Theology of Work: An Online Course Outline for City Vision College

Offered in six week-long sessions as study notes for the course.

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Session One

An Introduction to “Theology of Work”
Outline of this Session

Topics to be Covered

1. The Fallacies of the Current Understanding of “Ministry”

2. The Current Context of the Discussion

3. The Bakke Case Study and Other Case Studies

4. The Need for a New Theological Paradigm
Introductory Definitions:

“Theology”: “The study of God and His ways”---We only know about God through His “mighty acts”, in other words, His “Work” in creation, in redemption and in sustaining---bringing all things into Himself. In other words, a theology does not merely speculate on who God is, but studies the narrative of how God interacts and works among human beings. That work, in some sense, defines who God is, to humans who “work” to understand Him.
Theology has the purpose not just of mystical reflection on who God is, but rather, to achieve “God’s glory (honour and praise) and humankind’s good (the godliness that is true humanness) through every life activity”

(J.I. Packer)

In other words, there is no such thing as unapplied theology!!!!
Questions about Work

1. Whose work matters to God? Only that of professional Christians?
2. Does all work have intrinsic value?
3. Why do we work?
4. Does work have a part to play in our spiritual formation?
5. Does our work have any eternal significance?
6. Is work defined differently from one culture to another?
What do each of these words tell us about attitudes?

Examples: Job, Occupation, Career, Living, Profession, Trade, Labor, Employment, Business.

Examples of Attitudes: Drudgery, Travail, Sweat, Toil, Daily Grind, Duty, Obligation
Definitions of “Work”

Dictionary: “Physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something”

John Stott’s definition: “Energy expended whether manual or mental or both, whether remunerated or not,”

In other works, effort towards accomplishing something whether paid or not.
1. **Meaning:** Because it brings meaning to that portion of a person’s life that occupies most of his or her waking hours. It is central rather than peripheral. We spend far more time at our workplaces than we do in “Church”.

2. **Balance:** Because it is essential for putting “work” in its proper place. Work cannot be our “god” (the center of one’s meaning), nor is it simply a curse as many suppose it to be.

3. **Freedom:** Because work can be a liberation for all Christians in that every Christian lives life in two worlds—-in the world of the Church “gathered” and in the world of the Church “dispersed”
Why a “Theology of Work”, cont’d

4. **Accessibility:** Because all people are called to mission and many of them are placed in “secular” worlds where missionaries and professional Christians have no access.

5. **Preparation:** Because Scripture indicates that our “deeds” (our work) will follow us into eternity where we will have a continuation of work in the new heaven and new earth. Since work is not just an earthly activity, we prepare ourselves for even more noble work in heaven.
So then, Why do We Work?

1. To earn our daily bread and provide for our necessities.
2. To keep us out of trouble, because laziness is the Devil’s playground.
3. To exercise our talents and our gifts, or to acquire some new ones.
4. To make a positive difference in an organization or a community.
5. To serve our neighbor with our earned blessings
6. To socialize ourselves so that we don’t become “incestuous”, or totally self-centered
7. To learn from others and to build relationships
8. To advance the Kingdom of God
9. To assist the poor and needy
So then, Why do We Work, cont’d

10. To serve God and God’s purposes in unfolding the potential of creation.
11. To grow in holiness and Christ-likeness

So which ones of these reasons are operative in your life?

Which ones of these are operative among your friends in their “jobs”?
The Assumptions of this Course: Hopeful Outcomes

1. The understanding that all seven days of the week are holy days, that the goals of Sunday are the same goals of Monday, Tuesday, etc. Indeed worship is a seven–day spiritual commitment.

2. That the whole people of God are empowered for service and ministry in the world (there is no division in vocation between lay and professional Christian workers). Functions may differ, but intent and purpose are the same.

3. That pastoral ministry training needs to be redirected towards equipping all of God’s people for ministry.
The Assumptions of this Course: Hopeful Outcomes, cont’d

3. That the dualism that maintains that “church” work is spiritual and “world” work is secular be rejected, thereby producing changes in work ethics, motivation, witness and meaning.

4. That theological training embrace more integrative resources intended to equip all the people of God, not just “called preachers” in preparation.
The Fallacies of the Current Understanding of Ministry

By dividing Sunday from the rest of the week, secular from sacred, lay from professional, we create the following problems:

1. *Compartmentalization:* We are Christian in Church, but someone else in other contexts.
2. *Reductionism:* We limit God and His work to “within the walls of the Church” activities and fail to see God at work outside.
3. *Depreciation:* We lose the effectiveness of the many lay people in the Church, by confining their “service” to church tasks and responsibilities.
4. *Distortion:* We diminish the Lordship of God in our workaday worlds, and so do not bring to bear our ethics, our compassion, our creativity, our calling to the world outside. By confining “spirituality” to formal religious exercises, we let Satan rule in all the rest.

In the words of Paul Williams, “A faulty theology of vocation and work was a significant contributor to the secularization of Western society. Recovery of a fully biblical theology of vocation and work has the potential to energize a radical new missionary movement in the world today.”
The Current Context of the Discussion

Thankfully, we are being forced back to Biblical understanding of “ministry” by the following realities:

1. There are not nearly enough graduates of Seminaries and Bible Colleges to evangelize the world.

2. Many places in the world no longer welcome “professional ministers”. Indeed, even training centers have changed their nomenclature from “School of World Mission” to “School of Intercultural Studies” due to the hostility shown towards those labeled as missionaries.
3. Ministers are becoming increasingly isolated with in their religious institutions which absorb all their attentions and energy.

4. There is a major cultural backlash against formal religious figures due to scandals and political stereotypes.
5. The Church is no longer the initial “point of encounter” for non-believers.

6. Christian lay people are usually at the forefront of new Christian initiatives, i.e. Gideons, Wycliffe, Youth with a Mission, Campus Crusade, InterVarsity, Navigators and many other initiatives.

7. There is a growing hunger among lay Christians to be a “part of the action”.

8. Sadly, the Church, the ministerial training centers and the traditional denominational programs, are ill equipped to face the challenge.
Dennis Bakke, author of *Joy at Work*, offers his own story as a case study of how God reshaped him both theologically and practically to redesign his company to be a transformative force in the lives of his employees, his clients, and their contexts.

In the course of this class, you will hear certain themes repeated many times. These include:

1. We should find “Joy at Work”
2. Our work should empower those around us
3. Failure is not necessarily final or fruitless.
4. The leader serves his followers
5. The leader shares decision-making with all.
6. There must be heightened “trust” among employees rather than suspicion and mistrust.
7. There is a need for visionaries who think “outside of the box”. These people should be valued rather than seen as a threat.
8. A certain amount of messiness and chaos is permissible because people take priority over program
Christian influence is seen at many multi-faceted levels, not just in evangelizing or inviting people to church. It includes:

A. A spirit of freedom and honesty
B. An encouragement for people to express their gifts and talents in roles that are appropriate
C. A sense of participatory control
D. A role for the business or the institution to be transformative to the communities and the individuals that it services
E. A spirit of joy
F. The fostering of community within the organization
A number of case studies are given for businesses in the Lausanne Document. It might be wise to read these to see the range of ways in which businesses, for example, have taken seriously their mandate for extending the Kingdom of God.

Also read the paper by Young concerning a number of Korean businesses that have taken their missionizing mandate seriously. In the United States, business such as Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A, along with the long history of Kelloggs and the Seventh Day Adventist Church health initiatives are further examples.
1. God wants to use everybody for His mission of redeeming the world.
2. The Bible is filled with stories of lay people who made a difference in their worlds.
3. Most parables and examples that Jesus used to teach about the Kingdom of God involved lay people.
4. God wants to redeem the world in all senses not just those who attend church.
5. We are all called to be agents of reconciliation: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross” (Col. 1:19). We are all called to be agents of reconciliation.
Changing our Attitudes about Work

Jesus himself did God’s work: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work (John 4:34).

Or . . .

My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working. (John 5:17)
What was Jesus’ Work?

Was it to . . .

Reshape Society by Being Salt and Light?
Reconcile People to Himself and Each Other?
Usher in the Kingdom of God?
Die on the Cross, Offering Salvation from Sin?
What Was Jesus’ Work?

It includes all of these tasks. And God invites all of us to announce, proclaim and introduce the mission of God (“missio dei”).

And Jesus invites us to be co-laborers with him in these tasks.
Biblical Words that Express Work

According to the Dictionary of New Testament Theology:

Greek Terms:

Ergazomai (to labor, be active, work, bring about)
Ergon (deed, action, achievement, work, thing, matter)
Ergasia (work, practice, business)
Ergates (someone who is doing something, workman)
Energeia (working, operation, action)
Energeo (to work, be at work, be active, effect something)
Euergesia (kindness, a good deed, well-doing)
Euergeteo (to work, benefit, show kindnesses)
Energetes (benefactor)
Synergos (working together with, a colleague, fellow-worker)
Synergeo (to work together, cooperate, aid)
Problem of inadequate language:

“Occupation” can mean to “occupy” or “fill space”, or it can mean “busy-ness”, or “doing for the sake of doing”---there is no necessary “objective” in “occupation”

“Employment” suggests work, or again, just busy-ness, according to the whims of an employer.

“Career” and “Profession” suggest status rather than servanthood.
The term “Vocation” comes from the Latin “vocare”, “to call”, and suggests that our purposes are bigger than just doing a task, or filling space, or busyness. It suggests that the God who made us (He was fashioning us for His pleasure, His artifact), wants us to be similarly creative. He made us with gifts, and uses families and friends to develop our talents, so that we may work with Him in tandem with His creative process. This we call “ministry” [we will define this term in the third session].

In other words, we are all “called” to work alongside of God for His purposes and our fulfillment.
A Lesson from Genesis 1

When God fashioned the world, He did so in two ways, as understood by the verbs used in Genesis 1:

1. “B̄arā” to form, fashion, create. Usually this word represents the miracle of creating out of nothing (“ex nihilo”)
   A. Gen 1:1, “God created the heaven and the earth” (*the creation of energy and matter*)
   B. Gen 1:21, “God created great whales and every living thing” (*the creation of biological life*)
   C. Gen 1:27, “So God created man in his own image” (*the creation of humankind*)
However, on the other “days” of creation, specialization and diversity was produced out of what already existed. In other words, God’s work both operates in a “vacuum” and also in the context of what already exists. God creates “ex nihilo”, “out of nothing” and out of what is. We, being made in His image, have the similar desire and capacity to create both that which is imagined (first in the mind of God), and which is not yet imagined.
A Sermon–Poem on the “Work” of God

Please read the sermon–poem of James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), given as a resource piece in this session, that so vividly describe one dramatic expression of the “Work of God” at Creation. It is entitled, “The Creation” published in 1922 as a Negro Sermon.

It is to be found in the “Materials” section of this session.
Conclusions

- As God found joy in his creative efforts, we too were intended to find joy in His creation and in the act of creating.
- God created us to be partners with Him in stewarding His creation. Therefore our work is important in God’s Kingdom.
- Every believer is engaged in “sacred” work, or should be.
- By seeking to understand our “calling” and fulfilling it faithfully, believers find purpose and fulfillment in life.
- Humankind will be held accountable for how we steward God’s creation.
Feel free in insert below your questions and feedback on what you have learned in this powerpoint:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.
This is the end of the PowerPoint of Session One