

Laboring for What?

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

Is Life Vain? Is Work Meaningless?

Ecclesiastes is the kind of book that we need to read once in a while in order to reevaluate, not only what we are doing, but why we are doing it. Chapter one opens up with a discussion of the vanity of life. The Hebrew word "vanity" refers to bubbles - not very long lasting. So, does our hard work in life ever amount to anything? (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3) The ongoing generations of people and the seemingly endless cycles of life (Ecclesiastes 1:4-7) lead to the conclusion that we cannot get satisfaction in life. All we do is work. Nothing is of permanent value. We cannot really create anything new and lasting. We work. We eat. We die. Then another group of people take over, after us, and continue to do the same thing (Ecclesiastes 1:8-11). This results in vexation of spirit. We feel like we are grasping at the wind. Are we any better than grazing cattle? Is there any purpose to working; to learning; to living?(Ecclesiastes 1:14-18)

If a depressed person started to read the book of Ecclesiastes and stopped at chapter one, they might just give up on life entirely. However, Solomon will lead us to a different conclusion if we are patient enough to let him finish his thoughts. We need to interpret life as a gift from God. A gift that we should enjoy and use as an opportunity to know God; to serve God; to reap eternal benefits (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:9-10; 12:13-14). It should seem clear that without God life is meaningless!

So, we should cheerfully find things to do and keep busy because God made us for that purpose (Exodus 20:9-11). God is a worker. He made us in His image - to be industrious, creative and productive (Genesis 1:26-28). The Scriptures are full of warnings against laziness (Proverbs 6:6-11; 24:30-34; 27:23-27; II Thessalonians 3:6-15). Life goes better with work. It profits us physically, mentally and financially. It is not the only purpose in our life, but it is an important part.

You may not love your job, but you must learn to love work.

What is the Most Important Work?

Now we must speak of another kind of work. Working with earthly things / earthly business brings earthly / temporary benefits. Working with heavenly / spiritual things brings about heavenly / eternal benefits. These benefits are enjoyed now and will last forever (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 16:24-26; John 6:26-29).

In John 6:26-29, Jesus made it very clear that there is a purpose for work which is more than just physical sustenance; and there is a purpose for living which is more than physically surviving and materially gaining (Luke 12:13-21). However, this is a different kind of work. It starts with believing God concerning His Son Jesus Christ (John 3:14-18; 5:17-24, 39-47; I John 5:10-13).

In the spiritual realm there is a work that is not profitable. Acceptance with God is never accomplished through the natural efforts of man to do good works or to perform religious ceremony (Romans 3:19-24; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7; Hebrews 9:14).

So, at the beginning of our relationship with God, God must give His grace. By His Spirit we are born again. We are able to see Christ as the acceptable sacrifice that God will allow as payment for the guilt of our sins (John 3:3; 6:37-40, 44-45, 63; Romans 3:21-26; 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:1-6). When we are forgiven we are also brought into a relationship, in which the Spirit of Christ indwells us and begins to change our thinking and our living. We now have a new labor of love - to please and to serve God through the work of the living Christ who is within us (II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:6-14; 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8).

Salvation is **not by works**, but it is **not without works** (James 2:14-18). Those who have believed by Grace, through the work of God's Spirit, are freely pardoned and admitted into the family of God. Now, as children of God they are to learn how to trust and obey their heavenly Father. They are to fulfill their purpose to become like Jesus Christ in this life, so that their lives are an example to others who know not God (Ephesians 5:1-8; Matthew 5:14-16; Galatians 5:13-26; Philippians 1:3-11; 2:12-16 [note vs. 12 "*work out*" not "*work for*"] John 15:1-8; Romans 8:29; Titus 2:11-14).

Is life vain? Are our labors for nothing? - Not, if we are born-again followers of Jesus Christ! All of life has meaning and purpose through Christ (Philippians 1:21; Romans 8:14-18, 28-39; Psalm 23:1-6). All that we do, through Christ and in Christ's name, will be remembered and rewarded (Hebrews 6:10; Revelation 14:13; Matthew 6:19-20; 10:39-42; 25:31-40; Galatians 6:7-10).

Your labor is not vain in the Lord! (I Corinthians 15:51-58)