ourselves" (Bruce A. Ray, Celebrating the Sabbath, [Phillipsburg, P&R Pub., 2000], 18).
 3. God has appointed that we find meaning in our work—we are to find enjoyment in work.
Ecclesiastes 2:24 – "*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.*"
- D. A failure to work is sinful
1. Because God works. This is our highest example.
 2. Because the Bible condemns idleness
Proverbs 20:4 – "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; *therefore* shall he beg in harvest, and *have* nothing."
 3. Because a failure to work is equated with a life lacking order.
2 Thessalonians 3:11 – "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies."
- E. Like every human activity, work can be sinful
1. There is a great danger of turning work into a god. Work is sinful when it consumes all of our time and energy causing us to forsake God and family. Our society has forsaken the law of God by using the Sabbath as another day of work.
 2. Work is sinful when we view it only as the means of acquiring money, social status and personal satisfaction rather than the pursuit of God and His kingdom.
Matthew 6:33 – "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

II. The Theology of Leisure

A. What is leisure?

1. Leisure is time devoted to activities outside the realm of business or work. In general, if we are not at work we are at leisure. To take time for leisure means we must take less time for work – and visa versa.
2. Although leisure is not necessary for our existence it is necessary for our wellbeing
3. We must not draw an absolute division between work and leisure. Although work is obligatory we can find pleasure in it and so work can be a form of relaxing—a semi-leisure. Likewise, we may use our leisure to help a friend move which makes it semi-work. Or, a student’s study is his work but he may also find leisure in his reading. True leisure, however, is to completely separate ourselves from our work.

B. Biblical principles behind leisure

1. God demonstrated the principle of leisure in His resting. Being created in His image we are to imitate Him in work and rest
Exodus 20:11 – “For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”
Genesis 2:2 – “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.”
2. The Sabbath established the principle as a perpetual ordinance.
Genesis 2:3 – “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”
Exodus 20:9-10 – “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
¹⁰ But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work . . .”
3. God did not make creation for only strict utilitarian use, but also a place of beauty to be enjoyed.
4. We often find examples of rest in the Bible. For example, we find Abraham resting in the heat of the day
Genesis 18:1-2 – “And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;”
5. Israel often held feasts to celebrate the goodness of God
Nehemiah 8:10 – “Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this* day *is* holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”
6. We find Christ enjoying times of leisure
 - a. We find Him attending a wedding celebration where wine was served for the enjoyment of the guests. He did not condemn the celebration as a carnal activity.
John 2:1-3 – “And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: ² And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. ³

And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.”

- b. Jesus frequently went aside for times of spiritual refreshment

Mark 1:35 – “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”

Mark 6:46 – “And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.”
7. After the Apostles returned from their missionary journey Jesus encouraged them to rest

Mark 6:31 – “And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”
- C. Leisure should have a high focus upon our physical as well as our spiritual wellbeing
 1. God has declared the Sabbath as a weekly time of rest – physical as well as spiritual benefit
 2. Leisure’s high intent is to experience God and His kingdom

Matthew 6:33 – “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
 3. Leisure should involve those activities that bring us to enjoy the presence of the kingdom of God. (as opposed to work *advancing* the kingdom of God.
 4. Leisure can be a means of families enjoying the company of one another as they pursue God’s kingdom together.
- D. As we can be sinful in our work, we can also be sinful in our leisure
 1. Leisure is not the same thing as idleness. It is not the absence of activity but the promotion of activities that have their own reward—i.e. mental, physical and spiritual refreshment. There is no biblical endorsement of retirement from work for the sake of living in leisure.
 2. When our leisure is a means of promoting our sinful lust for pleasure

The love of pleasure is consistent with the lost man

1 Timothy 5:5-6 – “Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. ⁶ But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”

James 5:5 – “Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.”
 3. When pleasures and activities become gods

2 Timothy 3:1-4 – “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. ² For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴ Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;”

4. When we confuse leisure with worldly pursuits.
Luke 12:19-20 – “And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. . .”
James 4:4 – “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”
 - a. The goal of leisure is not to enjoy the pleasures of the world. It is to enjoy God through His creation.
 - b. Much of our leisure time should be spent in activities that are for our spiritual wellbeing.
5. When our desire for leisure makes us forget that Christianity is a life of sacrifice. When our focus upon this world and its pleasures become a priority we forget the higher priority of service and sacrifice.

III. The Proper Balance

- A. The Christian’s whole life should be under God’s dominion
 1. He has died to self and everything else that isn’t conformed to Christ. The Christian has discovered true life.
Romans 6:11 – “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
 2. He seeks to know Christ more in all that he does
 - a. He learns to enjoy Christ in the excellence of his vocation.
 - ∴ Putting out a truly great product manifests the splendor of God who does all things with perfection. A Christian craftsman of old might spend a whole week laboring over a single pair of shoes so that the finished product might be as perfect as possible.
 - ∴ Working with honesty and integrity reflects the holiness of God.
 - b. The Christian also seeks to know Christ more in his leisure.
 - ∴ It might be in pausing to gaze upon the wonder of God’s creation.
 - ∴ It might be in pondering over works of art as they reflect the mark of our Creator reflected in human creativity.
 - ∴ The Christian glories in the goodness and mercy of God as he finds respite from his daily labors.
- B. The Christian life is a life of self-denial
 1. We have died to self and to this world
Colossians 3:1-3 – “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”
 2. Asceticism is not Biblical - God has given us all things to enjoy
1 Timothy 6:17 – “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;”
 3. The Christian can live in Christ and enjoy His rich blessings and His gracious goodness. This can be found in both work and leisure

- C. The true balance between work and leisure is found in Christ
1. The man who is seeking to honor Christ with his whole heart is not burdened by guilt over leisure. Leisure for him does not stem from a desire to escape work nor is it motivated by the sinful pursuit of pleasure. It is simply another means of pursuing Christ. Jesus did not condemn Mary for desiring a time of leisure to sit at His feet **(Luke 10:38-42)**
 2. This is true liberty.
 - a. The person who has a heart to give to the work of Christ doesn't question if he should tithe on his gross or net income. The person who gives cheerfully and liberally doesn't have to wrestle with his conscience in whether or not to buy a new car.
 - b. The person who spends his life working to the glory of God doesn't have to struggle with the pains of guilt when he takes off on occasion for leisure. **Titus 1:15** – “Unto the pure all things *are* pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving *is* nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.”
 - c. Time is the element in which we conduct all of life's activities. The person who is careful with the use of his time and who uses his time for the glory of God can find great enjoyment when he sets apart a portion of time for leisure.
 3. Few people find this liberty in leisure because of sin
 - a. A hatred of work brings guilt in leisure
 - b. A lust for pleasure brings guilt in leisure
 - c. When the focus of our life is not Christ our consciences will condemn us in many things. When Christ is our life we find true freedom and liberty.
- D. General guidelines
1. Our leisure must be a virtuous activity – we must always guard against sin. Entertainment is good as long as it is not sinful or ungodly.
 2. Our leisure must be personally profitable
 - a. All that we do should be motivated by a desire to grow nearer to Christ.
 - b. Our leisure must refresh us mentally, physically, and spiritually
 - c. Our leisure should provide ample opportunity for meditation, prayer, searching the Scriptures, fellowship, etc.
 - d. “Secular” leisure is also profitable as long as God is the center
 2. Our leisure must be profitable to others – our actions must never hinder the walk of our brother nor harm our witness to the lost
 4. Our leisure must be to the glory of God
 5. As in all things, our leisure must be in moderation, not in excess.