

The Holy Nation, Part 5 & 6, Work and its Rewards

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We interrupted our discussion of private property as we began discussing Locke's idea that the principal means of acquiring property has to do with labor.

Ephesians 4:28 *"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."* Just as God provided for acquiring private property he also approved the ability to pass on an estate. Here we have labor as a means to property.

Martin Luther emphasized the ethical value of this life and the *sanctity of labor* saying, *"The man at the plough, the maid with the broom, are doing God better service than does the praying, self-tormenting monk."* When the spiritual force of the "Protestant work ethic" met the spiritual and political reasoning of Locke, it was a marriage made in heaven which produced cultural strength prolifically.

Thinking politically, with this consensus in America, certain conclusions flowed from it namely that we believed strongly in the relationship of work to possessions. This bears on the question of the welfare state and the "social safety net." We would have to look at almsgiving as a righteous requirement to round out that discussion. As we move away from biblical thinking there is more emphasis on giving free things to those who do not work or have not worked.

It was a legitimate function of government to protect private property. More than a legitimate function, it is the requirement of government to restrain those who are evil, threatening life and property and to reward those who do good. Locke said that there was competition for property and some were not strict observers of "equity and justice," so there needed to be some way to protect property: *"...Though in the state of Nature he has such a right (to his property), yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain and constantly exposed to the invasion of others,... the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has is very unsafe, very insecure. This makes him willing to...join in society with others who are already united,...for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name--property."*

Even though Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, his assertion that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, was a virtual photocopy of Locke's writings. The pursuit of happiness is nothing less than Locke's right to acquire and keep property of whatever type.

Jefferson and Locke agreed with the common sentiment of their day that government's obligation is to preserve property rather than to take it. This was the reason free men formed into governments. They wanted "established, settled, known law," impartial judgment, and collective power to enforce the laws.

Even the right of free speech they rooted in notions about property. For example, an influential tract circulated in New England in 1744 said, *"Whenever therefore he sees a rock on which there is a probability the vessel may split, or if he sees a sand that may swallow it up, or if he foresees a storm that is like to arise; his own interest is too deeply concerned not to give notice of the danger: And the right he has to his own life and property gives him a right to speak his sentiments."*

If government excessively takes private property, it commits an injustice. “Eminent domain” is based on the sovereignty of the state, rather than the sovereignty of God. At the very least, this power must be used only cautiously. *“In the United States, George Mason, author of the Virginia Declaration of rights, specifically excluded eminent domain in that document. The Virginia Declaration states “That no part of a man’s property can be taken from him, or applied to public uses, without his own consent, or that of his legal representatives.” This principle, ostensibly restated in the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution, was poorly worded and left grounds for the reintroduction of eminent domain.”*

Taxes also have an impact on property because they take from the property of the individual. To keep from violating the principles of property, taxes must be cautiously applied. Yet Jesus recognized the validity of taxes by proper government when he said, *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”* God also told Israel when they wanted a king like other nation that taxes higher than 10% would bring prayers for relief from the people. *Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king. He said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will do....He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day.”*

If the value of property is taken by governmental regulatory action, even if done legally, the individual’s property has been taken. Therefore, government has an obligation to use its regulatory powers cautiously.

The idea of work is well founded on the scripture. Christianity was built on the Jewish way of thinking expressed in the Ten Commandments. For instance, in Exodus 20:8-11 it states, *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”***

The implications of the Ten Commandments relating to the Sabbath clearly establish both work and rest as normative. If God worked then it is reasonable that those created in his image would also work. By placing this within the Ten Commandments it reaches an even higher place in the standards for the holy nation. People should work and then they should rest according to the divine pattern.

Workers are worthy of pay and are to be promptly paid. *“Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”* (Deuteronomy 24:15) Multiple passages quote Jesus as saying that the laborer is worthy of his pay. (Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 5:18, Matthew 10:10, Leviticus 19:13) It is a worthy thing to work and to be paid for that work as stated by the Law, Jesus, and the Apostles. It shouldn’t be overlooked that labor and wages were connected. There was no wage without work. Getting paid should be related to working.

If we apply these ideas to political philosophy there should be a direct link between benefits received and work provided. During the Gingrich, Clinton era the Welfare Reform effort linked these two together. The next year after the federal legislation similar requirements

were established in Washington State. Interestingly, both in Congress and in Washington State Marvin Olasky's book The Tragedy of American Compassion was very influential in the laws adopted. I personally supplied a summary of the book to state legislators. Regrettably as the political parties have drifted further from biblical norms those welfare reforms have been largely lost being replaced with automatic benefits without work requirements.

In the teaching of Jesus, work was not to be restricted just to manual labor but to include capital investments. Matthew 25:14-30 "14 *Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'*

Among the many parables of Jesus, here he chose to liken the Kingdom of heaven to a business situation. Some have argued, as Karl Marx did, against capital suggesting that labor was the legitimate way of business. You worked and got paid for your labor. But here, Jesus talks about responsible investment. It is the use of capital rather than merely of labor.

Christianity gradually changed the way people thought about labor. Greeks and Romans thought labor was only for slaves, not freemen. But Jesus had a job, working as a carpenter. Paul said each person should work not only to eat but to have something to give to another. (Ephesians 4:28) "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." When Paul told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:12) "We work hard with our own hands," this was a revolutionary concept.

Centuries later, *The Rule of St. Benedict* required living together, praying together and physical work together. Even so he still held the spiritual pursuits as greater than physical work. Work was still seen as a curse from God because of sin. A hierarchy of professions and trades

was developed by St. Thomas Aquinas as part of his encyclopedic consideration of all things human and divine. Agriculture was ranked first, followed by the handicrafts and then commerce. These were considered to be the work of the world, however, and the work of the church was in a higher category. For Augustine the ideal occupation was the monastic life of prayer and contemplation of God.

Luther changed the idea that church work was superior. He said, "Just look at your tools...at your needle and thimble...your goods, your scales...everything our bodies do, the external and the carnal, is and is called spiritual behavior if God's Word is added to it and it is done in faith."

Calvin, with his emphasis upon election, said one could have a sense of being part of God's Elect by the success in one's worldly endeavors. A person who was indifferent and displayed idleness was most certainly one of the damned, but a person who was active, austere, and hard-working gave evidence to himself and to others that he was one of God's chosen ones.

Calvin taught that all men must work, even the rich, because to work was the will of God. It was the duty of men to serve as God's instruments here on earth, to reshape the world in the fashion of the Kingdom of God, and to become a part of the continuing process of His creation. Men were not to lust after wealth, possessions, or easy living, but were to reinvest the profits of their labor into financing further ventures. Earnings were thus to be reinvested over and over again, *ad infinitum*, or to the end of time.

Selection of an occupation and pursuing it to achieve the greatest profit possible was considered by Calvinists to be a religious duty. Not only condoning, but encouraging the pursuit of unlimited profit was a radical departure from the Christian beliefs of the middle ages. In addition, unlike Luther, Calvin considered it appropriate to seek an occupation which would provide the greatest earnings possible. If that meant abandoning the family trade or profession, the change was not only allowed, but it was considered to be one's religious duty.

The norms regarding work which developed out of the Protestant Reformation, based on the Scripture and the combined theological teachings of Luther and Calvin, encouraged work in a chosen occupation with an attitude of service to God, viewed work as a calling and avoided placing greater spiritual dignity on one job than another, approved of working diligently to achieve maximum profits, required reinvestment of profits back into one's business, allowed a person to change from the craft or profession of his father, and associated success in one's work with the likelihood of being one of God's Elect.

These ideas, which Max Weber called the "Protestant work ethic" changed the world from the sixteenth century forward. His studies noted that it was not the same in Buddhist China, or Moslem or Hindu India. If you go back to 1600 and look who the economic leaders were they were Ming China at 30% of world GDP and Mughal India with 22.6%. The key elements of the Protestant ethic were diligence, punctuality, deferment of gratification, and primacy of the work domain. Throughout history, work had been associated with pain, sacrifice, and drudgery. The Greek word for work, *ponos*, also meant "pain." For the Hebrews as well as for the medieval Christians, the unpleasantness of work was associated with Divine punishment for man's sin. The Protestant ethic maintained that work was a sacrifice that demonstrated moral worthiness, and it stressed the importance of postponed gratification. The Protestant ethic gave "moral sanction to profit making through hard work, organization, and rational calculation". The English Puritans, the French Huguenots, and the Swiss and Dutch Reformed subscribed to Calvinist theology that was especially conducive to productivity and capital growth. On the American side, the writings of people like Benjamin Franklin reflected these Christian ideas of

diligence in work, scrupulous use of time, and deferment of pleasure. The results were a monumental shift in economic power with the rise of the United States as we followed these economic principles.

Many of these ideas came out of the consideration of this parable before us. In these days when the economy, jobs, and investments are on everybody's mind, it is worthwhile to consider how the Scripture applies to these subjects.

However, we need to go beyond the economic discussion because Jesus was dealing with the kingdom of heaven as his first subject, not economics. In terms of the Kingdom of Heaven, the parable is all about lost and neglected opportunity.

Whatever the size of opportunity we have, the reward is the same for those who do well. The man with five and the man with two got the same reward. *21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'* The message is clear. Whether you get five talents or two, do something with what you have. To whom much is given, much is required.

Maybe even more basic, I would note that the Kingdom of God comes with expectations. The parable of the Ten Virgins which precedes this parable shows that we must be ready. The parable of the sheep and goats which follows the parable of the Talents says we have to do something. We are judged based on what we do.

This parable says that what we should do must be proportional to what we can do. We have a duty to love God. We have an obligation to love our neighbor. These are positive things we must do. To apply the parable here, these are things which are akin to investing the money we have been given. There is the duty of witness, to tell the story of Jesus as widely as we can. We have a positive duty to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." We have a duty to work hard for the Lord. (Colossians 3:23-24) *"23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

Our duty is not to do as much, or even more, than the next guy. Our duty is to use our full capacity of ability and resource.

Fear and worry about the future must not paralyze us. Because we don't have as much as someone else must not keep us from acting. Inferiority or disadvantage is not our concern to keep us from acting. Whether one, five, or ten, it is about fruitfulness not largest or smallest.

In Chapter 21 verse 43 Jesus said, **"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people¹ who will produce its fruit."** He was speaking specifically of the Jews in this case, and the Gospel that would come to the Gentiles as a result of their failure but it clearly lays out a principle. Be fruitful or another will take your place.

Work is required of everyone to the extent that our health, strength, and age allow. That work is to be rewarded and not penalized through progressive taxes or redistribution schemes. Government policies should not hinder the rewards of labor, the investments of business, or the lending of money for interest. Supporting economic growth is to be preferred over ways of dividing the pie particularly with those who do not help produce it.

¹ ethnos