

Blessed in the Work of Your Hands

By Dennis Pollock

Man was made to work. As much as we complain about our jobs, in truth we would soon disintegrate psychologically if all work-related responsibilities were taken from us, and our life became a 24/7 playtime. When God created the first humans we are told that: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it." Adam was not given a recliner, a bowl of popcorn, a big screen television, and a remote, and told to chill. He was given work to do!

In the giving of the ten commandments God enforced a one-day-a-week Sabbath of rest, but what we sometimes forget is that implicit in the Sabbath command is the idea that in the other six days we are to be busy and productive: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:9). One day of rest out of seven is refreshing for soul and body; when we try to turn all seven days into rest days we invite deterioration.

It is a significant source of happiness and well-being for men and women to be successful and productive in their work. Indeed sometimes people get so carried away with their careers that they become workaholics, and neglect family and non-work related responsibilities for the euphoric high they obtain from their jobs. Most of us ordinary men and women have sometimes wondered why millionaires and billionaires bother to work so hard when they already have made enough money for many lifetimes. Why not retire, relax and enjoy their money? But of course they could no more do that than fly to the moon. That drive and ambition, and the thrill of success, which enabled them to make their fortunes, will keep them working steadily to increase their fortunes till the end of their days.

There is a tantalizing phrase found numerous times in the Bible that relates to our work: "Blessed in the work of your hands." When the devil was having a conversation with God over his servant Job, he suggested Job was only serving the Lord for what he could get out of Him. He sneeringly asked,

Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?
You have **blessed the work of his hands**, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face! (Job 1:10,11)

Job's work had a blessing attached to it. No doubt Job worked hard and was a sharp fellow, but there was more to his success than merely hard work and intelligence. There was a mysterious and intangible factor, which we often call a blessing, that was enabling him to achieve success and abundance in a far greater measure than men could normally expect. God has the ability to bless our work – the work of our hands! It is to be expected that labor brings some results, but laboring under the blessing of heaven brings extraordinary results.

In Deuteronomy God tells Israel that they must store up their tithes, in order to provide for the strangers, fatherless, and widows. And then he tells them why it is a good idea for them to do so: "that the Lord your God may bless you **in all the work of your hand** which you do." When His people were willing to share with those who had little, His grace would be released upon all the work of their hands. Notice God does not say that He would bless their idleness. He does not say, "I will bless your resting, your idle chatter, or your lounging." He wants to bless their work. There are almost an infinite number of motivational seminars, success books, and "how to make money" audio series available to us, but few consider this idea of the favor of God on the works of our hands. Favor is not something you can see or touch. You cannot take a quick look at a man and say, "He has it," or "He does not." It does not reside in a particular type of personality or style of doing business. Talkative, outgoing people can have it, but you can also find it in quiet, thoughtful people as well. Lazy people, however, never have this blessing. There aren't enough works of their hands for God to bless.

In another place in Scripture God tells His people that if they will obey His commandments "The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, **and to bless all the work of your**

hand" (Deuteronomy 28:12). Men and women can work, and they should do so, but only God can bless. There are some things beyond our control. A farmer can purchase the finest tractor available, and the most expensive and high-quality seeds. He can plant his crops at precisely the right time, and plow the straightest possible rows. He can do everything just as he should – and yet if the rain refuses to fall all his hard work and attention to detail mean nothing. In this passage God makes it plain that through obedience the work of their hands would be blessed, and when there was disobedience that blessing would be withheld.

New Testament Eyes

These promises to Israel were Old Testament promises, but we must interpret them through a New Testament perspective. If all we read was the Old Testament, and attempted to gain all the blessings and promises through our own obedience we would bring a curse upon ourselves rather than a blessing. The reason is simple: "through the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in God's sight." None of us will ever obey God fully or keep all of His precepts in any area of our lives. Years ago I read a book on parenting by a well known Christian leader. It contained a lot of good advice. It was filled with Scriptures pertaining to parenting, and gave many Biblical principles on the subject. But it had a huge, gaping hole in it – Christ was hardly mentioned. Nor was prayer. According to this book, all you need to do is keep all of God's parenting principles, and after about twenty years or so, your child will pop out into society a marvelous, mature, godly young adult. The only problem with this is that none of us will ever do it. Yes, we should by all means try, but despite our best efforts we will fail in various ways, and our best will fall pathetically short of God's ideal. For this reason we desperately need grace mixed in with our parenting, we need to pray constantly, and we need to look continually to Jesus to make up for our shortcomings. About the only person that doesn't immediately realize the truth of this is someone who has never been a parent!

The key to all the promises of God, including this promise of a blessing on the works of our hands, is Jesus Christ. In Second Corinthians we read, "For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." In huge office complexes top executives sometimes have a master key. This key will open any lock in the building from the president's office down to the janitor's closet. Every locked door must yield to this master key. Jesus is the master key to the promises of God. All God's promises are yes in Him. This mysterious thing called God's favor comes to us, not because we have perfectly kept all God's commandments, but because we have believed on the One who *did* keep all the commandments – Jesus Christ the Lord.

A beautiful Old Testament symbolic picture of this is found in the story of Joseph and Potiphar (Genesis 39). Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and ended up serving the captain of Pharaoh's guard in Egypt, a man named Potiphar. This mysterious favor of God rested heavily upon young Joseph, and we read the simple and yet powerful words, "The LORD was with Joseph and he was a successful man." Potiphar was no dummy and soon saw that "the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand." It just seemed like everything Joseph was asked to do was blessed. The tough captain kept his eyes on his young Hebrew slave and the more he saw the more impressed he became. In the Bible's words, "Joseph found favor in his sight." Finally Potiphar decided to turn his house and farm completely over to Joseph. We read these amazing words:

So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord **blessed** the Egyptian's house **for Joseph's sake**; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field (Genesis 39:5).

Potiphar obtained amazing blessings not for his own sake, but for Joseph's sake. He may not have had the nicest disposition, but no matter – he was blessed for Joseph's sake. He may have been a bit overweight and somewhat of a glutton, but his blessings came not for his own self-discipline but because of his association with Joseph. Perhaps he had too much temper, but his blessings were based on Joseph, not the amount of temper he had or didn't have. For whatever faults Potiphar may have had, he had one thing to his credit: he had enough sense to recognize God's favor upon Joseph, and to turn the responsibility of all that he had over to him.

Almost all Bible scholars believe that Joseph symbolically represented the Lord Jesus. And like Potiphar, God's favor comes to rest upon our lives not for our own sake but for the sake of Jesus. When God promises to bless the Jews in all the works of their hands if they would keep all His commandments, He had no takers for a long time.

Finally a young Jewish woman named Mary gave birth to a baby named Jesus. As He grew up He truly kept all the commandments. In a Messianic Psalm which reveals Jesus' heart toward His Father, we read, "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). True to His word, the Heavenly Father blessed His Son in everything His hands touched. Lepers were healed at the touch of those hands, demons were driven out, and lame people walked. That mysterious blessing was always present whatever those marvelous hands touched or whatever they did. Jesus was blessed coming in and blessed going out. He was blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

Until one day. At the peak of His popularity He was arrested and nailed to a cross. To make matters more puzzling, we read in the Scriptures that "cursed is the man who hangs on a tree." Jesus went from blessing to cursing. What happened? Had He finally broken one of the Father's commandments? No, the Bible tells us "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities... and by His stripes we are healed." Jesus became a curse that we might live in the blessing and favor of God. As we put our trust in Him, and in the power of His cross and resurrection, we are blessed for Jesus' sake. We can have the favor of heaven resting on our lives, and a blessing on all the work of our hands not because we are perfect and never make mistakes – but because the Blessed One lives in us.

This blessing is not a license to be lazy or live ungodly lives. We do not sit back and say, "Praise God for Jesus. Now I don't have to do much." Once this grace touches our lives we work harder than ever before – but not to try to win God's acceptance or favor. We work out of gratitude, and we work because the Spirit of Christ lives in us. Whether it is secular work or spiritual work, we do all things heartily as unto to the Lord and not to men. The great apostle Paul, who wrote more extensively about grace than any of the other Biblical writers, declared, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, **yet not I**, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10).