

Faith & Work

Class One—Re-Integrating our Work and our Worship

Exercise One

“... In the almost thirty years of my professional career, my church has never once suggested that there be any type of accounting of my on-the-job ministry to others. My church has never once offered to improve those skills which could make me a better minister, nor has it ever asked if I needed any kind of support in what I was doing. There has never been an enquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate the faith to my co-workers. I have never been in a congregation where there was any type of public affirmation of a ministry in my career. In short, I must conclude, that my church doesn't have the least interest whether or how I minister in my daily work.” (William Diehl, former executive of Bethlehem Steel).

What has been your experience in the church/other ministries with regard to training and teaching on faith and work? How has it been similar or different than described in the above quote?

Discussion

1. *What are the dominant views of work in our culture and setting?*

2. *How can our work take the place of God?*

Reflection

If the gospel is good news that all that is broken will be restored... then it must be good news about work.

Work and worship were made to be seamlessly one in the garden. Adam reflected the beautiful glory of His creator by working! Adam and Eve were commissioned with the task of filling the earth with a vast number of workers - so that the earth would be filled with the glory of God.

But when worship was broken, work was broken. The burden, effort, and necessity of work became a reminder of the brokenness of our worship. Work was still full of dignity but cursed with futility in that no amount of working could restore the full glory of work and worship united. But when true worship is restored in our lives through Christ... then true work is also restored.

Where did work come from?

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done... The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:2, 3, 15)

The Idolatry of Work

"The work ethic and identifying ourselves with work and through work is not only alive and well but more present now than at any time in history" (John Gillis, Rutgers U. Historian, cited in US News and World Report, Feb. 24, 2003, "Why We Work")

"If your work controls your identity, it probably controls everything else in your life" (Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*)

Re-Integrating Our Faith and Work

Dismantling the False Dichotomies

False Dichotomy #1 : Sacred vs. Secular

Gospel Re-Integration: The Sacredness of All Work

- Is this heresy? Why or why not? "there is no work better than another to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a cobbler, or an apostle, all are one; to wash dishes and to preach are all one, as touching the deed, to please God." (William Temple)
- Gen. 2:2, 3, 15
- Colossians 3:22-24—²²Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Also see 1 Thess. 4:9-12 and 2 Thess. 3:6-15)

False Dichotomy #2—Heaven vs. Earth (Eternal vs. Temporary)

Gospel Reintegration—Work Brings Heaven to Earth

- "The only things that are eternal are the word of God and the souls of men. So the only work that really matters is that which lasts forever" True or False?
- The Lord's Prayer - Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

False Dichotomy #3-Soul vs. Body

Gospel Reintegration—We Offer Our Bodies as Worship

- "The goal of life is for our souls to rise above our bodies and contemplate the spiritual world from which they came" Who said this? Is this Christian? or anti-christian?
- Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- 1 Timothy - 4:1-5—What is the false doctrine of demons (!) that Paul is so worked up about?

False Dichotomy #4—Clergy vs. Laity

Gospel Reintegration—All believers are ministers (The Priesthood of all believers)

- "We look in vain in the New Testament for a theology of the laity...With the lordship of Christ, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the dawning of the end/last days (Acts 2:17), the whole church, according to Scripture, is the true ministerium, a community of prophets, priests, and princes and princesses, serving God through Jesus in the power of the Spirit seven days a week." (R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days*)
- Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
- 1 Peter 2—What is a priest? Where do Christians live out their "priesthood"?

False Dichotomy #5—Private vs. Public/Professional Life

Gospel Reintegration—Glorify God in everything

- "Rather than instructing godly people to flee this evil world, the gospel urges Christians to remain engaged in the world so that they might reform their various vocations for the glory of God." (Michael Wittmer, *Heaven is a Place on Earth*)
- "While work had once been a means to serve God, two centuries of choices and industrialization had turned work into an end in itself, stripped of the spiritual meaning that sustained the Puritans who came ready to tame the wilderness (Andrew Curry, *US News and World Report*, Feb. 24, 2003)
- I Cor. 10:31—So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (also Titus 2:10)