

# The Work Imperative

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## Introduction

Communicating the work imperative, Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world” (John 9:4-5).

According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, when used as an adjective, “imperative” refers to “something of vital importance,” and when used as a noun, it identifies “an essential or urgent thing.”

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Work is an imperative, both in the physical affairs of life and also in spiritual activities.

Before sin entered the world, work was still important, even in a perfect Edenic environment: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

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Wise Solomon extolled energetic activity as a rule of success (Eccl. 9:10; 11:6).

*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going (Eccl. 9:10).*

*Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good (Eccl. 11:6).*

Paul praised the same spirit of industriousness (Col. 3:22-24; 1 Thess. 4:9-12).

*Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from*

*the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Col. 3:22-24).*

*Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need (1 Thess. 4:9-12).*

Jesus expressed similar thoughts on other occasions, such as His comments to the disciples after speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (John 4:31-38), and also in offering up His High Priestly prayer unto the Father just before His betrayal: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:1-5).

*Meanwhile the disciples were urging Him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples were saying to one another, “No one brought Him anything to eat, did he?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. “For in this case the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor” (John 4:31-38).*

*Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:1-5).*

## **The Work of the Lord**

We should abound in the work of the Lord, even when called to serve in some capacity other than that which we might otherwise prefer (1 Chron. 26:29-32).

*As for the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were assigned to outside duties for Israel, as officers and judges. As for the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his relatives, 1,700 capable men, had charge of the affairs of Israel west of the Jordan, for all the work of the LORD and the service of the king. As for the Hebronites, Jerijah the chief (these Hebronites*

*were investigated according to their genealogies and fathers' households, in the fortieth year of David's reign, and men of outstanding capability were found among them at Jazer of Gilead) and his relatives, capable men, were 2,700 in number, heads of fathers' households. And King David made them overseers of the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of the Manassites concerning all the affairs of God and of the king." (1 Chronicles 26:29-32).*

We should abound in the work of the Lord, even when it seems that the cause of truth is doomed and that wickedness is ascendant (Jer. 51:5-10).

*For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken By his God, the LORD of hosts, Although their land is full of guilt Before the Holy One of Israel. Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD's time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her. Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad. Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; Wail over her! Bring balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed; Forsake her and let us each go to his own country, For her judgment has reached to heaven And towers up to the very skies. The LORD has brought about our vindication; Come and let us recount in Zion The work of the LORD our God! (Jer. 51:5-10).*

We should abound in the work of the Lord, even when doing so contradicts commonly accepted, worldly wisdom (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

*Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:50-58).*

## **Conclusion**

In Paul's closing comments to the Corinthians, he praises Timothy, saying, "Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren" (1 Cor. 16:10-11).

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**Sources:**

Soanes, Catherine and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.