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 Two

“Theological Foundations of Work”
Learning Components for Session 2

This week we will learn about:

1. Theological Foundations of Work: Old Testament
2. The Triune God: “My Father Works and So Do I”
3. The “Creative” and “Redemptive” Mandates
4. The Task of the People of God: Successes and Failures
The Nature of Humankind: “Anthropology”

Last session, we learned that God loves to create. It is part of the nature of God. Humankind was created in the “image of God” ("Imago dei"). "So God created human beings in His own image, in the image of God he created them male and female" (Gen 1:17) This is a spiritual “image” not physical. Humans were created with the same propensities to create and manage that God expresses.
The Nature of Humankind, cont’d

Part of that creation was expressed in the divine “breath of life” where “man” becomes a living soul.

“Then the Lord God had formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7)

As a metaphor, God’s breath teaches us that what animates Him, animates all of us.
The entire Bible is a narrative of God’s work in three major ways:

1. **Creative Work** (Primarily described in the role of God, the Father)
2. **Redemptive Work** (Primarily expressed in the figure of Jesus, the Son)
3. **Sustaining Work** (Primarily seen through the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit)

However, we cannot separate cleanly the functions of the Godhead as all are engaged at all levels seamlessly.
A “Theology of Work” according to R Paul Stevens:

Stevens systematically studies all of the sections of the Bible from the point of view of a “Theology of Work”. (We are unable to cover all of these topics in this, an introductory class). Loosely put, this is his outline:

The Genesis Account:
- a. God is described both at work and rest, i.e. Gen. 2:2-3
- b. Humans are given the mandate to create, i.e. Gen. 1:28-30
- c. Sin corrupts the understanding and role of work, i.e. Gen 3:16-19

The Pentateuch and Historical Books:
- a. Israel is given a missional calling, i.e.
- b. Work is substantially redeemed, i.e. the Jubilee in Leviticus 25, Bezalel and Oholiab, Ex 31:1
A “Theology of Work” according to R Paul Stevens, cont’d:

Judges and the Kings:
  a. Shrewd leadership acts in beneficent ways, Elijah, Josiah, etc.

Wisdom Literature:
  a. The soul of work and the way of wisdom are highlighted, i.e. Prov 6:6-11
  b. The character of work is related to one’s worldview, Ecclesiastes

The Prophetic Books:
  a. The heart of God is shown through work and the workplace, i.e. Daniel and the three Hebrew
A “Theology of Work” according to R Paul Stevens, cont’d

The Gospels:
   a. Describe a Kingdom Worldview and its functioning, i.e. the Beatitudes
   b. Present Jesus and his Work Ethic, John 4:34 and 5:17

Acts:

The Apostolic Letters
   a. Exhibit Why and How to Work i.e. 2 Tim 3:17

Revelation:
   a. Describes the Heavenly Good of Earthly Work, i.e. Rev. 14:13
Work as it was before the Fall

1. We have been made in the image of God (our basic DNA)
   a. We desire to create, just as God rejoiced in the act of creation, “It is good!”
   b. We are made for community, just as God Himself forms community as “is” community
   c. We desire to give, just as God enjoyed giving life and the earth to us
   d. We reach our intended design when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have the “mind of Christ in us”
2. We were Created to Work as Stewards on the Earth

a. God is the landlord; He owns everything (Ps. 8:3–6; 24:1)
b. As God’s stewards, we do not own anything, but have responsibilities
c. As steward, we cannot be exploiters, but caretakers
d. Whatever our calling (or talent), we all work for His pleasure.
e. Some stewards are given more responsibility than others (Matt 25:15–18)
f. We were created to do significant things
g. As stewards we are called to work within four God-given institutions: Before the Fall—work and family; After the Fall—government and church. All are equally important.
The Three Principles in Genesis 3:

1. Adam and Eve were designed by God (in His image. Vs y ‘yatsar’ = formed” or “fashioned” for beauty, utility and function. Our design is our giftedness (enables us to add value to the world), the thing we most love to do, instinctively do, born to do. (Gen 2:7, Ps 139: 13–16, Eph. 2:10)

2. Adam and Eve used their gifts in the garden (Gen. 2:4–25). God brought the animals to Adam for naming (naming = an act of subduing and having dominion.

3. Adam and Eve saw their gifts as purposeful for God
God-ordained Institutions

1. Work (group work is business)
   - To work with and care for the earth and all life forms
   - To be creative like our God
   - To do great things in partnership with God
   - To have joy.

2. Family
   - To be headed by the union of a man and a woman who become one body
   - To procreate
   - To pass on values and faith from generation to generation
   - To have joy
3. **Government**
   - To organize initiatives for the well-being and safety of people
   - To set limits and standards (laws) for people to live and work
   - To maintain justice and extracting revenge by punishing wrong-doers

4. **Church**
   - To spread the good news of the Gospel
   - To serve as the presence of God’s rule on earth
   - To be a light to the world
   - To act as an agent for reconciliation between God and humans
   - To make disciples, resourcing and commissioning to ministry those who are called to work in the other God-ordained institutions
The Creative and the Redemptive Mandates

We are all familiar with the “Redemption” Mandate, that is, to “go into the world and to preach the Gospel to every creature.

But sadly, we ignore the “Creation” Mandate (sometimes called, the “Cultural” Mandate) to:

- Tend the garden (our earth) Gen 2:15
- Name the animals (subdue it for our good and God’s glory) Gen 2:20
- Proliferate (fill it with beautiful and creative life) Gen 1:28

In other words, we help God finish the creation (to give “added value” to it.)
Conclusions:

1. People are essentially built by God to create “value”
2. People are intended to work in and for community with God and other people (“it is not good for man to be alone”—Gen 2:18–19)
3. Work becomes the sphere of activity dedicated to value creation and thus it is fundamentally a spiritual activity or at least should be.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. This is expressed in all areas of life.
The Creation Mandate preceded the Redemption Mandate in the following ways:

1. Your work matters to God ("it was very good"). He wants us, in his image to do "good work"
2. Work is the fundamental human activity along with community, love, sex, family.
3. Work predates worship. Worship is not a separate activity. Indeed work is a way of expressing worshipping
4. The word, liturgy, comes from "liturgia"---the work of the people. Our work is liturgy when understood in the correct way.
In the Garden of Eden, the task was

1. To create, to add value to God’s creation.
2. To never devalue life or resources. There was no negative creation, no violation of proper limits.
3. To enjoy the perfect harmony between creation and distribution. No imbalance.
4. To enjoy the balance of work and rest which were both integral aspects of adding value.
An Exercise in Imagination

Imagine life in the Garden of Eden:

I. A Place of Harmony (*shalom*) found within .

1. Work and Play,
2. Labor and Rest,
3. Nurturing and Creating
4. Separating and Filling
5. Communion and Individuality
II. A Place of Joy: “A deep, abiding inner peace that no circumstances can take away, because we are doing God’s will and aware of God’s presence”

1. Found in “Stewardship” taking personal and corporate responsibility for what happens in and to this world, and the people in it.

2. Found in “Human Dignity” as bearers of God’s image in becoming “decision-making” creatures.

3. Found in the “Joy” of being stewards in our part of God’s creation in a relationship with Him characterized by trust, understanding and love.
So Why am I Missing “Joy at Work”? 

My problem might be in the . . . 

1. **“What”:** Could it be that I am not doing the “good works” that God has prepared for me in advance to do? (Eph. 2:10) 
2. **“How”:** Could it be that my attitude toward my work, my employer, my co-workers, is not appropriate (Phil. 2) 
3. **“Why”:** Could it be that I don’t see any purpose and meaning in the work that I am doing? (Jer 1:5, Rom 8:28)
So “For Whom am I Ultimately Working?”

1. For my own gain?
2. For my family and their future?
3. For my boss?
4. For my board?
5. For my supervisor?
6. For the people who contribute to my salary?
7. For the customers?
8. For the Lord? (Col. 3:23)
The Godhead Mirrored in Human Service

Just as the Godhead, that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, live in joyful harmony with their merged roles of “creator, redeemer, and sustainer”, humans mirror the same gifting or functionality.

Some people are gifted and called to primarily a “creator” role. Others to the “redemptive” tasks of “fixing things” that have gone wrong. While others find their role in “sustaining, nurturing, creatively maintaining”.
The Garden of Eden featured first and foremost the “Creation” role. Only after the Fall, was there a need for the “Redemptive” role, fulfilled in Jesus Christ and extended through the “Body of Christ” and, Only after the Fall, was there the need for the “Sustainer” role, in that the Fall introduced the principle of “atrophy” or entropy (2nd Law of Thermodynamics) that energy and matter wear down or disperse over time. The same principle occurs within a moral paradigm.
A Closing Personal Exercise

1. Look over the list of occupations in the material section of the course. Are there any occupations in this list that dishonor God and are, by nature, unable to fulfill the “Creation Mandate” in that they do not have the potential of “added value” to the character of life? Why not?

2. How do you think about your job? Is it tilted towards the “creative”, the “redemptive” or the “sustainer” purpose?

3. What really motivates you in your job?
Your Questions and Feedback

Feel free in insert below your questions and feedback on what you have learned in this PowerPoint:

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This is the End of the PowerPoint for Session #2