

Christ in the Workplace

Modern work has come to dominate more aspects of our lives. We face a continual conflict in balancing work and family time. Our work defines our status in many social structures. Our income from work is seen to affect not just our present and future circumstances but that of our children as well.

While we have always made ethical choices in our workplace the general decline in morality has increasingly caused us to face ethical challenges in our work that bring our Biblical understandings of right and wrong into question.

Our definition of character comes from our understanding of morality. Our morality is shaped by the beliefs we derive from our community of faith or culture at large. The dominance of secular psychology has moved Biblical concepts of morality into the realm of the private.

The goal of the modern project was to free the individual from the constraints of community understandings of what constitutes right and wrong and bring them into a place of autonomy. However, if you separate the individual from her communities you remove the grounds upon which morality and thus character are built.

As we face these increasing challenges to our morality and character, how do we present “Christ in you, the hope of glory”, in our workplace environment? Our involvement in a local church, in worship, learning, and fellowship will be increasingly important as we seek to define our lives and work in a Biblical understanding.

What has historically brought out Christ in our day-to-day living are the depth of our personal relationship with Christ, our family’s involvement in faith and the depth of our communal relationships in a local church. There is no greater safeguard or motivator for living Christ in the workplace than these fundamental structures of the Christian faith.

In the local church we are taught how to relate to God, our family, and society at large. We are also provided with a community of support in these areas. It is next to impossible to face the pressures of any non-Biblical culture without the base of a strong local church.

We then could see our entry point in living Christ in the workplace as the local church. As we invest ourselves in ministry and involvement in the structures and “work” of a local church we begin to develop patterns of relating that can carry over to our work in the marketplace.

We also need to practice two fundamental spiritual disciplines Scripture reading and prayer. The Word of God washes clean the cultural clutter that builds up during a day and the practice of prayer centers our life around our relationship with God.

I now want to turn to our motivations for working both intrinsic and culturally applied. Work is a core Biblical concept with many beneficial attributes and some severe warnings for not being willing to work when able. However, our motivations in what we seek to do and their affects on our primary relationships are extremely important.

Genesis 2:2, 3

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.¹

God's work in creation was primary physical creative work. He is the only One who can bring things into physical existence. Our work with the physical world always involves a secondary creativity. It could be argued that even what we consider to be primary intellectual creativity finds its beginnings in the mind of God. Unlike God our creative work is subject to the constraints of physics and a sin marred intellect. Yet we still possess a God-imagined ability to work and create.

Genesis 1:26, 27

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.²

In Deuteronomy 15:7—11 God expresses that one purpose of work is to meet the needs of the poor. Verse ten states, "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto." It is evident from this promise that our work motivation cannot be strictly centered on our personal needs only.

Jesus demonstrated the crucial need of Biblical motivations in our work in the parable of the Prosperous Farmer Luke 12:13—21:

"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.³

¹ The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible Fifth Improved Edition, B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988 pg 2.

² The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible Fifth Improved Edition, B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988 pg 2.

³ The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible Fifth Improved Edition, B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988 pgs 1098-1099.

Exodus 20:8—11

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.⁴

It is one of the marks of a civilized society that its citizens understand and appreciate the idea of leisure. Recreation (re-creation) is fundamentally anchored in the fourth commandment. The initial idea of a day off of work was to honor God. Re-creation was found in realizing that our ultimate well being rested not in our frenzied activities but in our relationship to our creative God. We dishonor God when our recreation becomes work. We all have varying abilities and aptitudes when it comes to leisure but a God focused day of rest and recreation invites the presence and blessings of God into our lives.

In Colossians 3:1-17 we see a powerful prescription for brining Christ into our workplace. Paul presents the idea of operating by different motives, controlling our emotions and language, and engaging in acts of mercy and forgiveness. It is powerfully summed up with the admonition, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”⁵

To bring Christ into the workplace is the mission of each believer that faces the challenges of labor in the public sphere. By deepening our personal relationship with Christ, our family’s involvement in faith and the depth of our communal relationships in a local church we can build Christ-like habits into our lives. By daily Scripture reading and prayer we cleanse and renew our minds and spirit for the challenges ahead. By engaging in God honoring times of leisure we re-create the ability of our bodies and minds to withstand the stress of work. And finally we need to realize that no matter who’s name is on the paycheck it is God’s doing that we work and prosper at all.

⁴ The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible Fifth Improved Edition, B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988 pg 87.

⁵ The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible Fifth Improved Edition, B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc. Indianapolis, Indiana, 1988 pg 1252.

Suggested Resources

MARS HILL AUDIO *Journal: A bimonthly audio magazine of contemporary culture & Christian conviction.* www.marshillaudio.org Telephone: 800-331-6407