A Theology of Work

Titus 2:9-10

Pastor Ron Prosise
July 10, 2011
Shepherd's Community Church

God's Work

(Genesis 2:2, 15; 3:17-19; Psalm 8:2; Isaiah 59:16; John 6:44; 16:33; 5:17; Philippians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Your Work

(2 Peter 1:3; Philippians 1:27; Ephesians 6:5; Romans 13:1; Colossians 3:22-4; Acts 4:29; Psalm 100:2; 1 Peter 2:9)

Hope and Strength for the Discouraged

Discouragement comes in many forms and so our array of weapons must be varied. Before I accepted the call to become pastor of Bethlehem my father wrote and told me about the many pitfalls of the pastoral ministry. One was the life-quenching discouragement that comes from extended periods of apparent fruitlessness. My father travels from church to church and has dealt with thousands of pastors. He told me about how close so many of them were to throwing in the towel, oppressed by the lifelessness of their people and their own hopelessness.

This is a threat not only to pastors, but to all believers. All of us can become oppressed that our work is of no value. Any one of us can be crushed by the feeling that others do not approve of how we do our work. Who has never felt the pang that he has labored in vain and spent his strength for nothing? When discouragement comes in this form we need a special weapon to fight the fight of faith.

As I was refreshing my spirit last week in a grand old book by Charles Bridges I found a weapon suited for such a battle. Bridges said, "Our recompense is measured not according to 'our success' but 'our labor' and, as with our blessed Master, vouchsafed even in the failure of our ministration." Then he cited this great text from the prophet Isaiah, who was sent out to preach to people God knew would not repent (Isaiah 6:9): "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity, *yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God*" (Isaiah 49:4).

That verse sank into my heart like a shot of adrenaline. I imagined a large-hearted, gentle, steady old parson serving in a small church in the country. He was worn and weary and at the end of his life. He had been faithful for two decades through every crisis, never succumbing to the temptation to quit. When a young replacement asked him how he had the endurance and strength of soul to keep on in the ministry all those years, he said, "The Lord measures the faithfulness of our labor, not our success. I look always to the Lord and not to man."

As I took this weapon into my hand last week it shone so brightly I could scarcely contain my joy. I thought: What a vision! What a hope! To come to the end of my life after 30 years of pastoral labors and be able to say (gray-headed and full of joy): "My right is with the Lord and my recompense with my God." O, that we might be a people strong in the Word, "never flagging in zeal, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11) *no matter what!*

John Piper, *Taste and See,* www.desiringgod.org