

# WORK

## Week 3: The Redemption and Restoration of Work<sup>1</sup>

- *The Pragmatist*: "Work is essentially a secular activity."
- *The Witness*: "Personal morality is important in the workplace."
- *The Prince*: "Jesus rules over every square inch of life and calls everyone to rule under him."

The pragmatist compartmentalizes his work from his church and home life, seeing it as a space set apart from biblical principles. The witness sees their job primarily as a platform for evangelism. **What is deficient in the pragmatist's understanding of work? The witness?**

*"The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables . . ."*  
—Dorothy Sayers

A prince understands that not only the character of the worker matters, in order to glorify God we must care about the character of the work also. "Creation thrives when mankind rules wisely." We must think of our work as a God-given plot of land for us to rule, cultivate, and improve. "If we are new creatures, it will show in our work" (57).

On the day of final restoration, every form of greatness and excellence will be revealed by our King (Matt. 13:43). If this is true, we should strive by the Spirit to work to bring eternal things into existence today, "so that the future keeps shaping the present" (57).

### Food for Thought:

Why do we need God's law to guide our work?

What are your goals at work? How many of them focus on the work itself?

Last week, we began exploring a biblical theology of work, which seeks to understand the unified witness of Scripture about work through the four stages of salvation history: (1) Creation, (2) Rebellion, (3) Redemption, and (4) Restoration.

From Daniel Doriani author of *Work*:

*"At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to [Christ]' (Hebrews 2:8). Let us highlight the words **not yet**. Those two words both admit that we never rule perfectly " (23)*

The redemption of the created order is a work of God from start to finish. All redemption in our own work finds its origin in him:

- *The Father both commands us to work and empowers our efforts (Gen. 48:4)*
- *Union with the Son redirects our work (Eph. 4:20-24,28)*
- *The Spirit makes us gifted and fruitful (Rom. 7:4-6)*

God directs our work through his Word and through Christian wisdom to understand and to cultivate his creation through our efforts. He redeems our work through four primary means:

- (1) by leading us toward good **goals**
- (2) through laws that state God's **standards** for work
- (3) through instruction on godly **character**
- (4) through spiritual **discernment**

### REDEEMING OUR GOALS

There are countless reasons to despair in our work: A micro-managing boss, equipment that breaks down at the worst time, economic downturn, or business failure due to lack of good marketing.

<sup>1</sup> This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani's *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

**Share a time when you gave up at work.** Job, Solomon in Ecclesiastes, and the Apostle Paul (cf. Gal. 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:1) all wrestle with the sense of futility in their work. Regardless how we may feel, Paul encourages, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

*“We know that faith drives out despair, but how does it operate? First, faith gives us worthy goals. Second, faith assures us that our work is fruitful, even if we never see the results” (42).*

Consider Johannes Gutenberg, inventor of the printing press. He went nearly bankrupt in his effort to create a movable type press to print Bibles and books. He died in obscurity. Yet, his invention fueled the Renaissance and Reformation, development of modern science, and universal literacy. **Gutenberg encourages us to have a long view on good work. What does a “long view” mean in your context?**

The goal of our work should be to glorify God. “That said, *motivation and dedication are necessary but not sufficient conditions for worthwhile labor*” (43). God is not necessarily pleased with our work simply because we dedicate it to him: “Good work is both lawful and helpful to humanity” (43).

- the *goal* must be a desire to glorify God
- the *standard* must be God’s law, and
- the *motive* must be love for God and neighbor

### REDEEMING OUR STANDARDS

The Ten Commandments provide a great starting place as we consider God’s requirements for morally pleasing work. **Can you think of a time you were asked or expected to break one of the Ten Commandments at work?**

- Commandments 1-3: Work shall not become a demigod or an idol. Our work should not bring shame on the name of Christ.
- Commandment 4: “There is more to God than his work, and there should be more to us too. . . . Stop working endlessly” (45)
- Commandment 5: “Honor your father and mother” teaches us to respect supervisors and mentors at work.

- Commandment 6: Our work should promote life, not bring about its reckless end, making mankind to bear fruit, not wither.
- Commandment 7: We should be faithful workers, free of plots, disloyalty, or broken promises.
- Commandment 8-9: “You shall not steal” forbids not only direct theft but other forms of indirect stealing that intend to rob customers. Business owners should not stretch the truth to make a sale or sell knowing defective or enslaving services or products.
- Commandment 10: Our work should never be motivated by greed, but a desire to give.

*“Every vocation, even the most respected, has its temptations. Teachers can dominate their students; physicians can bloat with pride. In our quest to be godly workers, we must read Scripture carefully, pray, and examine ourselves” (47).*

### REDEEMING OUR CHARACTER

“Character brings the right dispositions to moral situations, and that is vital when there are no rules in sight” (48). Godly character includes:

- **Love:** Matthew 22:37-39
- **Faithfulness:** Exodus 34:6-7
- **Justice:** Matthew 23:23

All Christian character flows from love. **But can a Christian manager be loving and fire employees?**

- Keeping a bad employee is unloving to the other workers who have to cover for their mistakes or laziness
- A failed business because of inept employees puts everyone out of work
- Poor workers often know the truth already
- Some poor employees may be better suited for other jobs

“Teachers of all kinds join love and justice when they both affirm their students and demand that they do their best. Civil servants do their best when love for the community lead them to practice justice” (50).

### REDEEMING OUR DISCERNMENT

Discernment helps us evaluate ourselves, revealing the ways we see work through worldly perspectives rather than through God’s eyes.