

Ten Facts about Men and their Work

By Clark Blanchard

- *Why don't I feel more fulfilled in my job?*
- *Should I expect my wife to help financially by working outside the home?*
- *What is a good retirement age?*

[For our purposes here, we will define “work” as productive activity for which another is willing to pay.]

Much confusion has arisen in our culture over the entire subject of work, especially as it relates to a man's work. The culture has taught us that a man's work is central to his life. From the earliest ages he must pursue education as a preparation for his life's work. He and his work or profession or trade become so intertwined as to often provide him with his primary identity. “I do dentistry,” soon becomes, “I am a dentist.” Further, our culture teaches us that our work is the primary fulfillment for our lives.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of men go to jobs that are far from fulfilling. Financial greed, pride, political maneuvering, dishonesty, revenge, fatigue, boredom, personality conflicts, stress, danger, and a host of other real world elements are where we live daily, year in and year out, for most if not all working men. The theory of our culture doesn't match the laboratory experience.

One of the key elements in being a man of God is to understand the nature of work and shoulder the responsibility. What does the Bible teach about men and their work?

1. Work (toil) is part of the male's penalty for his role in the fall of mankind.

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I have commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Til you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:17-19).

- (a) Adam had duties prior to the fall but they were of a pleasant caretaker nature, not toil.
- (b) Adam's penalty was to toil (work/labor) against a cursed earth for survival, yet he would ultimately not survive.
- (c) Work might be a gracious penalty as it usually forces service to mankind and it tends to keep fallen men busy, which minimizes mischief, the *idle hands* issue (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).
- (d) Satan and Eve (women) had different penalties from each other and from Adam (Genesis 3:14-16).

2. Modern work and its money are an extension of the curse on Adam.

- (a) The world's modern complex economy is merely an extension of the work to survive principle established in Genesis 3.
- (b) Society's economic engine is a pool of resources generated by its pool of work (toil).
- (c) Each man is called upon to contribute to this pool in order to partake of its resources.
- (d) Bartering the fruits of one's work for the fruits of another's work is how the economy works.
- (e) Money or its credit equivalent is a certificate for work performed and can be exchanged for the fruits of another's work. This is a more complex economy.

3. We are commanded to work and provide goods and services for ourselves and our families.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our

*example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: **if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.** For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:6-16, emphasis mine, and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).*

- (a) God requires men to provide for their families (1 Timothy 5:8). This is usually done by their work, although it can include other means such as inherited wealth or wealth earned by previous work.
- (b) Ultimately, however, it is God, not our work, who provides for our needs (Matthew 6:25-34).
- (c) God requires men to work even if it is not necessary to provide a living. We work because God says to. Therefore, retirement from work is unbiblical.

4. Stealing, fraud, cheating, giving and taking bribes are attempts to avoid work. They are strictly forbidden in both testaments.

You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:15-16).

Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need (Ephesians 4:28).

5. There is no lasting value on earth (“under the sun”) in the product of our work.

Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11; 1:14; 2:17-23; Genesis 3:17-19).

Whether an assembly line worker builds a car or a surgeon saves a life, neither work will have any earthly value 500 years from now. Both cars and people turn to dust.

6. We are not to seek wealth as an objective of our work but rather to be content with moderate financial objectives.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God (Proverbs 30:8b-9).

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:9-11; see also Proverbs 23:4; 28:20; Ecclesiastes 5:10-16; Matthew 6:19-25; 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14; 18:22-25; 1 Timothy 6:6-8; and Hebrews 13:5).

- (a) When Jesus died, there was no squabble over His estate (Matthew 27:35).
- (b) None of the apostles were rich nor did they have it as an objective (Luke 8:1-3; Acts 3:6).
- (c) We are to pursue responsibility and excellence in our work, not wealth (Ephesians 4:28).
- (d) The “Prosperity Gospel” commonly taught today is completely unbiblical (Matthew 6:25).

7. If wealth comes to us, we are not to rely on it. If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them (Psalm 62:10). See also Job 1:20-22; Luke 12:13-21; 18:22-25; and 1 Timothy 6:7).

- (a) Wealth comes from God and is something we are to be responsible for as a steward (Luke 12:48b).
- (b) God determines your wealth in this life. You determine your wealth in the next life (Luke 16:19-31; James 1:17).

8. God's concern is not the type of work we do but the manner in which we do it (Luke 3:12-14; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Colossians 3:17).

- (a) We are not to be anxious about our livelihood but rather seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:24-34).
- (b) We are to work as if for God Himself (Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 6:5-9).

9. We have financial responsibility for:

- (a) Our families (1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8).
- (b) Those with legitimate needs (Luke 3:10-11; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:9-16).

(c) Those who minister the Gospel, especially preaching and teaching (1 Corinthians 9:14).
See also 1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14.

10. We should try to enjoy our work and the product of our work. *Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward* (Ecclesiastes 5:18; 2:24-25). See also Deuteronomy 14:22-26.

Questions and Answers

Q: *Why don't I feel more fulfilled in my job?*

A: Work was not given as a "fulfillment." It was given to the male as a penalty for his part in the fall. God never promised fulfillment in the job. The culture made that promise.

Q: *Should I expect my wife to help financially by working outside the home?*

A: No. Work and the financial support of your family is the man's responsibility. If your wife sincerely wants to work, that may or may not be appropriate. Also, if you are unable to work, that, too, is another complex issue.

Q: *What is a good retirement age?*

A: God expects men to lead productive lives as long as they are physically able. Reverting to loafing or playing at some magical age is entirely unbiblical. We may change careers at some age or several times but not retire from productive work.