

HE THAT WILL NOT WORK ...

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on January 26, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Several years ago I took my car to one of the new automatic car-washes. Within a few minutes I was standing at the end of the service line watching as the attendants rubbed their cloths over the surface of the car to dry it. Casually, I noticed that the man who was working on the near side of the car was doing an unusually conscientious job. He even went back and rubbed an area a second time to make it just right. Then, he turned to me, opened the door and suddenly we recognized each other. He was Harris Smith, owner of the establishment and an elder of the Vultee church. In an emergency, when one of his employees failed to show up, he had put himself in the service line and was doing this rather menial task for his customers.

In some countries of the world, for the owner of a going business to work as a common laborer would be unthinkable. There is a kind of caste system in which certain ones are expected to do manual labor while others would not think of doing such. I am glad that it is the American tradition that no one is too good to do manual labor. There are some whose training and background qualify them for more difficult and more specialized work, but there is no one considered above the humblest of tasks. The president of a bank dons overalls and cleans out his own basement. A highly skilled psychiatrist told me once that he enjoys taking an automobile engine apart and doing his own repairs. In the summer it is standard practice for men to do back-yard cooking. As the occasion demands everyone does whatever work needs to be done. This is as it should be, for wholesome work is honorable.

Dress and Keep

In the beginning of God's dealings with man on the earth he placed him in the Garden of Eden "to dress and to keep it." (Gen.2:15). God's plan called for man to work. After Adam's sin his work was more difficult. We read "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." (Gen. 3:17-19). From the very beginning work was a part of God's plan for mankind.

From one end of the Bible to the other it is obvious that God approves the ownership of property and the honorableness of work. In giving the Ten Commandments, God indicated clearly both of these principles. For example, the fourth commandment reads, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." (Ex. 20:8-10).

Ordinarily when we read this passage we have our minds on the day of worship that came each week. It is true that God intended for his children under the Law of Moses to reserve each sabbath day for worship, just as he expects those of the Christian era to let the first day of the week be a day of worship. However, it is also quite clear that the other six days are to be given over to honorable, meaningful work. This is clearly declared in the sentence, "Six days shalt thou labor ..." The eighth commandment requires, "Thou shalt not steal." And the tenth commandment teaches, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's." (Ex. 20:15, 17). Both of these passages show that mankind is not to take that which belongs to another, but is to provide for himself that which he needs.

All this is in the context of putting God first, our fellowmen second, and things last. The apostle John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15). In Luke 12:15 Jesus said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Things are not to rule our lives. God comes first, our fellowmen second, but there is a place for things. Honorable work has to do with these material possessions.

Something For Nothing

At this point I should like to sound a very strong warning. In America in our time there is a great danger in the popular trend toward expecting something for nothing. Thousands and even millions of people seem to be drifting in the direction to get something without working for it. This is a wrong attitude. It will be a curse to an individual and to the nation as a whole. Notice four areas of life in which this seems to be a growing, dangerous trend.

Helping the Poor: It is certainly right and proper that Christian people should help those who cannot help themselves. This is taught in the scriptures in no uncertain terms. Those who may need help may be orphans, or sick people, or elderly people, or those who have faced some special emergency. What we are about to say in no way should be understood as implying a failure to be concerned about those who have legitimate needs or a dodging of the Christian responsibility to meet those needs.

Having so said, however, we do point out that sometimes in our efforts to care for those in need we have encouraged idleness and a lack of responsibility. Sometimes our public welfare programs and our programs of unemployment insurance have encouraged people

not to work and to provide for themselves when they were able-bodied and mentally capable of doing work. One employer has told me of a man who came to his firm and asked for a job. He was given the promise of a job and asked to report at 7:00 A.M. the following morning. He reported at the specified time, but he did not go with the men into the plant to work. He waited until 8:00 o'clock and talked with the employer in his office. He said simply, "I have decided not to take the job. I have compared the wages that I would get with my present welfare benefits and have taken into consideration what I would have to pay in taxes. Then, when I add the cost of coming to work, and other incidentals I am better off not to work at all." This is indeed an unfortunate situation. We do not wish to imply that the motives behind the setting up of the programs were such as willingly to hinder initiative and foster idleness, but sometimes this has been the result.

Recently when we read in the public press newer and stronger demands for "a guaranteed annual wage" we could not help but feel that thousands or even millions might be encouraged to take the government bounty rather than to work for their material needs. What we wish to speak for is a training program in which all people capable of holding a job would be given the necessary training for such jobs. Then, a program in which job opportunities would be made available to these people. This would be a blessing to the individuals involved and would strengthen the nation rather than weaken it. Those who are not capable of holding jobs, by reason of mental limitations or physical limitations, would, of course, be cared for by those who are strong, just as we care for babes and for the elderly.

Contests: In an entirely different area, we find another encouragement to the people of our nation to get excited about receiving something for nothing. During the past year it seems that almost every major oil company has mounted an extensive program of luring customers by offering rich prizes to lucky car owners. We are told about the various kinds of cars that we may win. We are promised a chance at vacation trips, desirable consumer goods of one kind or another, or even cash itself. It seems that the quality of the product being sold has been crowded out of the advertising copy, in favor of winning customers by promises of a chance to win a fabulous prize.

Sales promotions by mail are constantly telling us that if we will order a certain object we may also win an expensive prize. The copy often runs, "You may already have won such-and-such prize." In one of these recent promotions the height of the ridiculous was reached as each potential winner was told that he would have a choice, if he should win first prize, of taking \$18,000 in cash, or of having a mountain given to him. It was explained that the small mountain would bear his name, and that it would be his for all time to come. It is not wrong to accept a prize given by some firm, but it is dangerous and degrading to the population generally to be plied with one contest after another offering this and offering that, until the people are hypnotized and excited about getting "something for nothing."

Speculation in Stock: We wish to say first of all that it is certainly not wrong to invest in a business enterprise. The investment of capital is the means of helping a company expand and is not basically different from investing one's own talent or time. However, it appears to us a different thing when one buys and sells stocks, not as an investment in a company, but simply as an avenue through which he hopes "to get rich quick." He hopes to be clever enough to get into the market at a low level and get out at a higher level, leaving someone else to ride the stock down. This appears to be wild speculation or manipulation of stock that seems to me too closely akin to gambling. The element to which we object is the desire to get rich quick, a desire essentially to get something for nothing at some one else's expense.

Leisure Time: There is a growing trend in America toward more and more free time. As the work-week comes down from forty-eight hours to forty hours, and then possibly down to thirty-two hours, as some unions are now demanding, man will have a great deal more leisure time. This can be a great blessing, or it can be a great curse. God did not create man to have great blocks of idle time. As the old adage says, "An idle mind is the Devil's workshop." God has given us talents and abilities which he expects us to use. A short work-week may be a blessing in that it allows a working man time to work constructively at other things--even perhaps the Lord's work. If it is spent simply in lavishing luxurious pleasures upon one's self, it will destroy the individual and the nation as well. Work is a blessing but vast amounts of idle time are a curse.

Paul's Practical Admonitions

Just here we wish to turn to the scriptures and read. The apostle Paul wrote, "But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; that ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing." (I Thess. 4:10-12). This passage indicates that the quiet, solid life involves working with the hands in order that Christians may be well respected by those outside the church and also that Christians may have need of nothing.

Again Paul wrote, "For yourselves know that ye ought to imitate us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat bread for naught at any man's hand, but in labor and travail, working night and day, that we might not burden any of you: not because we have not the right, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you, that ye should imitate us. For even when we were with you, this we command you, If any man will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear of some that walk disorderly among you, that work not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." (II Thess. 3:7-21).

When Paul was at Corinth he labored with Aquilla and Priscilla in the making of tents, supporting himself rather than being a burden upon the brethren. Honorable work is always commended in the scriptures. In the passage just studied we find the emphatic sentence, "If any will not work, neither let him eat." This means that every able bodied, mentally-capable person must work. This is God's will. Yet again Paul wrote, "But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." By honorable work we are to support ourselves and our families.

Values of Work

Finally, in summary of this study, let me point out five basic values of good, honest, productive work:

(1) Work provides the necessities of life. For ourselves and for others honest work will provide food, clothing, shelter, and the other necessities of life. The worker even has something to share with those who are in need. Remember the words, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need." (Eph. 4:28).

((2) Work renders a service to others. The farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the doctor, and countless others provide necessary services for their fellowmen.

(3) Work brings personal maturity and development. The pioneers who settled the great American continent were hard working people who felled trees, cleared land, planted crops, built houses, and all the rest. They grew and developed through their hard work.

(4) Work prevents the temptations of idleness. Those who are busy doing some constructive work do not have time to fall into the temptations that have caused so many people to succumb. Hard working people are honest, thrifty, God-fearing, moral, and generally free from the weaknesses of those who are generally idle.

(5) Work brings satisfaction. There are few joys as deeply satisfying as a job well done, when that job is a benefit to one's fellowmen.

Conclusion

In the 90th Psalm Moses wrote, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory upon their children. And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." (Ps. 90:16-17). Good, honest work is honorable. Let us never forget this basic principle taught throughout the entire Bible. The idea of getting something for nothing is a shallow idea that ultimately brings suffering and disappointment to the individual and weakness to the nation. Let us avoid this alternative in favor of constructive, meaningful work.