How to Bring Sunday and Monday Together

Rich Nathan August 22-23, 2009 God at Work Series Genesis 2:15

How many of you wake up on Monday morning saying, "Thank God, it's Monday! I can go back to work!" Some of you do. But you have to understand that most folks don't work in your particular type of occupation. Of course, I mean most folks aren't professional ice-cream tasters or mattress testers, or professional video game players. Most of the rest of us actually have to work a job for a living.

There is an executive named John Beckett, who is a very thoughtful Christian, who wrote a book titled *Mastering Monday* in which he said:

In my short life time man has split the atom, conquered polio, walked on the moon and shrunk the globe through the Internet. But millions of us have yet to master Monday.

"Don't buy a car made on Mondays," advise automotive insiders. "Too many assembly plant no-shows; and the ones who do come to work are only half there."

Beckett goes on to write:

I'm not immune to Monday's challenges. If there is a day in the week where I'm apt to get a headache, it is Monday. Some fare much worse than me. In fact, the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta cites 9:00 Monday morning as the peak period for heart attacks!

We have t-shirts and radio promotions screaming, "TGIF" – Thank God It's Friday. People talk about getting over the mid-week hump. Folks plan vacations a year in advance. You sure don't hear a lot of "TGIM – Thank God It's Monday." Many people, including Christians, agree with Dolly Parton when she sang:

Working 9 to 5 what a way to earn a living Barely getting by, it's all taking and no giving. They just use your mind and they never give you credit It's enough to drive you crazy, if you let it.

Now, I know there are many of you who really enjoy your jobs. You find your jobs fulfilling; you are working in a place with people who you basically like. You feel valued by your boss. You feel like you are making a difference in the lives of your clients and customers. You are using your gifts and talents. You may be drawing a really good salary and have great benefits.

But even for you, who enjoy your work, and say, "I actually like what I do. I like the situation I'm in," I would suggest that you are in a very small minority, if you have formulated for yourself a really thorough-going way of integrating your Christian faith with your work life.

The problem: Monday is separated from Sunday

Years ago I had a picture of the way that many of us as Christian workers relate to Christ. We did a survey last year and a high percentage of you said that you read the Bible at least four times a week; not just at church. But the picture that I got of the way we Christian workers sometimes relate to the Lord is that you get up, you make a pot of coffee, you do your devotions, read your scripture passages for the day, take some time to pray, shower, get dressed, Jesus walks you out to your car, and then he stands in the driveway and waves good-bye to you. And you wave good-bye to him and you say, "I'll see you, Jesus, tonight when I get home." Or, "I'll see you when I go to my small group meeting this evening."

People say that as they pull out of the church parking lot every weekend. "I'll see you, Jesus, next week at the Vineyard."

Maybe you do better than that. But you take a 10-hour gap in your real relationship with Christ. For most followers of Jesus, Jesus pops in and out of their lives. And he mostly leaves during work.

We Christians have different strategies for trying to bring Jesus into the workplace. Some of you bring Jesus to work by looking for opportunities to share your faith. Unfortunately, for some Christians work is actually just an excuse for doing evangelism. What they do to earn a living is not particularly meaningful in their minds. It doesn't feel like "the work of the Lord." But at least they get to witness to coworkers or customers or clients on occasion. And, so for these folks, Jesus shows up every so often at their jobs once a month, once a week, when you have an opportunity to witness, when you go to a Bible study at your job. But then he leaves you again and you are back to work.

Many people secretly long for the day when they can come to work for the church, or get involved in some mission or other ministry so that they can be full-time Christian workers. Maybe you are one of those folks.

The gap between Sunday and Monday, between worship and work, is not just a problem for Christians, and it is not just a subjective problem for our feelings in which we suffer a loss of meaning and purpose. The gap between Sunday and Monday has created a real world global economic meltdown. The gap between Sunday and Monday is not just a problem for Christians; it is a problem for the whole world because it has resulted in the loss of trillions of dollars of wealth and the unemployment of millions of people, and hundreds of thousands of folks who have lost their houses through foreclosure.

Let me bring this down for just a moment. Let me put it really simply. Do you think that Bernie Madoff went to work every day praying, "God, how can I serve you today and love and serve my clients by doing the very best job I can of investing their hard-earned money? How can I honor you by my investment decisions?" Do you think Bernie Madoff was saying that every day?

It was reported this week that when the CEO of one of America's largest health insurance companies recently retired, he was given a \$1.1 billion – that's \$1.1 billion, not \$1.1 million – dollar retirement package. And that was on top of a \$500 million payout he had already received. So this healthcare insurance executive received \$1.6 billion dollars as a retirement package.

Do you think that the people who voted to give this man a \$1.6 billion dollar retirement package prayed before their decision and they said, "Father, we are in this position of responsibility on this board because you put us here. We want to do the most ethical and honorable, most God-honoring job of determining this retirement package using the company's wealth the way you want it to be used. Our CEO has added value to society; he's created jobs in a responsible and prudent way. Father, what amount of money should he be rewarded for the good job that he's done?" And God said, "He should get \$1.6 billion dollars."

Do you think that this is the way that decision came down?

David Miller spent 16 years in senior executive positions in international business and finance. He went on and got his Ph.D. and is now the Director of Princeton University's Faith and Work Initiatives. He recently wrote a book titled *God at Work*. And he said:

The main problem facing our economy is creating a culture, a corporate culture, that accents character, that accents the common good, and not just earnings per share, or a penny more per share per quarter. We need to create a new culture. Is it possible that companies can make a decent profit – create wealth, create jobs, provide goods and services for society and maybe even be a moral community to develop its people? I think it can, but it will take leadership that is committed to a new vision of business.

Business periodicals are picking up on this problem of separating Sunday and Monday. There are literally dozens of articles in the last ten years that have appeared in periodicals like *Business Week*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and across the board. There are cover stories like "How the Church has Failed Business," "Where is Religion in the Workplace?" and, "Does God Fit Into Business?"

Most secular and religious observers are increasingly commenting on the great separation in people's lives between Sunday and Monday – the separation of worship and work; the separation of our Christian faith from what we spend most of our lives doing. And it has had devastating effects. It has had devastating effects on Christian

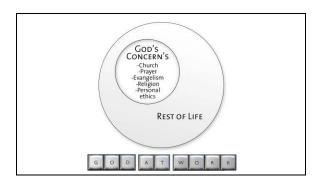
believers in terms of our level of joy and sense of purpose and meaning and contentment at our jobs, and it has had devastating effects on the global economy in terms of the absence of moral and spiritual guidance for decisions that affect every one of us. There has been obviously a loss of a moral compass, a loss of an ethical center, in many businesses. Something is definitely wrong. In most workplaces there is almost an official atheism that prevails. God is simply walled out.

I want to do a brief series on work. I've titled this series, "God at Work." Work is, by the way, notoriously difficult to define. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the noun "work" no less than 34 different meanings, and the verb "work" 39 meanings. When I'm speaking, I'm talking about work of any kind from writing computer programs to changing diapers. The work series includes church work and volunteer work and visiting prisoners and visiting the sick at hospitals. But what I'm mainly going to be focusing upon is paid employment, although, again, I want you to be able to, as you listen, apply what I'm saying to all kinds of work. I've titled this first message, "How To Bring Sunday and Monday Together." Let's pray.

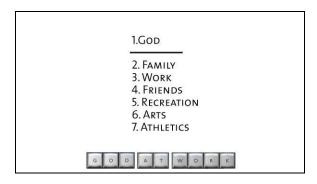
So, we face a problem: We separate Sunday and Monday.

The problem: why do we separate Sunday and Monday?

How did we get to the place where there is such a gap between what we do in worshipping God at church and what we experience in the workplace, particularly since there are still a significant number of folks in the US who profess to be followers of Christ in many of our workplaces? There are an even greater number of folks who are in our workplaces who are at least occasional churchgoers. So, how did we get to this place of great separation between Sunday worship and Monday work?



For 1700 years the church has, by and large, communicated a perspective on the Christian life in which God's concerns are confined to a narrow circle of things – church, prayer, evangelism, religion, and personal ethics. And then there is the rest of life. Some people have talked about God living in the upper story.



There is a cement roof between God and everything else – family, work, friends, recreation, art, and athletics. We visit the Upper Story occasionally when we pray, or when we have a spiritual experience. But eventually, even those who claim to be followers of Christ separate God from most of what they do in life.

So, how did we get to this place? Why do most workplaces, even those run by Christians, function with a practical atheism?

Well, if you go back in history at least 1700 years you come to a church leader named Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea. Eusebius was the principal historian of the early church from the apostolic age down to his own day. And he is a really valuable witness regarding how the church thought about things before the conversion of Constantine.

But Eusebius wrote a really unfortunate book titled *The Demonstration of the Gospel* in which he argued that Christ gave the church two ways of life: one of the ways is the "Perfect Life" and the other way is the "Permitted Life." The Perfect Life, according to Eusebius was the spiritual life. It was a life dedicated to prayer and contemplation; a life lived by priests and monks and nuns. The Permitted Life was the secular life. It was dedicated to tasks like farming, business, soldiering, and raising families. Eusebius talked about this second way of life, the Permitted Life, as a lower form of Christian faith. Higher versus lower; sacred versus secular; perfect versus permitted.

Over the centuries the church became more and more dualistic, more influenced by the philosophy of Plato than the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. So the church taught for centuries that while marriage is permitted, celibacy is really the perfect life. Possessions are permissible, but poverty is better. It is okay to hold a normal 9-5 job, but it is even better to be a monk, who invests his entire life to praying.

And this is not just some medieval view. This view is absolutely the majority view in most churches in the evangelical world. We talk about full-time Christian work and we restrict the notion of calling, to a calling to preaching ministry, or a calling to the missions field. We rarely talk about a calling to teach in a public school, or a calling to be a stay-at-home mom, or being called to be a secretary, or a physician, or a plumber. So the more serious you are about your Christian faith, the more even in the 21st century, you are likely to think that you may be called to work at a church. Everyone else is let off the hook because we can't really expect very much Christian devotion unless you are paid to be a Christian.

Now there have been voices of protest against this separation of Sunday and Monday, secular/sacred, God up there/the rest of life happening down here division. There have been voices of protest for centuries. Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation, really fought against this higher and lower form of work. He talked about the priesthood of all believers. The priest ministers the sacraments. We are all priests. He wrote this wonderful little essay on marriage 500 years ago in which he said:

When natural reason – takes a look at married life, she turns up her nose and says, "Alas, must I wrap the baby, wash its diapers, make its bed, smell its stench, stay up nights with it, take care of it when it cries, heal its rashes and sores, and on top of that care for my wife, provide for her, labor at my trade, take care of this and take care of that, do this and do that, endure this and endure that and whatever else of bitterness and drudgery married life involves? Should I make a prisoner of myself by getting married and having a family?

And Luther answered these questions by saying:

Christian faith opens its eyes and looks upon these insignificant and despised duties as given by the Holy Spirit, and is aware that they are all adorned with divine approval as with the costliest gold and jewels. It says, "Oh God...I confess to you that I am not worthy to rock the little babe, or wash its diapers, or be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother." Now, you tell me when a father goes ahead and washes diapers, or performs some other humble task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool – though that father is acting in the Holy Spirit just described and in Christian faith – my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling – not because a man is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.

A man washing diapers as an act of Christian faith. That was said 500 years ago. And 40 years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

If it falls to your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep the streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the Hosts of Heaven and earth will have to pause and say, "Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well."

I read a story about a fish salesman in a great book titled *Heaven is Not My* Home by Paul Marshall. In it he tells the story about a man who watched his father selling fish at his business at the Great South Bay Fish Market in Long Island. He said that the store was a small store and it smelled like fish. He said, "One Thursday my dad was selling a large carp to this woman. She asked him, 'Is it fresh?' 'Fresh?' Dad said, 'look at this fish.'" He went over the fish with this woman. The eyes were bright; the gills were a good color; the flesh was firm; the belly was spare and solid; the tail showed not much waste; the price was right. He said, "My dad held the fish up from behind the counter

and he said, 'this is a beautiful fish, a beautiful fish! Do you want me to clean it up?' The woman smiled admiring the way that my dad sold the fish and she said, 'You certainly didn't miss your calling!'"

Marshall writes and says:

My father is in full time service for the Lord – prophet, priest and king in the fish business. And customers who come into the store sense it. He cut and sold fish year after year with never a vacation, through fire and sickness, thieves and disaster, weariness, winter cold and hot muggy summers, twinkling at work without complaint, past temptations, struggling day in and day out to fix a just price, in weakness often, but always in faith, consecratingly cutting up fish before the face of the Lord.

Cutting up fish before the face of the Lord.

How do we break down this 50-foot thick wall that has been erected for hundreds of years between sacred and secular, between God and work, Sunday and Monday? Let me suggest two things: First of all, we need to recover the biblical message about work.

The solution: recovering the biblical message about work

I want to give you a quick overview of work in the Bible. Sometimes we miss the obvious. You can read the Bible for years and miss the fact that there are thousands of verses about how we should relate to the poor, or thousands of verses about how we handle money. You just miss it. And likewise, we miss a huge amount of scripture about work. So, let me just give you a quick survey.

The Old Testament view of work

First of all, the Bible portrays God as a worker. Look back at the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. There is God making, forming, building, and planting. God is a worker. That's what Jesus said in John 5:17:

John 5:17

In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."

And we are created in the image of God; therefore, we human beings have been created to be workers. Back in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall, what we find in Paradise as the role of human beings is not some glorious state of inactivity. I don't know what your view of paradise is – lying on a raft in the Caribbean where your only decision is whether you should roll over to get sun on the other side of your body. A handsome young man named Raul wades out to you with your drink that is served in a coconut with a big umbrella. I don't know what your view of paradise is. But God's paradise involved work.

And by the way, we are going to work, according to the Bible, in the kingdom of God. I don't know what your view of the Kingdom of God is like. You might think you spend eternity on vacation in a lounge chair. But if you read Isaiah 65, I won't go through it with you now, but if you read that chapter, verses 17 and following, you will find that people are working in the kingdom of God. The only difference is that the work will be without a curse. It won't be stressed-filled, conflict-filled, unfulfilling drudgery. You are going to work and it is going satisfy you and be in line with what we were created to be.

Back in the Garden of Eden it says in Genesis 2:15:

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Paradise is not a glorious state of total inactivity. Paradise involves, at least according to God, responsible work on our part. God created men and women to work and to take care of the garden. Work is not a consequence of sin. We would be expected to work even if the fall had never occurred. Work is our God-like activity. We are imitating God when we work. God didn't create a static world. God didn't put human beings in the Garden of Eden and say, "Now, don't break anything!" He actually wanted us to tend it; to work it; to improve upon it.

How do you improve upon perfection? By developing it according to our gifts and our talents. Maybe grow different colors of roses and plant them over there by the wall. Maybe figure out how to grow more wheat with less energy. Maybe carve wood and make it into a musical instrument. How to pound metal and turn it into a car. You know, those lambs over there are looking pretty wooly. I wonder if I could cut some of that and make my husband a hat?

Improve on creation. "Work it and take care for it! Guard it," God said. There are so many forces at work that want to destroy creation. You work it and you guard it.

We are created to work. What that means is that your humanity is shredded when you choose not to be productive. When you give yourself over to alcoholism or drug abuse, or laziness, and sit all day in absolute indolence and inactivity. That destroys the image of God in a person. The problem of retirement without any volunteer activity that improves on creation is that our humanity is attacked. No wonder so many folks struggle with depression in retirement.

Even in a hospital bed we can at least conduct the work of prayer. We can always find something to do to bring improvement upon this world. Otherwise, we destroy our humanity. We were made to work.

We're not only created to work, we are commanded to work. Have you ever noticed in the Ten Commandments in the commandment about the Sabbath, God said:

Exodus 20:8-9

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days <u>you shall labor</u> and do all your work

God says the same thing in Exodus 34:21:

Exodus 34:21

Six days <u>you shall labor</u>, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

The Old Testament mentions so many different professions. It especially held up skilled workers – stone cutters, carpenters; we find shepherds and government workers, midwives and singers. Proverbs 22:29 says:

Proverbs 22:29

Do you see those who are skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank.

In fact, the book of Proverbs is filled with advice and counsel regarding work. It is also filled with statements about the goodness of work.

The Jewish view of work

From the Old Testament Jews gained an incredible value for hard work. A Jewish man who didn't work became an outcast to the community. Every father was to train his son in some kind of an occupation.

William Barclay, the great Bible commentator said,

To a Jew, work was essential – work was of the essence of life. The Jews had a saying that "he who does not teach his son a trade, teaches him to steal." Work to a Jew was not a way of life, work was life.

You know, work was so important to the Jewish people that in New Testament times a woman or a man could divorce each other for a lack of material support. If a man simply sat around all day and would not work and provide for his wife and family, a wife could divorce him. If a woman spent all of a man's money and wouldn't control her spending habits, her husband could divorce her. Work and material support were seen as foundational to marriage.

The New Testament view of work

In the New Testament we find Jesus as a worker. He is a carpenter. His closest circle of disciples were all workers. His teachings came out of the world of work. He talked about sowers and merchants and fishermen and tax collectors. He didn't only teach in

synagogues and in the temple. He taught out in the marketplace where people were working in the streets and on the hillsides, on the shores of lakes where people were fishing for a living.

So we have all these people in the Bible who were working. Abraham is a wealthy cattle trader. Joseph is a prime minister. He deals in wheat futures. Luke is a doctor. The first Ethiopian convert in the book of Acts is a central banker. Dorcas is in fashion. Lydia is a business woman. Cornelius was an Army General. Simon, the tanner, was the Louis Vuitton of his day, making purses and beautiful leather wallets for people.

Let me sum up this section on the biblical view of work with two thoughts. First, work is so important in the Bible that the apostle Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10:

2 Thessalonians 3:10

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Anyone who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Paul doesn't say, "If you are unable to work because you are sick or suffering with such a severe disability that you can't work, or you've been laid off from work, and you are searching for a job, but you can't find work, you shouldn't be given food." Paul says, "If you are not willing to work..." He is talking about an individual who has an opportunity to work, but decides not to work; too lazy or undependable to hold a job. He's talking about the person who chooses to sponge off of other people. He says work is so important that if you will not work, you shouldn't eat. That's pretty strong stuff in our entitlement society. That's the negative side of things.

On the positive side, do you know the Hebrew word for work that we find in Genesis 2:15:

Genesis 2:15

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

The Hebrew word is *avod*. It is where we get the word *avodah*. The Hebrew word for works was *avodah* is also used by the Jews in the Old Testament for "worship."

Avodah = work and worship

We find the word, *avodah*, for example:

Exodus 3:12

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Exodus 4:23

and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.

Psalm 100:2

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

The bottom line: God in the Bible breaks down this secular-sacred wall by inspiring the writers to use the same word for work as for worship. Our workplace, in other words, ought to be a context for worship. Sunday should blend into Monday.

We don't worship our work, don't misunderstand me. But work is a context for worship. Work is a context for meeting with God.

So how do we further breakdown the separation between Sunday and Monday, sacred-secular, full-time Christian work and all the rest?

The Solution: Recovering an understanding of vocation

One of the major reasons for the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century as a in response to medieval Catholicism was this attempt to breakdown sacred-secular, to recover the goodness of all of our human activities. The Protestant Reformers lived in a world that was permeated with God. God wasn't just in religious activities. He wasn't just in Christian ministries narrowly defined. He wasn't just in monasteries. God was involved in families and in work and in the arts, education and government.

The Reformers talked about "vocation." Mostly when we use the word vocation we mean our jobs. But the Reformers, particularly people like Martin Luther, the word "vocation" wasn't primarily what we do, rather, vocation referred to what God does through us in our jobs. Vocation is God's work through our human work.

The meaning of vocation

Vocation = God's work through our human work

Let me break this down for you. You know, all over the world Christians pray the Lord's Prayer and one of the things we pray in the Lord's Prayer is "Give us this day our daily bread." Now, if you've ever prayed that, "Give us this day our daily bread," what were you expecting? What were you asking for? You probably were not expecting manna to drop from heaven, or a dump truck to show up in front of your house to dump out a thousand loaves of bread. What you were saying is, "God, provide for me by giving me a job." Some of you have been praying that way, especially in this recession. Provide for me; provide for my family by giving me or my spouse a job.

Vocation is God's work through our human work. How does God populate the world? He could populate the world the way he did when he made Adam by creating every

single cell as an act of special creation. God still makes children. In Psalm 139:13 it says:

Psalm 139:13

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

But the way he does it is by having a mother and father conceive a child which shares their DNA. God's work through human work. How does God care for children? We know he loves children; we know he cares for children. How does he do it? Through mothers and fathers who nurture kids and protect them and nurse them and feed them, and love them.

God heals our bodies. How does he do it? Occasionally, he does something miraculous, but mostly God heals us through the 10% of Americans who are health professionals – doctors, nurses, physical therapists, medical technicians. God's work through human work.

We know that God works justice not just in the end, in judgment, but God works justice today in this world. How does God work justice? How does he punish wrongdoers? How does he protect the innocent? He does so through courts, and lawyers and police officers, and soldiers. It says in Romans 13:6:

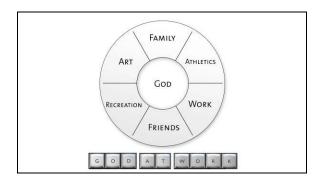
Romans 13:6

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

How does God bring beauty into this world? By working through artists and musicians and architects and fashion designers. God rescues people through counselors, fire fighters, and ER workers. Vocation. God working through your work. How does God save people? By having preachers announce the gospel. How does God teach children? Through the education system.

The <u>implications</u> of vocation

Two things quickly: First of all, God is not divorced from the rest of life.



This is the proper way to think about life. God is working through all of life. So the implication of vocation is that work is more than just earning a living. Work is more than just drawing a paycheck. Work is more than just a context in which you occasionally get to share your faith. Work is more than a place of self-fulfillment in which you ask yourself the question: Am I fulfilled at my job? Work is a place in which you respond to the call of God.

Work is a way to respond to God's call

We're all called into relationship with Christ. That's our primary calling. We're called to connect with the Lord. We are called into fellowship with Christ – to know Christ, to enjoy Christ, to love Christ, to worship Christ.

But we're also called to perform certain tasks in this world. And the question that you ought to be asking about whatever work you do is not simply, "How much money am I making?" Or, "Am I fulfilled at this work?" But, "Do I see myself as an instrument of God in my workplace? Is God working through my work?"

So, you can sell coffee, or insurance, or roofing supplies and do it as your way of honoring God improving on this world. And God smiles. And you can preach and do it out of so much pride or greed that you are barely an instrument of God at all. Work is a way for us to respond to God's call.

Work is a way to love and serve our neighbor

Jesus said that there are two commands: we're supposed to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and we are supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves. How practically do we love our neighbor? How do we fulfill the second command to love your neighbor? In this world, mostly by working; by resolving a customer's complaint; by working with integrity and excellence in handling a financial matter; by fixing someone's leaky pipes; by typing a lengthy report; by cleaning out someone's trash can; washing your baby's bottom – in doing all these things, you are practicing the second commandment – loving and serving your neighbor.

Let me quote again from Martin Luther:

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers, or performs some other humble task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool – though that father is acting in the Holy Spirit just described and in Christian faith – my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling – not because a man is simply washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.

God working through our work. Let's pray.

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