

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORK

WEEK 4: ARE SOME JOBS MORE SPIRITUAL THAN OTHERS?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The overall goal of this six-week class is to give a broad overview of how Christians are to view work with a Biblical worldview.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is a Biblical theology of work?
 - Week 2: What is a Biblical work ethic? How can I work for God's glory?
 - Week 3: How can I tell when work has become my identity and/or an idol?
 - **Week 4: Are some jobs more spiritual than others?**
 - Week 5: How do I balance work, church, family, and life?
 - Week 6: Should I quit my job / take a new job / retire?

INTRODUCTION

- In this class we are going to ask three important questions to help clarify the relationship between the Christian and their work.
 - How should we view a job, generally speaking?
 - We need to go to the Bible and find out if there are any instructions for us on how we should view our job. If this is something that the Lord wants us to know then we need to be sure to follow His commands.
 - How should we choose a job, specifically?
 - Does God command us to search for specific jobs or are we free to randomly choose what we desire? Should we have some criteria in mind and if so, what should they be?
 - Is there a *more spiritual* job that one should do?
 - Many people view church or non-profit jobs as being the closest to God. Some even go as far as to think that if you are not in these jobs then the work you are doing has lesser value. If so, we want to be sure that we are following what the Bible has to say.

HOW TO VIEW OUR VOCATION, GENERALLY

- For the purpose of this class this morning, we are going to be using 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 as our passage. We are going to use this to direct what we think about jobs and how they relate to what we know about God. 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 “Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. Was any man called when he was already circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”
- Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to view their vocational calling through the Lord’s eyes. As you can see here, it is not about where you are working as a believer, but how you are doing the job before you.
 - The obvious caveat is that the believer should not be employed to do anything illegal, immoral, or otherwise sinful. The temple prostitute was to leave that vocation in favor of something else. The one who was a career thief, was to no longer steal but rather get an honorable job.
- Paul says a few things here I think are worthy of our attention:¹
 - *Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk.*
 - Your job should be viewed as a gift from God, something that He has assigned to you. The job that you have, for all intents and purposes, is the place that the Lord desires you to be.
 - We all know that jobs and seasons change, we will discuss this further in two weeks. But for now, where you are is where you need to be.
 - *But what matters is keeping the commandments of God.*
 - What Paul is saying is that at your job, obey the commands of God. If you were a slave or a slave owner (per the context here) then remain as such but now do it as a believer.
 - It was not about getting away but about now laboring with new eyes.
 - *Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.*
 - Where you were called unto salvation is where you should stay. A call to salvation does not mean that you must get a different job (with the above exceptions). What it means is that you are now a Christian in your workplace and can make a difference for the kingdom.

¹ We are going to expand on these ideas throughout this paper.

- William Perkins in 1603, writing on these verses and a man’s vocation specifically said, “a vocation is a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God, *for the common good*...no more may any man leave his calling, except he receives liberty from God...” This is because the purpose of a calling is not individual accomplishment but the “common good, that is, ... the benefit and good estate of mankind. The common good of men stands in this, not only that they live, but that they live well, in righteousness and holiness and true happiness. And for the attainment hereunto, God hath ordained and disposed all callings, and his providence designed persons to bear them.”²
- Speaking of the Puritan Richard Baxter, “Baxter and other Puritans were not motivated by the desire to merit salvation or to be assured of it; rather, they offered ways to live the *Christian life that flowed out of the experience of salvation*.”³
- The question we should start off with is *am I impacting my current job with the gospel of Christ?*
- As we have talked about before in the previous weeks, the job is not what is holy or not, it is the heart that one has as they are working.
- Is the fact that I am saved by God’s grace coming out in the way that I am working at my current job?
- In other words, do people know that you are a believer by your attitude and actions at work?

CHOOSING A JOB

- A logical question which arises from this is *if a job is a job...how should I choose one?* If the work that I do is equal in God’s eyes, does it really matter what work I do?
- First, we should acknowledge that the entire idea of “choosing” a job is largely a modern Western concept. For most of human history, work was something you did to survive, and often there were no options to consider. Most of the time, you did what your father or mother did, and that was the end of the story.⁴
- Just as we discussed last week, we must make sure that we are not making an idol out of a specific job or career path or education that we may need or take.
- It is frighteningly easy to fall into idolatry in the process of choosing a job. We make an idol of choosing a job when we base our criterion for “the right job” on bringing glory and honor to ourselves rather than on bringing honor and glory to God. When we focus on the salary or status a job might bring us, we are in danger of falling into idolatry in our job search.⁵
- To make sure that we are not falling into the sin of idolatry or that of idleness, we must make sure that when choosing a job, we start with God.

²William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* vol. 10, pp. 31–109.

³Joel Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 355.

⁴Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*.

⁵ Ibid

- What we do should not be primarily focused on us, our likes, our desires and our requirements. Rather, we should be looking for something that begins with God’s priorities.
- There are six good questions that we should ask ourselves before taking a new job:⁶
- The first three questions are what we call “must-haves.” They’re the questions to which, as Christians, we really must be able to answer yes for a job opportunity to be a real option for us. They’re the questions that rest at the base of the pyramid. The last three questions are what we call “nice-to-haves.” They’re the questions that belong higher up on the pyramid — the things that are great if you can get them but aren’t necessary in a job.

The Must-Haves

- ***Does this job glorify God?*** Is what I would be doing in this job honoring to the Lord, or does it dishonor and disobey him? Here we have to exclude lines of work that would be inherently sinful. Working as a bartender, a drug runner, or a staff member at an abortion clinic dishonors God and is forbidden for a Christian. Of course, things aren’t always quite that clear! Lines can be blurry, and people’s consciences will feel differently about different lines of work. In general, though, it’s important to start here. We want to do work that glorifies and honors God.
 - **Matthew 22:37–40** “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’”
- ***Does this job permit me to live a godly life?*** In other words, will this job allow me to obey God in every area of my life, or will it mean I have to sacrifice obedience in other areas? Will this job allow me to love my spouse well and parent my children well? Will this job force me to default on another biblical obligation? Will it allow me to obey God by having a rich, textured relationship with a church? If a job necessarily means we’ll have to disobey God in other areas of our lives, then in all likelihood it’s a job we should remove from consideration.
 - **Romans 8:5** “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”
- ***Does this job provide for my needs and allow me to be a blessing to others?*** Scripture commands us to be hard at work in order to provide for ourselves and our families and be generous toward those in need. We place this in the must-haves because it really is not an optional characteristic. Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 5:8**, “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the

⁶ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*.

faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Wow! If you choose a job that uses your gifts but doesn’t pay enough to provide the basics for yourself and your family, the Bible says you’re living in sin. Believe it or not, money is a must-have.

The Nice-to-Haves

- ***Does this job benefit society in some way?*** Almost certainly, if you answered yes to the first three questions, you’re going to answer yes to this one as well. The challenge is that it can be incredibly hard to quantify what qualifies as a benefit to society. We need to be very careful when trying to decide which of two jobs benefits society the most. For example, it can be easy to assume that nonprofit jobs benefit society more than sales jobs. But is that necessarily true?
 - Still, we should at least consider the question. Is this job good? Does it seem beneficial to others, to the people around you? It may be challenging to compare the social benefits of various jobs, but it is still worth considering.
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 “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.”
- ***Does this job take advantage of my gifts and talents?*** Is this something that lines up with the gifts and abilities God has given me? The fact is, not everyone has the freedom to choose the kind of work they’re going to do. Many people simply do what is available to them. If you have the luxury to consider this, though, it is preferable to work in a job you know you will be good at doing. The Bible is full of stories about God equipping people to do specific work. Bezalel was specially gifted to build the tabernacle, Joseph to administrate Pharaoh’s kingdom, Daniel to govern, and David to be a warrior-poet. Sometimes God intends for our jobs to line up perfectly with the gifts and talents he’s given us.
- ***Is this job something I want to do?*** You should have realistic, biblical expectations about the level of satisfaction and fulfillment a job will bring. The world often tells us that finding a job you enjoy is the key aim in life. But the Bible says nothing of the sort; it simply states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23). It’s nice to have a job you really enjoy, and that should be a consideration in choosing a job. At the same time, be careful that “enjoyment” doesn’t become your all-consuming priority. Thinking this way is really just another way of making ourselves the highest priority.
- It is with this way of thinking we can start our job search by saying *what would honor God* instead of *what do I really want to do*.
- If we start with the right questions, we have a much better chance of ending up at the right destination.

- *Of course, there's one other obvious point to keep in mind.* If God doesn't give you an opportunity to do a certain thing, then he's not calling you to do that thing, at least not now. God directs our steps through present opportunities. There is nothing wrong with thinking about options and considering "What ifs." Yet we still have to do what God puts in front of us today. Solomon wrote two nearly identical proverbs about this truth. **Proverbs 12:11** reads, "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense." **Proverbs 28:19** reads, "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies will have their fill of poverty." This is such a practical and important point that Solomon says it twice! Don't chase fantasies. Take advantage of the opportunities you have right now instead of dreaming fancifully about opportunities you may never have.⁷
- A mind-set built on a biblical worldview is the only one that is stable enough and strong enough to hold up the weight of our lives. This reflects the way Jesus taught us to think as well. The greatest commandment (the base of the pyramid of our lives) is to "love the Lord your God." After that? To "love your neighbor as yourself." This means that "self" comes last. Self sits at the top of the pyramid — not because of its importance but because of its weakness. It simply can't bear the weight of a life created to honor God.⁸

The benefit and good of mankind

- Our gifts are not just for ourselves to use and to be edified by. God has given us our gifts also for service to church or society.
- As Perkins argues: "Every particular calling must be practiced in and with the general calling of a Christian. It is not sufficient for a man in the congregation, and in common conversation, to be a Christian, but in his very personal calling, he must show himself to be so. For example, a Magistrate must not only in general be a Christian, as every man is, but he must be a Christian Magistrate, in bearing the sword. Some man will say perchance, 'What, must we not labour in our callings to maintain our families?' I answer, this must be done, but this is not the scope and end of our lives. The true end of our lives is to do service to God, and in service of man: and for a recompense of this service, God sends his blessing on men's travails and allows them to take for their labours."⁹

IS A MINISTRY JOB MORE VALUABLE OR SPIRITUAL IN GOD'S EYES?

- This is a common question and assumption by many people. It is especially common among those who struggle to find any real meaning in what they do for a living.

⁷ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins* vol. 10, pp. 31–109.

- Ultimately, the struggle with thinking your job isn't valuable grows out of a mind-set of idleness about work. If you fail to see God's purposes in what you're doing, it's incredibly easy to look at where he's deployed someone else and think, "I'd rather be doing that."
- On the other hand, if you've made an idol of your work, this kind of question will infuriate you, and you'll respond to it very differently. Instead of feeling like *your* work is valueless, you'll work overtime to explain to yourself why *other people's* work is not as meaningful as your own.
 - We believe both those ways of thinking are wrong. In fact, we think the whole question is wrong, because the whole game of trying to assign relative value to this job or that one is ultimately a fruitless waste of time. The world is far too complicated, and God is far too sovereign for that inherently selfish exercise to be of any use. Think about it. The whole big idea...is that the value of our work isn't finally found at all in the particular thing we do; it's found in the fact that whatever we do, we do it for our King.¹⁰

Ministry Work at the Church

- Within the church there are many things which need to be done.
- We must be careful when we assign more value to one position in the church than to others.
- **1 Corinthians 12:4–7** "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."
- Paul says God has given different gifts to different people so that the whole church will benefit.
- The one who cleans the church, the one who makes the coffee, the one who shovels the walkway, the one who teaches the message, etc. Each of these individuals are serving in the capacity that God has gifted them.
- God has called us to be faithful to the calling that He has given us. Our rewards are based on what we have done with what we have been given, not on what we want to do.
- **We must be careful when serving at the church, or even in our daily jobs.**
- **Firstly, we should never have an *if I can't do it the way I want, then I won't serve* attitude.**
 - While this may seem obvious, this is very common in the church. People have certain talents and gifts that they believe should be used in a specific way, if the church does not do it how they want, they just won't serve.
 - What that does is strip the body of believers from the blessing of that person's gifts. It also denies that person the fruit and rewards of using their talents for the glory of God.

¹⁰ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*.

- **Secondly, we must fight the temptation of *looking over the fence*.**
 - We may desire a different job in the world or a different place to serve in the church. Those desires may be a good thing, but if we are not content with where we are, our hearts will become jealous.
 - If we look at others giftings and long to have what they have, we are no longer useful in the kingdom.
- **Thirdly, serving in a church, just like a job, may come in seasons of life.**
 - Things change, people change, situations change. We must hold all things loosely but labor in them as if they count for eternity...which they do.
 - Our giftings may not change, but how we use them might. This is true for both worldly jobs and for those serving in the church.

CONCLUSION

- So above all else, trust in God as you choose a job. Jobs are temporary; God is eternal. If it looks like you may have to choose a job that isn't perfect for you, praise God and do it with all your heart. One day that job will end. And if it looks like you've landed the job of your dreams, work at it with all your heart. Remember, one day it, too, will end! Either way, you work for Jesus. You can trust he has good reasons for the work he is giving you to do.¹¹

¹¹ Sebastian Traeger and Greg D. Gilbert, *The Gospel at Work*.