

# Principles of Wealth

## Part 4 - Christian Workmanship

*September 13, 1998*

**Ephesians 4:17-32 NKJV**

- **Review & Introduction**

We are continuing in our series on wealth and have primarily considered those passages in the book of Proverbs that pertain to wealth; the gaining of wealth and the loss of wealth. As you will recall, there are four fundamental principles which will continue to undergird our study of wealth. They are:

- There is wealth under the blessing of God
- There is wealth under the curses of God
- There is poverty under the blessing of God
- There is poverty under the curses of God

Today we are going to look at the general topic of Christian work and specifically at both the *manner* and *content* of that work which God has called us to do. This series has fostered much good conversation and thought. Typically with a series like this and especially today's topic, there are some who will hear God's Word and rapidly apply it to their neighbor. Others who are already faithfully obeying the Word in this area will become introspective and seek to be overly harsh on themselves to the point of breaking under the weight of the command and joy will depart. Others will not hear anything said because they believe that these things don't apply to them. Finally, others will examine the Scriptures and will come to understand their own heart in light of the them rather than seeking to understand the Scriptures in light of their heart.

It is a genuine travesty that much of what was theologically gained during the Reformation has been squandered today. As we considered in our prior series on the "Solus of the Reformation" one great contribution of the Reformers was the protestant work ethic. Unfortunately, no one equates that ethic with genuine Christianity today. However, before we seek to instruct the world in these principles we must have them faithfully applied in our own lives so that we can disciple the world without hypocrisy.

- **Work Is Not a Curse**

***15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. Genesis 2:15***

We can see that prior to the fall of Adam, God had given Adam a task and Eve as his helpmate. God created Adam to be a producer and his wife to support him in that labor. Although the work became more difficult after the fall, it was God's mandate that Adam tend the garden and the work would have been a joy. Knowing that His commands are not burdensome, we should never grumble about the necessity of work, nor should we complain about the work He has given us to do.

- **Idle Hands & Sweaty Brows**

***4 He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.<sup>5</sup> He who gathers in summer is a wise son; He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame. Proverbs 10:4-5***

The Scriptures have much to say about laziness. A lazy man desires wealth (Prov. 13:4) but he is never filled. God's way to wealth is generally through long consistent hard work. Those who chase after riches without working will not find lasting wealth. Notice also however, that God does not always reward the same. Don't be fooled by the health and wealth gospel that somehow Christianity is a means to wealth. In God's customary providence, He rewards diligent honest work and laziness is rebuked. Remember, God is not a slot machine. It is good to work hard and be tired. In His kind mercy, He provides fruit from our labors and rest for our back.

- **Work Clothed in Honesty**

***11 Honest weights and scales are the Lord's; All the weights in the bag are His work. Proverbs 16:11***

Our Lord declares that He owns honest work. God identifies Himself with work done with honesty. If we deliver a product or a service with honesty and integrity, the Lord says that the work is His. If it is the Lord's work, then it is good and glorious to Him and to us. Whether work is done in a dark cloud of lying and deceit or a thin haze of truth-stretching and white lies, it does not belong to the Lord and is therefore cursed. It doesn't matter whether we say with our mouths that God owns our businesses or that we put a fish on our advertisements, if the work is not done with honesty, from top to bottom, He refuses to associate with it.

**17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel. Proverbs 20:17; Proverbs 9:16-18**

Although this kind of cursed work is very alluring, in the end is destruction and sorrow. For some reason, we tend to diminish or deny the sweetness of sin at the beginning and we deny or diminish the horror of sin at the end. There is something sweet about getting the upper hand in a business deal and taking advantage of the situation, but this type of gain is destruction in the end. Representing our services or products in a shady or deceptive way seems advantageous but God assures us that we will have gravel in our mouths. The key to avoiding this kind of sin is to taste the gravel *early*.

**11 Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, But he who gathers by labor will increase. Proverbs 13:11**

Notice here that wealth gained dishonestly never leaves the sight of the Lord. Time doesn't cover over the sin. Nor does becoming a Christian mean that you don't have to make restitution for prior crimes or sins. Just because you became a Christian on the way home from robbing the bank doesn't mean that God's timing was unexpectedly fortuitous. There is a promise here that dishonest wealth will be destroyed. Don't enter into a contract thinking that later, when your customer is dependent upon you completing the work, you will exert this force upon him for more money.

Be careful about how rigorously you bargain over the price of something. It is good to consider the price offered and compare that to the value of the item. There are times where negotiating over the price of something is proper and other times where it is not. We must not be such ogres as to expect or demand that we negotiate all profit out of a transaction. (Proverbs 20:14) As in most cases, you get what you pay for—if you want quality, dependability and skill be prepared to reward others for this kind of work. Likewise, if you are providing the service or product and it is not of this caliber don't expect to be paid as though it were. A half truth presented as a whole truth is a non truth (entirely a lie).

**10 Diverse weights and diverse measures, They are both alike, an abomination to the Lord. Proverbs 20:10; Proverbs 20:23**

The context of this verse is someone who uses mismarked weights for measuring things. When a butcher says that he is selling three pounds of meat, does he have his thumb on the scale? Does the three pound weight really weigh two and a half pounds? Notice how strong this language is—this kind of behavior is an abomination to our Lord. Notice that homosexuality (Lev. 18:22), witchcraft (Deut. 18:12) and idol worship (Deut. 7:25) are also abominations. God hates it when we cheat our customers or we are not precise in our dealings.

- **Applied Skill**

**29 Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men. Proverbs 22:29**

It is not enough for Christians to say that they are working hard. As we have already considered earlier in this series, work must also be done with wisdom. Wisdom would also dictate that we undertake to perform that work for which God has given us skill. God has made us very differently and yet at the same time He has made us very much the same. The disparity that exists between us that God has placed between us should not be held in contempt. The notion that anyone can be the President or that anyone can be a concert violinist is an egalitarian heresy. Whatever skills and gifts God has given to you, use to the glory of God for the provision of your family and the blessing of a good name.

Our work as Christians should be exceptional. What a joy it would be to hear someone say "of course his work is good and fair, he's a Christian". Instead, we have no assurance that because someone is a Christian the work will be done on time, in budget and up to the agreed standard. This kind of reputation tells lies about the character of our Lord.

If you cannot perform the work with skill, honor and integrity—decline the work and refer them to someone who can. If you cannot perform the work on the customer's timetable—do not accept the work. If you cannot provide the service or work at the agreed price—don't accept the work expecting to overcharge them on future work.