

# **THE BIBLE AND OUR DAILY WORK**

A brief summary of  
Biblical teaching

Dr John Benton is Director of Pastoral Support  
with the Pastors' Academy  
at London Seminary

# CONTENTS

	Page number
1. Work and creation: why work is good	3
2. Work and the fall: why work is hard	5
3. Work for men and women	7
4. Work and the need for rest	9
5. Work and the Lord Jesus Christ	12
6. Work and ambition	14
7. Work and wealth	16

© 2018 John Benton

Cover image: iStock

## 1: Work and creation: why work is good

The book of Genesis is often derided by contemporary people, but it is God's book of beginnings. To understand anything, we need to know about its origins. Work is a crucial subject in today's world and the early chapters of Genesis speak about its origin, nature and value.

### **WORK AND CREATION – Genesis 1**

In the Bible's opening chapter, we are introduced to both God and man.

#### **GOD**

There are three pertinent points to note

- He is introduced as the Creator. In this he is the God who works, see Genesis 1.1; 1.7; 1.16; 1.21; 1.26; 1.31. In Genesis 2.2,3 God's activity during the week of creation is specifically referred to as work.
- God expresses himself through the things he makes. The apostle John tells us that God is light and in him is no darkness, 1 John 1.5. It is significant that God creates light, Genesis 1.3. Again Psalm 19.1 tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God. Ideas for what is made originate in God's mind and he brings them into existence. So it is that Paul tells us that something of God can be known from the creation, Romans 1.26, 27. In particular God expresses himself in the creation of mankind made in his image, Genesis 1.26, 27.

Genesis 1 goes on to emphasize that God gets satisfaction from what he has made through his work, Genesis 1.4; 1.10; 1.12; 1.18; 1.21; 1.25; 1.31. He says it is 'good'.

#### **MAN**

Human beings are closely related to God.

- All the other creatures were made 'according to their kinds', Genesis 1.21. But for human beings alone God himself is the pattern. The man and the woman are made 'in the image of God,' Genesis 1.26, 27.
- Since God is a worker, who expresses himself and derives satisfaction from his work, as his image we are made to do the same. We are made to be workers, using our God-given creative abilities and to find a measure of fulfilment in our achievements. Work is a good and necessary part of who we are. Thus, after the creation of man, the very next thing we read is of God setting mankind a task, Genesis 1.28.

Unlike much of contemporary culture, the Christian should not view work as a necessary evil. It did not enter the world with sin at the Fall. The Bible sees work

as essentially good. Human beings are created in such a way as to be blessed through working.

## **WORK IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN – Genesis 2**

The second chapter of the Bible gives more detail concerning how mankind was created and the work which Adam was given. We have recorded for us two specific tasks which God gave Adam: his work as a gardener in Eden and his naming of the animals, Genesis 2.15; 2.19, 20. Notice three things:

1. There was no division of Adam's life into 'sacred' and 'secular'. God is interested in Adam's work of horticulture just as much as in his prayer life, Genesis 2.8, 15. All of life is worship.
2. Man's rule and subduing of the earth, Genesis 1.28, is not to be tyrannical. He is to 'take care' of the garden, Genesis 2.15. In Hebrews, 'to work' or 'to till' in 2.15 is the same word as 'to serve'. He is not free to exploit the earth. He is to serve God and the garden. Adam is rewarded for his labour by being able to eat of any of the legitimate fruits of Eden, 1.29; 2.16.
3. Adam's tasks recorded in Genesis 2 include both physical work and mental work, Genesis 2.15; 2.19. He tills the soil and he uses his creative mind to name the creatures which God has put under his rule. But one form of activity is not seen as superior to the other. Unlike the tendencies of our society, which is very influenced by Greek ideas, the Bible recognises a great dignity in manual labour.

## **2: Work and the fall: why work is hard**

In the garden of Eden work was always a joy. Obviously, today, work and mankind's attitude to work is very different. Man's disobedience to God and the entry of sin into the world brought about a profound disruption in the world God had made, Genesis 3.1-11; Romans 5.12-21; Romans 8.19-21.

### **WORK AND THE FALL – Genesis 3**

God's judgement and the consequences of sin affected every area of human life, including work, Genesis 3.17-19. We briefly note seven points.

1. God's creation purpose that humanity should work to subdue the earth. Genesis 1.28 is unchanged by the Fall. God does not change his commands to suit our sin. Man is still to be a worker, Genesis 3.17.
2. As a result of man's rebellion, God cursed the ground, 3.17. The ground, the dust, is what Adam is made of, Genesis 2.7. By this, God shows wrath without directly cursing Adam. Adam was the head of creation and, as the head of creation falls because of sin, so all creation falls with him, Romans 8.20.
3. As a result of man's rebellion, our work becomes 'painful toil', Genesis 3.17. God does not directly curse Adam, but curses the ground from which Adam was made, Genesis 2.7, and on which he labours.
4. Also, Adam has now changed. He has become a sinner, with an innate antipathy to obeying God's commands including the command to work. Thus Adam and his descendents now tend to perceive work in a negative way, Proverbs 6.6; 2 Thessalonians 3.6.
5. As a result of sin, nature is set against man, Genesis 3.18. It is the weeds and the thistles which will grow effortlessly and need no cultivation. Thorns and thistles are eloquent signs of nature untamed and encroaching; in the OT they mark the scenes of man's self-defeat and God's judgement, Proverbs 24.30, 31; Isaiah 34.13.
6. As a result of man's sin, work becomes necessary in terms of a struggle for human survival, Genesis 3.19; Proverbs 10.4.
7. As a consequence of man's rebellion, although man was created by God to subdue the ground, Genesis 1.28, now it is ultimately that the ground will subdue man – he will die, Genesis 3.19. 'Dust you are and to dust you will return'.

After the Fall man's need to work remains, but the nature of it has changed. While work can still be a source of blessing, it has now become something of an onerous task which always has a tragic end, Ecclesiastes 2.17-23.

## TWO LESSONS

1. The difficulties we find in the workplace and the dislike we experience towards work is a revelation to us that we are sinners before a holy God. Though mankind may work as hard as it likes and produce all kinds of amazing technology, we can never build heaven on earth or get ourselves back into paradise through works. This points us to our need of God's grace in the gospel and of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Revelation 21.5.

2. The Fall has brought enormously destructive tensions within the sphere of work. In particular, historically, the heightened need for efficiency has often assigned the worker a task which reduces him / her to little more than an unthinking machine. Many people have 'jobs' but what they do has little fulfilment and is hardly what God intended work to be. 'The Christian has to argue that until it is accepted that the quality of the workers who leave the factory doors each evening is a more important thing than the quality of the products it delivers to its customers, the employment experience is likely to continue to violate the dignity and humanity of many workers.' Carl F. H. Henry

### **3: Work for men and women**

There are many pressures in contemporary Western society which work to confuse the distinctive roles of men and women. That would be acceptable if 'male' and 'female' were simply evolutionary accidents. But the Bible says that is not the case. God created the two genders, Matthew 19.4.

#### **MALE AND FEMALE IN THE CONTEXT OF WORK**

Again, the book of Genesis provides us with foundational principles.

##### **The essential similarity and equality of man and woman**

Man and woman possess an identical essence and equal humanity.

Genesis 1.27 The last phrase of this verse specifically underlines that man and woman are equally made in the image of God.

Genesis 2.19-23 The juxtaposition of Adam's categorizing the animals and the Lord bringing Adam and Eve together emphasises the qualitative difference between the animals on one hand and Adam and Eve on the other. Adam is not the same as the animals but he is the same as Eve.

Genesis 2.22 That Eve is made from Adam's rib is significant. The Hebrew word can also mean 'side'. Eve is the 'other side' or the 'other half' of Adam.

We therefore need to beware of any tendencies to imprison women in their femininity to the detriment of their participating in what is simply human.

##### **The different points of focus for the work of the man and the woman**

Equally his image, God gave man and woman different roles and responsibilities in Eden.

The man glorified God through his working the ground, Genesis 2.5, 15, whereas the woman glorified God through being a helper for the man, Genesis 2.18.

The man was made out of the ground (the focus of his work), Genesis 2.7, whereas the woman was made from man (the focus of her task), Genesis 2.20-23.

The man was made and brought to the garden, Genesis 2.8, 15, whereas the woman was made and brought to her man, Genesis 2.22.

These two different points of focus for work, namely the ground for the man and the family for the woman, are assumed in God's words to Adam and Eve after the Fall, Genesis 3.16, 17.

Notice that the word 'helper' does not imply any inferiority. In the OT the word is used 21 times, 15 of which refer to God being our helper.

Notice particularly that the male and female roles are not cultural in origin or

merely pragmatic but appointed by God.

The Biblical justification for interpreting the details of the Genesis account is seen from Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians 11.7-9; 1 Timothy 2.13-15; Titus 2.4 etc.

**These principles are to be interpreted not restrictively but nevertheless responsibly**

As we look through the OT we find that, although the bearing and raising of children was central in the lives of Israelite women, and a much longed for achievement, they did much more than just that.

It would seem natural to interpret Eve being Adam's helper as that part of what she did was to help him with his work in the garden, Genesis 2.18.

Sarah and other wives of the patriarchal period ran large households, which included managing domestic servants, Genesis 16.16.

As Israel settled in the promised land and life took on an agricultural tone, women became involved in field work, Ruth 2.2, 3.

The woman described in Proverbs 31 is held up as something of an OT ideal. She is a woman of prodigious ability, with interests and activities which, although centred on her home, go well beyond the confines of her house, Proverbs 31.14, 16, 17.

In a world which has done much to undermine traditional family life with devastating consequences for society, married Christians must think carefully about how moving away from the traditional roles of man as bread-winner, Matthew 6.9, 11, and woman as home-maker, Psalm 128.3, might affect our lives.



#### **4: Work and the need for rest**

Overwork destroys joy. It leaves no room for wholesome fun or stillness. When we never stop to relax or reflect, we tend to lose perspective. Overwork can lead to burn-out.

Genesis 1 and 2 tell of God spreading out his work of creation over 6 discrete days. But why did this take a period of time at all? He is God, he could have created it all in an instant had he chosen to do so.

It seems that God used this timescale specifically to teach us that we need rest. God himself does not require rest. His strength is inexhaustible. But he thus gives us, made in his image, Genesis 1.26, 27, a pattern of work and rest to copy. God made us to work. But he also indicates that rest is essential for us as finite creatures.

#### **THE FUNDAMENTAL PATTERNS OF WORK AND REST**

In Genesis we find that as God makes the world, two basic rhythms of work and rest are established.

1. In Genesis 1 we find a daily cycle of work and rest with evening and morning, Genesis 1.5; 1.8; 1.13; 1.19; 1.23; 1.31 (cf. John 9.4). God appears to work during the day but cease in the evening until the next morning.
2. In Genesis 2 we find a weekly cycle of work and rest established. The pattern is of six days work followed by a day of rest, Genesis 2.1-3.

In Genesis 2.1-3, Moses draws attention to the special nature of the 7<sup>th</sup> day in several ways. *First*, although 2.1-3 belongs with Genesis 1, there is nevertheless a break from the 'And God said...' pattern introducing the previous 6 days. *Second*, the day is emphasized in a way the other days are not. Each is mentioned only once, 1.5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31. The phrase 'the seventh day' is repeated three times in 2.2-3. What is more, the Hebrew phrase occurs in three separate sentences each composed of 7 words. *Third*, though the word 'Sabbath' is not here, yet the word for 'rest' used in this verses is virtually the same word (*Shabbath* compared with *Shabath*). *Fourthly*, God is said to 'bless' the seventh day. Implied is the thought that those who so rest from labour one day in 7 will be blessed. *Fifthly*, we are told God 'made it holy', a day set apart for God. *Sixthly*, the 'evening and morning' formula is abandoned for the 7<sup>th</sup> day (hinting at God's salvation provision of an eternal Sabbath in Christ?).

There are those who try to deny that the day of rest is a creation ordinance, arguing that it was first revealed at Sinai, that it was for the Israelites only and was part of the ceremonial law which is now gone in Christ. But as we see from

the wording, to deny a reference to the Sabbath in Genesis 2.2, 3 would be to be pedantic in the extreme. Furthermore, Moses specifically explains in the 10 commandments that the Sabbath does go back to creation, Exodus 20.11. So to try to restrict the one in 7 day of rest to it being solely the covenant sign of the Mosaic covenant with Israel won't wash.

The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment is part of the moral law. It is wrong to try to make people work 7 days a week.

## **REST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The great emphasis of the NT is on the spiritual rest of salvation to be found in the Lord Jesus as we cease from relying on our works to put us right with God and trust in Christ alone, Matthew 11.28-29. Believing in Christ opens for us the prospect of heavenly rest, the eternal Sabbath which still remains for the people of God, Hebrews 4.9, 10; Revelation 14.12, 13. In this sense it is true that Christ brings to fulfilment the rest pictured in the Sabbath.

But to say that because we already enjoy something of this spiritual rest we no longer require the physical rest of one day off in seven would be as ridiculous as saying that, because Christ and the church fulfil the true meaning of marriage, we no longer require marriage between men and women.

It is the product of over-excited theologians who have lost touch with everyday reality.

- The Lord Jesus, while rejecting the man-made rules of the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath, confirmed that the pattern of one day of rest in 7 as a good gift of God for mankind and declared its place within the sphere of his Messianic Lordship, Mark 2.27, 28. Brian Edwards comments on these verses: 'If Jesus had been intending to take out the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment from its place in the Decalogue this was a remarkably strange way of achieving it, since he did nothing more than reaffirm his Father's plan for the Sabbath day'.
- As Lord of the Sabbath, he encouraged the first Christians to meet together on the first day of the week rather than the last through his resurrection appearances and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost which was a Sunday, John 20.1, 19; Acts 2.1. (This change of calendar with a new phase of redemption history should not surprise us, Exodus 12.2).
- No other day, except the first day of the week, is singled out for special mention in the NT showing it had special significance for Christians, Matthew 28.1; Mark 16.2; Luke 24.1; John 20.1; Acts 20.7. Paul's words of apparent 'indifference' towards 'special days', Romans 14.5,6, and 'a Sabbath day', Colossians 2.17, refer to the obsolescence of the OT Jewish calendar and should not be generalised. Paul himself saw 'every first day of the

week' was special, 1 Corinthians 16.2. And the apostle John certainly thought Sunday was special, calling it 'the Lord's day', Revelation 1.10. Surely the day we call 'the Lord's Day' is just as special as the supper we call 'the Lord's Supper', 1 Corinthians 11.20.

So without becoming legalistic, we should prize Sundays as a day of ceasing from our daily work and finding rest and renewal.

## **PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING REST**

Going back to Genesis 2, we note that God's rest was not one of total inactivity. He ceased the work which he had been engaged in, but his rest included both delighting in his achievements in creation and the work of continuing to uphold the world he had made, John 5.17.

### **Using our leisure wisely**

Rest should rarely consist in 'doing nothing'. Doing nothing will not satisfy us. It is a contradiction of our essential nature and 'doing nothing' often leads to sin, 2 Samuel 11.1-3. God has given us 'all things richly to enjoy', 1 Timothy 6.17. We are to enjoy life to the full but turn that enjoyment into praise of our Creator.

### **Planning for rest**

God's rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day was not an ad hoc decision. God always works by plan. He planned that this would be a day of rest.

We need to work out our priorities, and plan for rest (not just on Sundays) otherwise rest will be crowded out, Luke 10.41, 42.

We need to share responsibilities within the family and within the fellowship so that the load is fairly spread, Romans 12.3-8.

We need to think carefully about how we can best use Sundays. Some we will want to use for showing hospitality, but if we do that every Sunday we might end up overdoing it.

### **The spiritual nature of true rest**

Satan can fool us into shutting God out of our times of rest. But God made the Sabbath a holy day, Genesis 2.3. This indicates to us that truly satisfying rest is only found through intimacy with God.

It is the Lord who is our shepherd who restores our souls, Psalm 23.3.

It is those who wait upon the Lord who renew their strength, Isaiah 40.28-31.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is able to give true rest, Matthew 11.28-30.

## **5: Work and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Here we consider the broad sweep of the New Testament teaching concerning our daily work. We do so under two headings and find that the teaching focuses around the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **THE DIGNITY, SANCTITY AND NECESSITY OF LEGITIMATE WORK**

For work to be legitimate, it must fulfil two criteria. A). The job itself must not entail violating God's law, e.g. that of a thief, Ephesians 4.28. B). The context of the job must not violate God's law, e.g., a locksmith (legitimate) who makes keys for thieves (illegitimate) etc.

The Lord Jesus was the 'son' of a carpenter, Matthew 13.55, and up until the age of about 30 years old worked at that trade himself, Mark 6.3. This teaches us three important lessons.

- Legitimate labour, of whatever form, is never to be despised  
Jesus not only worked as a carpenter / builder in Nazareth, he was prepared to do the work of a slave, washing the disciples' feet, John 13.1-17. If God incarnate engaged in the lowest menial tasks, he has stamped heavenly dignity upon such work.

- It is possible to maintain the closest communion with God in the toil of everyday work

Jesus did ordinary daily work with its humdrum routines and difficult customers. He faced all the same difficulties and temptations that we do, Hebrews 4.15. And yet within the carpenter's shop he grew in favour with God and man, Luke 2.52. His spiritual growth as a human being did not take place during years of solitude and desert contemplation. It took place in the midst of daily work. It is a mistake to use the demands of our work as an excuse for failure to grow spiritually.

- By his life we see that work is the normal God-ordained means of meeting our needs

If anyone had the right to be exempt from work, if the world ever owed anyone a living, it was Jesus the world's creator, Colossians 1.16. But he wanted to set us an example, so he worked. He who multiplied the loaves and fishes for the crowds never seems to have done that to provide for himself or his family. He went to work.

Thus, we find the apostle Paul is stern with those who refuse to work, 2 Thessalonians 3.6-10.

## **THE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION WHICH ARE TO GOVERN OUR WORK**

There are a number of New Testament passages which address the subject of daily work, Colossians 3.22-4.1; 1 Thessalonians 4.11, 12; 1 Peter 2.18-25 etc. We will sketch the main considerations which should govern the Christian's attitude to work from Ephesians 6.5-9.

- **The Yoke of Christ**

In v5 Paul speaks of 'earthly masters' and so implies that we have a heavenly master for all our daily work. He makes this explicit in v9. When you became a Christian, you voluntarily took upon yourself Christ's 'yoke' taking him as your master, Matthew 11.28-30. He is your master at work. This means there is no sacred/secular divide. Secular work is full-time service for Christ.

- **The Love of Christ**

Your heavenly master is Christ who has died for you and who loves you, Ephesians 5.25. If he has given himself like that for us then we feel motivated to do our best even with the worst jobs once we see them as done for Jesus. Unlike the world, the Christian has reason to be enthusiastic about even the lowest jobs. Our motive is not first of all money, it is serving Christ, v5-7.

- **The Eye of Christ**

Because of our sinful nature, there is a temptation to do only the minimum amount of work required. But the Christian can be saved from this as he/she realises that we live forever in Christ's presence, v6.

- **The Throne of Christ**

We are working for Christ in that all legitimate work which the Christian does is pleasing to Christ and will be rewarded by him at judgement day, v8. This is true whatever our status. Especially we will be rewarded for the times when we have suffered unjustly because we are conscious of God and his ways, 1 Peter 2.18-20.

We conclude there can be no right relationship to work without a right relationship to Jesus and there is no right relationship to Jesus if it does not issue in a right attitude to work.

## **6: Work and ambition**

Is it wrong to seek promotion and advancement at work? Is it right to have ambitions? Christian people can be faced with decisions in their business or professional careers where such questions are pertinent.

### **1. WHEN HAS AMBITION NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH?**

In 1 Thessalonians 4.11, 12, the apostle Paul sets out some basic ambitions connected with our work which should characterise all Christians. Not to desire these goals is to be astray. We are to eagerly seek to achieve at least three things:

#### **To work**

The context of that work is to be a quiet life – but the great ambition, if we are physically and mentally able, must be to work, v11.

Note again that there is no disparagement of manual labour in the NT. Paul commends working ‘with our hands’.

Leisure is not intrinsically better than work. It should not be our ambition to be on perpetual holiday. This is what the world so often aims for. Laziness is condemned throughout the Bible, Proverbs 12.24; Titus 1.12.

The Christian is to desire to be useful, productive and to make a contribution to the common good. This is the so-called ‘Protestant work ethic’. God made us to work and we can find a degree of fulfilment and satisfaction in our work. As Christians, our work becomes an act of worship, Colossians 3.23.

#### **Through our industry to win the respect of unconverted people**

The background to Paul’s remarks in v12 is in v9, 10. Some of the Thessalonian Christians were so zealous in their love for brothers and sisters in Christ that some people were taking advantage of that and had given up work and were living on hand-outs from the church, cf. Titus 3.14. Such behaviour brought the name of the Lord Jesus into disrepute.

We need to add that ‘success’ at work is not the only way to win respect. It may be that ordinary people will be directed to Christ by the way our faith enables us to cope with crises or drudgery or other difficulties, Philippians 4.12, 13.

#### **Through our work to be dependent on nobody**

In v12 Paul commands the Thessalonians to aim at earning their own keep. The New Testament is keen to help those in real need but it will not allow an able-bodied Christian to become content to live from other people’s charity.

Our first ambition should be to support ourselves. This takes priority over whether or not we like the job, 2 Thessalonians 3.11-14.

## **2. WHEN HAS AMBITION GONE TOO FAR?**

God has given us all some set of abilities. If those abilities cannot find an outlet, we become frustrated. It is therefore good to have ambition to use our potentials to the full, Ecclesiastes 9.10. But this must be in the context of seeking a contented godly life, 1 Thessalonians 4.11; 1 Timothy 6.6. With this in mind, here are seven indications of when our ambitions have gone too far.

- When our ambitions are greater than our abilities

Scripture commands us to have a proper estimate of ourselves, Romans 12.3.

- When we are prepared to compromise Christian principles to get promotion

The 'end justifying the means' is never God's way, Psalm 23.3.

- When promotion is pursued for self-exaltation

Ambition is not condemned but selfish ambition is always condemned, Philippians 2.3.

- When ambitions are pursued out of the love of money

Jesus told us that we cannot serve both God and money, Matthew 6.24; Hebrews 13.5.

- When ambitions are pursued out of envy and discontent

The spirit of the world is that 'the grass is always greener', James 3.14-16.

- When ambition is pursued at the expense of our responsibilities to others

We are to put the needs of others before our own, Philippians 2.4; Ephesians 5.25.

- When ambition is pursued to the neglect of the needs of God's kingdom

Local churches are a priority. We are to seek God's glory Matthew 6.33; 1 Corinthians 10.31.

'Right ambition consists not so much in wishing to be promoted, but in wishing to deserve promotion'. Matthew Henry

## **7: Work and wealth**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the German social historian Max Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He was trying to explain why, at that time, in many societies those with the top jobs were predominantly from a Protestant background.

Whether you can connect the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century easily with the rise of capitalism, mainly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a matter of conjecture. But it is certainly true that as Reformation leaders like Luther and Calvin taught the Scriptures, a new spirit of industriousness and an enthusiasm for daily work was generated. The question raised by Weber's thesis is not so much to do with work as what we do with the fruits of our labours. Jesus had much to say about money and the use of wealth, e.g. Matthew 6.24; Luke 12.13-21.

### **The Creator's Property**

Scripture teaches that the one who creates is the one who owns. Work establishes property.

Thus God is called the 'Possessor' of heaven and earth, Genesis 14.19, 22.

See also for example Psalm 24.1; Psalm 50.9-12.

Many of Jesus' parables concerning the Second Coming speak in terms of an owner of property returning and those to whom he entrusted it having to give an account, e.g. Mark 13.32-36.

Already we therefore see that a Christian's attitude to property ought to be different from that of others. We are merely stewards of things which actually belong to God.

### **The legitimacy of personal property**

In the context of everything ultimately belonging to God, the Bible goes on to teach the legitimacy of personal property. Under God, some things legitimately belong to us.

God is the worker who made the world and therefore owns it. We are made in God's image, Genesis 1.26, 27, and therefore man too has a certain right to the things he has made.

The Decalogue, with its commandments not to steal and not to covet what belongs to others, makes the legitimacy of personal property explicit, Exodus 20.15, 17; Deuteronomy 5.19, 21.



The New Testament makes the same point, Ephesians 4.28.

But the Bible also emphasises that personal property is only legitimate if it has been obtained in a legitimate way i.e., justly. Paying people low wages because they are too weak to stand up to a master will bring God's wrath, James 5.1-6.

### **The dangers of personal property**

Within a limited sphere, wealth brings both freedom and security. Thus material wealth often goes hand in hand with forgetting God, Deuteronomy 8.10-18. This is what has happened in the prosperous Western world.

Thinking ourselves as having no need of God, fallen human nature sees itself as free to indulge its sinful desires. Thus the love of money becomes a root of all kinds of evil, 1 Timothy 6.10.

When we replace God by the love of wealth and material things, not only do we worship the creature rather than the Creator, Romans 1.25, but we plunge ourselves into destruction, 1 Timothy 6.9.

### **The responsibilities of personal property**

The gift of personal wealth carries with it at least two responsibilities.

*First*, as we enjoy the material things that God has given us to enjoy, we have a responsibility to thank him and love him for his kindness to us, 1 Timothy 4.4, 5.

*Second*, as God has prospered us, we have a responsibility to use our wealth to help others. The apostle Paul tells us to use our money to be rich in good works, 1 Timothy 6.18. The apostle John tells us that practical love towards others through giving is a mark of true conversion, 1 John 3.14-18.





