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 Three

- Theology of Work
- Theological Foundations of Work
According to Genesis 3, the following consequences are noted:

1. There is a curse. But it is not that “work” is cursed, but that it is the ground that is cursed.
   - Sometimes work ends in futility
   - Sometimes relationships end in futility

2. The Fall caused four major breaks between us and...
   - God
   - Ourselves
   - Each Other
   - Our World
Work: After the Fall, cont’d

The Breaks Have Caused Much Confusion and Pain in the World (Gen 11:1–9)

- The loss of purpose to steward God’s creation resulting in . . .

  Environmental crises
  Social, economic and justice inequalities
The loss of seeing people as made in God’s image resulting in . . .

- Using our power to control others, rather than serve them
- Creating our self identities based on materialist perceptions
- Being indifferent and disconnected to God
- Hanging on to transactional social relationships (what we get out of the exchange to satisfy human needs) rather than transformational ones (that satisfy all our needs)
Breaks have Caused Much Confusion and Pain in the World (cont’d)

- The Belief that the purpose of business is profits. This single orientation results in... 
  Colonialism
  Unbridled free-market capitalism
  Greed, short-term focus, ethical crises
  Consumption and consumer societies
  The rise of entertainment as moral arbiter
  World-wide economic inequities, violence, jealousy and hate
So What is the Solution?

There is the need to regain our purpose, to strive to rebuild the garden by reconnecting to:

- Ourselves
- Each Other
- Our World
- God
God’s Redemptive Plan in Christ and the Cross

Has the Cross Made a Difference?

Yes!!! It has rectified and reconciled the relationships between . . .

Jew and Greek (ethnic and racial groups)
Slave and Free (social and economic standing)
Male and Female (gender differences)

Gal 3:27–29
God’s Redemptive Plan in Christ and the Cross

Has the Cross Made a Difference?

YES!!! The world is being redeemed from the curse imposed at the Fall (Gal 3:13)

- From the cursed ground
- From the futility of work
- From the troubled relationship between man and woman.
Has the Cross made a Difference?

YES!!! When we walk through the cross, we catch a glimpse at the character of the Kingdom as seen in Isaiah 65:17–25

- Infants live rather than die
- People live much longer
- They own their own houses, and have land to plant food, and have sufficient
They will not build only for others, but also for themselves
They will not work in vain or have children that are sold into captivity
The Strong and the Weak will leave peacefully together
People will not work at cross purposes with the New Creation.
Passing Through the Cross

1. Each person starts as a member of the world kingdom
2. As we come to the cross, we are graciously redeemed
3. As we pass through the cross, we see God’s Kingdom in a new light, how things ought to be.
4. We return into the world, knowing that the curse is removed and that we work and live as lights to the world.
Three Dimensions of Evil

The Fall introduced the active presence of Evil in the world.

Evil is expressed in Scripture in three dimensions:

It is caricatured as: The World
The Flesh
The Devil
Evil in Three Dimensions, cont’d

- The “World” refers to the human-based systems of the world that are corrupted by sin, selfish intent and institutional and corporate abuse. We call this “Systemic Evil”.
The “Flesh” refers to personal choices made that express the human bent to sinning. This we call “Personal Evil”.

The Devil refers to the active role of the demonic, or of Satan himself. This we call “Cosmological Evil”.
Ironically, the Christian Church is all too naïve and piecemeal in that various factions seem to see Evil at only one of these dimension:

1. For instance, “evangelicals” tend to focus on “Personal Evil”, with personal conversion being central, and Christian discipleship pinpointed at the follow-up. Redemptive services such as Rescue Missions and Rehabilitation Houses and tight personal accountability are seen as resources to help individual overcome their evil tendencies.
2. On the other hand, members of conciliar (churches formed out of historical church “Councils”, i.e. Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic) churches, and mainline denominations tend to focus primarily on “Systemic Evil”, believing that institutions, over time, become corrupted and self-serving and that it is the Christian prerogative to confront, challenge and call them back to Christian values and accountability. This is done through direct and indirect influence, political pressure, advocacy and confrontation, the ballot box, and more radical symbolic gestures similar to those exhibited by the Old Testament prophets, i.e. Jer 19, Jer 32, Is 20, Ez 4, Hos 1
3. The third evil is what we call the “Cosmological Evil”. This is the active direct attack of Satan in a very personal and powerful fashion. It is expressed in demonic possession or demonic oppression. Scripture describes Satan as a “roaring lion seeking who he may devour”. Often, it is noted that the Pentecostal churches have a stronger sense of this “evil” more so than other Christian traditions.

- The antidote to the power of demonic evil is exorcism, prayer and fasting, “Joshua” marches, and sometime radical suffering or martyrdom.
The Bible expresses all three of these dimensions in Ephesians 2:1–2:

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins \[**Personal Evil**\], in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world \[**Systemic Evil**\] and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air \[**Cosmological Evil**\], the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (NIV)
Therefore the presence of “Evil” within the work environment is the result of . . .

1. **Personal decisions** that corrupt the quality and nature of work, i.e. sloth (laziness), jealous competition, theft, etc.

2. **Institutional corruption** in a dog–eat–dog environment, bottom line profits over people, unjust wages, etc. Examples: The divorce between profit and “value added”; the divorce between “value added” and fair distribution; the divorce between means and ends.

3. The **active presence of Satan** expressed in evil people or “people of the lie” (Beelzebub). For a good description of this, see Scott Peck’s book entitled, “People of the Lie”.

**Evil in Three Dimensions, cont’d**

We live in the “in-between” stage of history, in a fallen world still under a long process of accountability before God. The Kingdom of God which is here, but “not yet”. Any understanding of “work” that neglects the reality of the curse, is naïve and romanticized. Yet we are called to help redeem “Work” as a promise of future redemption.

Scripture Verse: “In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.” Hebrew 2:8b (NIV)
Examples of the “Fallenness” of Work

1. Conflict in the office, i.e. “to go postal”
2. Oppressive working conditions, i.e. sweat shops, conditions in mines, asbestos poisoning
3. Employer–employee tensions, management/union conflicts
4. Poor quality results, i.e. dangerous children’s toys from China
5. Scams and pyramid schemes. i.e. Madoff
6. Bribery, i.e. Bogdanovich, governor of Illinois
7. Safety failures, i.e. airline maintenance issues
8. Corporate greed, i.e. bank failures
Relationship of Good and Evil

Good and Evil are tangled together now in very complex ways. For example:

1. Profit doesn’t always measure true value
2. The distribution of value and wealth isn’t always fair
3. Maintaining fair economic balance is hard to maintain
4. It is a tough challenge to make what we value equal to what God values in business
Review of the Two Mandates

The Two Mandates Given to Humankind by God

1. The **Creation Mandate**: Gen 1:27-30: Called to have dominion over the earth.

2. The **Redemption Mandate**: The Great Commission of Matt 28:19-20. Called to witness the saving grace of Christ and to work in His Kingdom.
Work, after the Fall and after the Cross suggests the following:

- We are a group of redeemed people
- We who were once “nothing”, are something, a “royal priesthood” a “light to the world”. We are transformed and transformative agents of change.
- The Creation Mandate is still in place and is reaffirmed as our mission
Work after the Fall, cont’d

- We work in a spirit of praise and worship
- We are stewards of God’s creation
- We are given the Great Commission (Redemption Mandate)
- We have been given all the resources we need to do both jobs: the Creation Mandate and the Redemption Mandate
We Need a New Worldview that Drives our Behavior, Not the Culture that Drives Our Behavior

This Worldview needs to be central out of which values, behavior and culture radiate.

This Christian Worldview comes from the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to put on the “Mind of Christ”

In contrast, a Worldview fashioned by the culture is subjectively created by our individual immediate environment and our limited experiences.
We acquire the “mind of Christ” through the following:

1. Listening to what Jesus tells us in words and stories, and living them out, and having them direct our actions, i.e. the Sermon on the Mount, the Olivet Discourse, the Parables, the Post–resurrection instructions to his disciples
Looking at how Jesus and the Father did their work and emulating them in our actions and behavior; for example, seeing how Jesus and God gave their power away to empower others, in a spirit of humility, loving and forgiving, always desiring reconciliation, providing for their needs and resources with gifts and talents, trusting of others, allowing them to fail, etc.
Exercising the Mind of Christ in Us

As Christians, we not only follow Christ but we put on the “mind of Christ.” This means for us to:

1. Love the Father
2. Love and think of others first and build them up
3. Faithfully be stewards of the Father’s calling for our lives
4. Be compassionate
5. Seek justice
Exercising the Mind of Christ

6. Be kind
7. Be merciful
8. Be pure in heart: honest, responsible, of highest integrity, vulnerable and accountable to others
9. Be a peacemaker
10. Be joyful in the Lord, knowing that He loves us, knows us by name and cares for us, as we do with those with whom we work
Understanding the \textit{Missio Dei}

It is important to understand that our work really isn’t our own. The concept of the \textit{missio dei} (Latin for “Mission of God”) suggests that God is doing the mission and invites us to work alongside of him.

In other words . . .

- Our work should never be seen as our own but rather, His.
- We are never working alone. He is our partner.
Our work should characterize God’s values, not just the company’s or the culture’s or our own value, but those of God Himself.

We are, ultimately “servant-leaders”, serving God, but also leading in the sense that we recognize that God has placed us in this job context to be “light”, to be “salt”, to be “change agents” both within the job setting and to the larger community it touches.
Therefore, every Christian is called to be a minister, a member of the “priesthood of all believers” (Martin Luther).

Ministry can be defined in three ways:

“It is the active engagement of Christians as co-regents with God in the life of the community, for the purpose of identifying, introducing, exhibiting and celebrating the Kingdom of God in all manner of spirit-enhancing forms. These forms include those of specific evangelistic intent (the Redemptive mandate), both individual and corporate. For example:
1. Those of “Remedial Intent”: that is, providing care for the needy, restoring the damaged, reconciling the shattered, recycling the discarded, in short, fulfilling the mission of Jesus as expressed in Luke 4:18–19 and of Christians in Matt 25:35–39.

2. This expresses primarily the Redemptive Mandate, though many businesses and organizations also need “fixing up” or healing as suggested here.
Composite Definition of “Ministry”, cont’d

2. Those of Creative Intent: that is, the building of community and institutions (both profit and nonprofit) that seek to better life, or add value to it by embellishing (beautifying) it.

This would be primarily fulfilling the “Creation Mandate”.

3. Those of *Confrontational Intent*: that is discerning the evil forces at work and countering them with spiritual engagement, confrontation, advocacy, intercessory prayer and fasting, spiritual warfare (manifest in ‘signs and wonders’) and incarnational suffering.

This too would primarily fulfill the “Creation Mandate”
There is a danger that in popular language “community” is limited to the world of the “Church”. The Church is often seen as nothing more than a . . .

1. Building or a
2. Legal Institution or a
3. Program

When, what it really is, is the sum total of “people called by God”, to represent Him in the world.
A Children’s Song on the Church

Words and Music by Richard K Avery and Donald S Marsh, 1972

“I am the Church, you are the Church, we are the Church together. All who follow Jesus all around the world, yes, we’re the Church together.”

“The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple; the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.
Children’s Song on the “Church”

“We're many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces, all colors and all ages, too, from all times and places.

“And when the people gather, there's singing and there's praying; there's laughing and there's crying sometimes, all of it saying:

“At Pentecost some people received the Holy Spirit and told the Good News through the world to all who would hear it.”
The Message of the Song

According to the song, the Church is **PEOPLE!!!**

People gathered and dispersed, taking their whole being and their message of Good News wherever they go.

The Church is “Centripetal”: pulling people together and . . .

“Centrifugal” flinging people out into the world as witnesses of His grace
Between Christ’s resurrection and His return, the Church is a unique institution of God’s presence, the “body of Christ”:

1. It is the God’s especially designed collection of people interlocked into relationship, commissioned to proclaim the redemption of the world through Christ.
What is the Role of the Church?

2. It is the “tithe” of creative and redemptive activity intended to infiltrate the unholy with its character of holiness.

3. It is where Christians are equipped to serve God’s Kingdom in the world at large.
Yet, the sad reality is that the Church often fails to engage the world, living contentedly or in hostility in its sub-cultural Christian ghetto.

The Church fails to engage the world because . . .

1. It often regards only its own work as “ministry”

2. It regards value creation in the sphere of economics as merely a neutral or negative activity with no intrinsic or eternal value.
So What’s Wrong with the Church

3. Or it spiritualizes the Bible so that it disconnects from the ordinary world.

4. It lives in fear of the seductive influence of the world on its membership, fearing contamination, or betrayal.

5. Its pastors have limited or no experience in the real world to know how to equip members for engagement.
So What’s Wrong with the World?

On the other hand, the non-church workplace fails to engage the Church because it believes that...

1. Business is morally neutral and not accountable to the Church.
2. Business is too busy or too absorbed to deal with trivial Church pursuits.
3. Business stimulates demand for things of inferior value that might be insignificant to God and higher purposes.
So What’s Wrong with the World

4. Business never gets around to addressing issues of unfair distribution.

5. Business ignores the importance of relationships and is only interested in the bottom line.

6. Business fears the hypocrisy of Churches in that it feels used not for its own value but for the monetary gain that it potentially represent to the Church.
The Hierarchy of “Callings” in the Church

Implicitly there is an unspoken hierarchy of “ministries” in the Church, all which see themselves as serving the Church rather than the world.

For instance, from highest value to lower:

Missionary
Denominational administrator
Pastor
Theological professor
Church staff person
Church volunteers
Secular jobs
The Parable of the Talents

Yet, in the parable of the talents, in Luke 19:11–27, Jesus gives highest priority, not to clergy, but to money investors who used wisely their finances.

They earned added responsibilities, not in the Church, but in administrating cities, certainly a non ecclesiatical reward!
Matthew Highlights Secular Occupations

The Gospel of Matthew highlights Jesus’ use of 23 similes and metaphors to describe the Kingdom of God:

17 of these take place in workplaces
7 speak of farming
6 take place in the home
4 speak of handling money
2 talk of caring for animals, or caring for children, or going to a wedding. The remainder talk about riding a camel, fishing warehousing, weather forecasting, baking bread, or buying pearls

NONE take place in a synagogue or temple!!!
Jesus describes the work of the Spirit as it “blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit”. (John 3:8).

Everyone “born of the Spirit” suggests an unpredictability or spontaneity of the Spirit, not confined in institutions or programs or even the Church.

Ironically, Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus that night was probably in a neutral location away from the Synagogue as it was with the woman at the well in the chapter in John 4.
Repeatedly throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit seems to descend on the most unsuspecting candidates. For instance:

1. Exodus 31:1–2: This was the first time that the Holy Spirit filled anyone in Scripture. Bezalel and Oholiab, temple artisans, were filled . . . “giving Bezalel great wisdom, ability and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master of every craft.”
2. Matthew 1: Christ was born to an unsuspecting young girl, Mary, made pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Ironically, in that same chapter is recorded the genealogy of Jesus, including four women’s names. To mention their names in a genealogy was, in itself, a scandal, given the gender divide during that era of Judaism. But the names themselves compounded the scandal as all four women bore the stigma of violence and social class.
The Spirit Outside of the Box

- Tamar was raped by her father.
- Rahab was a non-Jewish prostitute.
- Ruth was a Moabite widow, a member of a cursed tribe.
- Bathsheba was concubine and co-conspirator with David, to the murder of her husband.

Yet the Holy Spirit appropriated their scandals into the story of redemption!
Most prominent leaders in Scripture neither held clerical (Church) positions nor seemed highly qualified to perform their significant leadership tasks that ultimately transformed or redeemed their worlds around them. For example . . .

Noah, farmer and ship-builder, preserved the human race.

Abraham, agricultural mogul, designated to become the father of many nations.

Moses, murderer, sheepherder, with a speech impediment, delivered his people from slavery, and inculcated the Law into their culture.
Leadership Where You Least Expect It

Joseph, arrogant teenager, slave, accused of moral failure and prisoner, becomes the agent of salvation for his family, Egypt and the surrounded nations. He was also the architect and creator of cities.

David, sheep herder and “runt”–kid in the family. Later, despite being an adulterer and murderer, he served as an effective ruler and “friend of God”

Nehemiah, cupbearer in the enemy royal court, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem

Esther, beauty queen, becomes the deliverer of her people

Daniel, exiled from his own land, works his way up to the position of court administrator, deftly succeeding four tyrant emperors
Leadership Where You Least Expect It

Joseph, carpenter, earthly father of Jesus

Matthew, tax collector, Gospel writer

Luke, medical doctor, Gospel writer

Mark, mission-casualty, but becomes Gospel writer

Peter, fisherman, becomes early proponent of the Gospel

Paul, tentmaker and terrorist, uses his profession to access both rich and poor towards the Gospel
Conclusions:

The narrative of the Bible shows clearly that professional ranking has little to do with God’s calling. He chooses all to be ministers and uses all talents and gifts in vocation to serve as transformative agents of the Kingdom wherever we are placed.

It is our responsibility to learn how to leverage influence and presence to extend the Kingdom of God through whatever our vocation may be.

The Church ought to be the arena of preparation for that calling.
This concludes Session Three