

Abstract: Three Myths of Good Hard Work

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Work is the economic activity by which a person earns a living. Employed adults spend a large part of their life working (England & Whitely, 1990). A person's occupation has a major physiological and psychological impact on his life (Wuthnow, 1996). This is true for Christians as well as non-Christians. This presentation explores three myths about work that are presently in the evangelical church. These myths are all false.

Myth # 1: There is Good and Not-so-Good Work. Many evangelicals think that God advocates a value hierarchy of occupations. Vocational ministry, "Full Time Christian Work", is more spiritual and more valued by God than secular occupations particularly "money making" occupations. This arises out of Greek dualism and means that the working Christian's life is compartmentalized between work and "ministry". Norm Geisler (1982) calls this the most prevalent heresy among evangelicals today.

Myth # 2: Hard Work is Good Work. In America, a work view exemplified by the Protestant Work Ethic argues that work is ennobling, virtuous, and of value for its own sake. (Moorhouse, 1987). A corollary is that God shows His approval for hard work by give financial prosperity to the worker (Chewning, Eby, & Roels, 1990).

This interpretation of work is commonly suggested to be derived from Luther, Calvin and later the Puritans (Weber ([1904] 1952). It is not. But what did they actually did teach about work?

Luther contradicted the sacred-secular view of work by arguing that Scripture shows that God works in the physical as well as the spiritual realm (Luther, [1524] 1979). He also argued that work expresses love to one's neighbor by meeting his or her economic needs (Wingren, 1957).

The Puritan Work Ethic. The Puritans expressed four attitudes about work: 1) All legitimate types of work are sacred (Law ([1728] 1955). 2) God calls Christians to a vocation. Because God knows each person intimately, contentment and even pleasure in the work is part of God's plan (Packer, 1990). 3) Wealth is not an appropriate motive for work. Rather, as Baxter says, the appropriate motives of work are to glorify God and to benefit society (Ryken, 1986). 4) Work should be in moderation and not become an idol (Packer, 1990).

Myth # 3: The Good Work of evangelism should not mix with Economic Work. Loving service to one's neighbors includes telling them the good news of Jesus Christ. There are many ways to use work to spread the gospel. Contemporary models include tentmaking, creating businesses to stay in closed countries, and micro-enterprise. Historic models include the Moravians who set out to deliberately created an economic base in order to fund their missionary efforts. They also used business models to enter the life of a community.

Application to 21st Century Christians.

1. A job can be worship if it is used to the glory of God. A corollary to this principle is that God cares about the quality of our work. Indifferent work does not reflect glory to Him.

2. Work is relationship. God's command to love one another is fulfilled in the idea of vocation. Our neighbors on the job are our constituents.

3. God wants balance in our life. Being a steward of our time and energy also means that God is not pleased when we overwork. It is easy to enjoy work so much that one becomes addicted to it and work becomes an idol. Since God is the God of our entire life – work, family, friends, church, community, and play – overwork is just as displeasing to Him as under-work.

Three Myths of Good Hard Work

by

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Definition of work: How a person provides for the economic necessities of life by producing services or products of value (Hall, 1986). People who do not receive a direct wage, such as a homemaker, are still economically rewarded for their labor (Frideson, 1990).

Work is one of the basic human activities and absorbs a large part of our time and energy.

The evangelical church says little about it. The implication is that “As long as you have integrity on the job, you can decide by yourself how you will earn your money – just make sure you tithe it” (Barrett, 1976).

Is this a problem? Yes! The church’s silence about work means that...

- *Christians gain a distorted view of work as drudgery or drudgery.
- *A tremendous opportunity in world evangelism is not being fully utilized.

Myth # 1: Some work is better than other work

*God values some occupations more than others. Vocational ministry (“full time Christian work”) is more spiritual than secular occupations, particularly “money making” business occupations. **False***

Dualism: a variation on the body- mind debate which maintains a division between the real and virtuous realm of Eternal Ideas (mind/spirit) and the illusory and the vulgar realm of concrete objects and matter (body). This contrasts with the Hebrew view that God made both body and mind/spirit and saw them as a “very good” unity (Genesis 1). -Dictionary of Philosophy.

Dualism in the early church (Cyprian, Ignatius, Origen, Augustine):

- *a division between the clergy and laity (clergy were more spiritual)
- *the idea that the ascetic life was superior to the life of worldly affairs

The Two-World view: A Christian’s church or ministry world is separate from his or her work world. God cares about the first but is indifferent to the second.

According to Norm Geisler (1982), this is the most prevalent evangelical heresy today.

Consequences to modern Christians:

Error 1: God is removed from our secular work and doesn’t care much about it. This makes work an endless grind

Error 2: what God really does care about is the work we do in the church and ministry compartments of our life. Secular work is for unspiritual Christians

This leaves the thinking Christian with a number of disturbing questions. Does God truly want my whole life – including my secular job? Is making a good living mutually exclusive with having a strong spiritual life? Is my only contribution to the kingdom to volunteer part time at church and write checks? Is meaningless work all there is to life?

Myth # 2: Hard work is good

Work is ennobling, necessary for human development and of value for its own sake (Protestant Work Ethic). God shows His approval for hard work by give financial prosperity to the worker. Thus business success is a mark of God's special favor and a mark of special spirituality on the part of the prosperous person (Prosperity Theology). False

This is supposed to be part of Martin Luther's and Calvin's Puritan Theology (Weber, [1904] 1952). It is not! But what did Luther and Calvin really say?

Martin Luther contradicted the sacred-secular view of work based on dualism. He argued:

1. *Scripture shows that God works and He works in the physical as well as the spiritual realm.*
2. *Work can be a means of expressing love to one's neighbor*
3. *Work is co-creation with God. This means one can worship through work.*

State, Occupation, Vocation, and Calling

State: one's role in society – husband, student, community leader.

Occupation: an honest job to provide for economic needs.

Vocation: a relationship with one's neighbor that reflects God's love on earth.

Occupation/ state becomes vocation when a Christian uses it to show Godly love and service to a neighbor. Example: To be a son is a state. To have the vocation of "son" is to be a chaste and wise person that brings honor to his parents (Wingren, 1957). Work is a way to express vocation to a neighbor by meeting her economic needs.

Calling: the occupation or state God has specifically called you to exercise vocation in.

Practical implications from the Puritans

1. *All honest occupations are sacred* because, if done well, they honor God and become worship to Him (Law [1728] 1955). Even the most common domestic jobs (like washing diapers) can be a means of serving God and receiving His blessing.

2. *God calls a Christian to an occupation or state so that he or she can express love to neighbors through service. Whatever the job, the worker is a steward serving God. God's calling is personal. Contentment and pleasure in the work is art of God's plan (Packer, 1990).*

3. *The appropriate motives for work are first to glorify God, then serve one's neighbor (Ryken, 1986). God might, or might not, choose to reward one financially. It is up to Him.*

4. *Work should be in balance. Idleness dishonors God and diligence praises Him (Sayers, 1974) but work is not all of life. All things should be in balance. One's calling should not become an idol. Overwork does not glorify God (Packer, 1990).*

Myth # 3: The good work of world evangelism should not be mixed with economic work. This myth is true only if we insist on the church's current model of missions.

Christ commanded us to spread the Good News (Matthew 28:19). The entire globe is now economically tied together and the business person, who is trained to create economic value in a community, is welcome all over the world even when the career missionary is not (Clark, 1997).

It is time to set aside our prejudices and use economic models to spread the Gospel

Models that Mix Work (Business) and Evangelism:

Intra-cultural: be a competent worker first, then a witness for Christ at work

Current cross-cultural models:

- * Support career missionaries with wages
- * Kingdom Professional: start a business in order to stay in a closed country and minister
- * Tentmaker: use business skills to support yourself as an evangelist
- * Micro enterprise: finance small businesses to help the poor or develop the church

Historic cross-cultural models:

Moravian Models:

Create an economically viable community as a support base. Half the time a person works in the businesses, half the time they are full-time missionaries (Danker, 1971).

Send skilled workers to start a business in a new field so they can support themselves and be more readily accepted by the nationals because they enter into the life of the community (C. Kersten home page, 2001).

Basel Mission Society

- * Create businesses to illustrate that God is viable in all parts of life (Danker, 1971).
- * Create businesses so that new Christians have a place to work and can become independent children of God.

Applications to the 21st century

1. A job can be worship. We can “abide in Christ” by honoring Him in our job

A job does not need to be a drudgery but can be an act of worship shot through with God’s pleasure and our enjoyment.

2. Work is relationship; you don’t have to do it alone.

Work is not solitary; it is always in relationship. We can love one another through our job. To do this, we must be competent at what we do. For best effect, we must develop accountability relationships to think through work issues.

The business person has an instant mission field in his or her customers, suppliers, government officials etc. We can use our secular talents for cross-cultural ministry with great success. However, we need a team to base our witness from.

3. Yes, God does want Christians to have a life.

God has currently called us to be professors. If we see our daily work as a means of giving glory to God, we will start to get pleasure from it.

There needs to be balance between work and the rest of life. Sometime we must concentrate on work for a period, but then must back off and relax. Don’t let work become an idol.

Yvonne Smith Biography

Yvonne Smith is an associate professor of management at Biola University and has been a frequent contributor to the CBFA conference and the JBJB.

She received her Ph.D. in Strategic Management from Texas Tech University in 1995.

Her major research interests are strategic cognition, complex system change, and historic work values. Her passion is showing how these things relate to the word of God.