THE CHRISTIAN WORK ETHIC

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God Ordained Work

At the very dawn of history God called man to work. God ordained work before the Fall. Work is not a part of the curse. Adam was commanded to tend the garden before he fell into sin (Genesis 2:15). Labour is a God-given responsibility. Work is not a curse to be avoided, nor is it an undesirable activity only to be pursued when necessary. In the Bible we are commanded to: "be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed..." 2 Timothy 2:15

Heathen Nations Despised Work

Before the coming of Christ, the heathen nations despised physical work and consigned it to slaves. When Christ was born, half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Three-quarters of the population of Athens were slaves. When Luke visited Athens he noted that "all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." Acts 17:21

Jesus Revolutionised Labour

But Jesus revolutionised labour. By taking up the axe, the saw, the hammer and the plane, as a carpenter our Lord imbued labour with a new dignity. Christianity undercut slavery by giving dignity to work. By reforming work Christianity transformed the entire social order. In time this gave birth to the free enterprise system which brought unparalleled prosperity and progress to billions of people. "The hand of the diligent makes one rich." Proverbs 10:4

God is a Worker

God worked to create the world and He works to sustain it. He is also constantly at work fulfilling His purposes in history and in the life of His people (Philippians 2:13). As our Lord Jesus declared "My Father has been working until now and I have been working." John 5:17.

Work is Good

God called His work "good," confirming that work has intrinsic worth. Work is no disgrace – the disgrace is idleness. "He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer." Proverbs 18:9

Work is a Gift

God created man in His image as a worker. Before the Fall, God assigned to men and women the task of caring for His earthly creation and cultivating the garden they lived in (Genesis 1:26-29; 2:8,15). Work is a gift to us. By assigning responsibilities to Adam and Eve, God was making them significant and valuable. By working diligently they reflected God's image. This was the first partnership. Adam and Eve were created as co-workers with God. God planted the garden and man cultivated it. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work. "Therefore... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31. Soli Deo Gloria!

False Assumptions

Unfortunately, many Christians seem to have lost this Christian work ethic. Most people labour under the illusion that God is concerned merely with our purely spiritual pursuits. This misunderstanding is based upon these four false assumptions:

- 1. That God is only interested in people's souls, rather than their bodies.
- 2. The things of eternity are of such overriding importance as to exclude all concern with the things of time.
- 3. Life is divided into the secular and the sacred.
- 4. Becoming a minister, evangelist or missionary is the only way to serve God.

Souls are Attached to Bodies

However, the Bible shows that God is interested in whole people, not in disembodied souls. Many of Amy Carmichael's fellow missionaries in India considered her efforts to build an orphanage and school as actually a "worldly activity" that distracted her from "saving souls," to which she replied: "Souls are more or less firmly attached to bodies."

All of Life is Interconnected

The manufacturer who provides the goods, the transporter who ensures distribution and the shopkeeper who makes the item accessible to us are as vital to our lives as those who provide electricity, plumbing and roadworks. We need the teachers, nurses, policemen, firemen, printers, postmen, computer programmers, businessmen, secretaries, mechanics and other workers.

Work in the Light of Eternity

What goes on in both time and for eternity are equally real and important to our Sovereign God. Being co-labourers with God in caring for His creatures and making His physical, temporal world run smoothly is important, as is co-labouring with Him in Evangelism. Eternity is our ultimate destiny and we will each have to give an account of our lives before Almighty God. In the light of eternity we need to work diligently on earth. If God has designed you to be an architect, a carpenter or a builder, then build buildings to the glory of God. The quality of our daily work should witness to our faith in Christ. As Martin Luther declared: "A dairymaid can milk cows to the glory of God."

God Has Entrusted Each of Us with Gifts with Which to Serve

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." Romans 12:4-13

Vocation

One of the vital solutions to the corruption, entitlement and exploitation all too prevalent today can be found in the Reformation doctrine of vocation. Vocation is the Theology of the Christian life. It provides the blueprint for how Christians are to live in the world and to influence our culture. Vocation provides a vital key to effective parenting, strong, healthy marriages and a vibrant economy. Vocation is not the passivity of vacation. Vocation involves activity, focus and energy in a God given purpose and direction. "But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk and

so I ordain in all the churches." 1 Corinthians 7:17. God has distributed gifts and talents, duties and responsibilities to each of us.

Interdependence

Dr. Martin Luther taught that God created us to be dependent on others. We depend on farmers, mechanics, suppliers, parents, teachers and so many others. And just as God is working through the vocation of others to bless you, He is also working through you to bless others. Your vocation is far more than the work that you do. Every Christian has multiple vocations. Luther described these as four estates, or spheres of life, that God has established: the family/or household; the church, the state and the common order of Christian missions.

"Give us This Day our Daily Bread"

God distributes His gifts by means of ordinary people exercising their talents and responsibilities, which themselves are gifts of God. God gives us our daily bread through the vocations of the farmer, the miller and the baker. God looms behind everyone who provides us with the goods and services that we need. God made the farmers, the **seed**, the **soil** and the **sun**. God makes the rain to fall.

Blessing our Neighbours

God heals us by means of healthy food, pure water, exercise, doctors, nurses and other medical and nutritional professionals. He makes our lives easier by means of inventors, scientists and engineers. God inspires beauty by means of artists, authors and musicians. He provides us clothing, shelter and other things we need by means of seamstresses, tailors, shoemakers, factory workers, construction contractors, bricklayers, plumbers and electricians.

Family Relationships

Your family relationships are also your calling. God established marriage. Being a husband, or a wife, is a vocation. Being a parent, a father or a mother, is a vocation. So too is being a son or daughter. You are a brother, or sister, a nephew, or uncle, a grandmother, or grandfather. Each person holds multiple vocations, even within one family. A woman may be the wife of her husband, the mother of her children, the daughter of her mother and the sister of her brother and sister.

Cultural Mandate

We also have vocations in our community. Each one of us was born into a particular time and place in society. The cultural context, community and nation in which we find ourselves is also part of the vocation God has assigned to us.

Roman Catholic Spirituality

In stressing the spiritual significance of all areas of life, Dr. Martin Luther challenged the entire Roman Catholic practice of reserving the terms of vocation and calling for religious orders. If you, as a catholic, were really serious about God, you were expected to become a priest, a monk or a nun. To enter into these spiritual offices you were required to make a vow of *celibacy* – thereby rejecting marriage and parenthood. You were also expected to take a vow of *poverty* – thereby rejecting full participation in the economic life of the workplace. Your vow of *obedience* would substitute the authority of the Roman Catholic system instead of that of God's Law.

Protestant Spirituality

However, the Reformers insisted that Biblically the Christian life requires, not withdrawal from the world, but **engagement** in the world. We are called to live out our Christian Faith, not only in "church work", but in our **work ethic**. In practice this meant that the Reformers moved spiritual disciplines out of the

monastery into the market place of **everyday life**. The ideal of celibacy was replaced with **faithfulness in marriage** and **parenthood**. The monastic goal of poverty was replaced with the **Biblical work ethic**, principles of **hard work**, **ingenuity** and **thrift**. Obedience to the religious order was replaced with **obedience to God's Law**. Even more importantly, prayer, worship and service was moved into the family and the workplace, society and the environment.

Forgotten and Forsaken

Unfortunately, many so called Protestants today have forgotten this vital Protestant doctrine of vocation. Today numerous ostensibly Protestant Christians have slipped into the assumption that serving God is only a matter of "church work." Some Christians have become so preoccupied with "spiritual work" that they have allowed their marriages to fall apart and they have failed to invest quality time in discipling their children.

Loving God and our Neighbour

The church is the place where Christians are to meet each week, to feed on God's Word, receive Biblical direction, seek the mercy and forgiveness of Christ and to grow in knowledge and Faith. Then we are to go into our vocations, to our families, work places and communities to apply the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life and to bear much fruit. The true purpose of every vocation should be to love God, love our neighbour and care for God's Creation. Jesus taught that whatever you did unto one of the least of these My brethren, you did it unto Me. Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and those imprisoned for the Faith, are just some of the ways that we show our love for Christ.

Serving our Neighbour

Every vocation has its neighbours and creatures for us to serve. In a church fellowship, or congregation, we are called to love and serve one another. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives "As Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Wives are to submit to their husbands as the Church should submit to Christ. Both the wife and the husband are called to sacrifice themselves for each other. We have pets to care for and love and wild and domestic animals in our environment to protect and care for. In the work place, we have duties and supervisors, managers and leaders to respect and follow their instructions and directions.

A Priestly Sacrifice

Vocation has to do with the priesthood of all believers. A priest performs a sacrifice. We no longer need sacrifices for our sins. Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He has offered Himself up as our sacrifice - once for all. However, in the light of Christ's sacrifice, we are called to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1

A Living Sacrifice

Members of any congregation are called to love and serve one another. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents love and serve their children. Children are to love and serve their parents, their brothers and sisters. Rulers are to love and serve their subjects, citizens and communities. Workers are to love and serve their employer and their customers. Loving and serving involves an act of self-denial for the sake of somebody else. Vocation focuses on self-sacrifice. We are to love and serve God's Creation by means of our vocation.

Godly Authority

Certain vocations exercise authority, but authority must not be abused. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility. Jesus taught that the rulers of the Gentiles laud it over them and called

themselves benefactors. "But it shall **not** be so amongst you. Whoever would be great among you must be your servant ..." Mark 10:42-45

Sins Against Vocation

However, instead of serving others we all too often demand to be served. Instead of loving our neighbour, we all too often use and abuse our neighbour for selfish reasons. Mothers are called to love and serve their children, not to abort them. Doctors are called to heal their patients, not to kill them. Leaders are called to love and serve their people, not to exploit, extort or tyrannise them.

Ignoring our Duties

Unfortunately, there is a tremendous tendency to seek out extraordinary spectacles at the expense of performing our daily duties. We look for miracles, mountain top experiences and spectacular events. Meanwhile the spiritual significance of everyday life can easily be overlooked. "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." Galatians 6:9

Our Daily Altar

When we understand the Protestant work ethic and the doctrine of vocation, then we see that the kitchen table, the office desk, the computer screen, the shop counter, the printer and the garden can be altars on which we exercise our royal priesthood, offering up a living sacrifice to our God. Punctuality and going the second mile brings blessings. Mary was first to see the Risen Lord. Thomas missed the Lord's appearance by not being in the Upper Room.

School of Discipleship

Martin Luther taught that marriage is the best School of Discipleship. Dr. Luther said that he learned more about Christian discipleship in one year of marriage than from 10 years in the monastery. He taught that dairymaids can milk cows to the Glory of God. Our vocation is where our sanctification happens and where effective evangelism can take place. When we have a strong sense of our vocation as a calling and responsibility before God then it will change the **quality** of everything we do. "Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men." Colossians 3:23. "Be sure to finish the task given to you in the Lord's service." Colossians 4:17.

What our Nation Needs

This is what our country needs: a Protestant work ethic and Christians determined to fulfil their vocation wholeheartedly - as a means of worshipping God, loving our neighbour, caring for God's Creation and protecting God's creatures. Then we will not be using people and loving things, but we will be using things in order to express our love for God. Instead of being self-centred we will be Christ-centered. We will realise that nothing less than our very best is good enough for our Creator God and eternal Redeemer.

Work Ethic

To whom much is given, much is required.

To whom much more is given, much more is required.

Freely you have received, freely freely give.

Those who have been given a trust must prove trustworthy.

Faithfulness is required of the Faithful.

A Personal Challenge

Is your conscience captive to the Word of God? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

What are you doing to resist the New Age/New World Order? What are you doing to fulfil the Great Commission? What are you doing to make a positive difference? What are you doing to change your world?

Be Even More Diligent in Your Calling

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love... Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble." 2 Peter 1:5-7,10

For Fulfilment of the Great Commission

Good work well done is an essential part of fulfilling the Great Commission. God has commanded all Christians to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Our witness is not only to be carried out by our talk, but also by our **walk**. It is not only what we say that proclaims our faith - it is what we **do**. Our words mean nothing if they are not backed up by our **work** (James 2:14-26).

Our Greatest Priority

The great commandments of Christ are that we are to love God and that we are to love God's creatures (Mark 12:30-31). One of the ways we show love for God is by caring for His creation - reflecting the image of God in useful work. One of the primary ways we show love for God's creatures is by doing productive work which contributes to their wellbeing.

Walk the Talk

One of the very best sermon illustrations is the daily testimony of a Christian doing his work with integrity and diligence. When others see our concern for both people and products we earn their respect and their interest in what motivates us.

Dignity and Destiny

For most Christians our workplace is our main mission field. Our job is not secondary to the making of friends and proclaiming the Gospel. In fact, completing our "secular" work in a God-honouring way is one of the most powerful demonstrations of the Gospel. Through meaningful work we can reveal our love for God, His Word and His creatures by: serving others, meeting our own needs, meeting our family's needs and earning enough money to be generous to others, practice hospitality and support our local churches, charities and missions. As John Wesley taught: "religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality." When we realise that God has placed us in our vocation to co-labour with Him, contributing to His creation, it leads to a sense of dignity and destiny in our work.

Faithful and Fruitful

The Scripture declares that an industrious housewife and hard-working mother pleases the Lord and delights her husband (Proverbs 31:10-31). A man who fails to provide for his family... "has denied the Faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Timothy 5:8. Christians are commanded to learn to devote themselves "to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful." Titus 3:14

What is the Testimony of your Work?

In the parable of the talents, Jesus teaches us to serve Him faithfully with the talents He has entrusted into our care (Matthew 25:14-30). Christians must work in order to give to others: "Let him who stole,

steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." Ephesians 4:28. Being a faithful worker is a powerful testimony to outsiders: "...aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly towards those who are outside and that you may lack nothing." 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Laziness is Destructive

The Scriptures are scathing in recording God's denunciation of laziness: "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - so shall your poverty come on you like a robber..." Proverbs 6:6-11

"Because of laziness the building decays and through idleness of hands the house leaks." Thessalonians 10:18

"Why have you been standing here idle all day?" Matthew 20:6

The Disgrace of Laziness

It is a disgrace to be lazy (Proverbs 10:5). Lazy people always find excuses not to work (Proverbs 15:19; 26:13 16). Those who love sleep will grow poor (Proverbs 19:15; 20:13). "I went by the field of the slothful, by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles, its stone wall was broken down... a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come like a prowler..." Proverbs 24:30-34

We are Commanded to be Diligent

Therefore, the Apostle Paul taught: "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you... but worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you... to make ourselves an example... We command you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10

Work in the Light of Eternity

On the Day of Judgement "each one's work will become manifest" 1 Corinthians 3:13. Jesus taught that "whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant." Matthew 20:26.

The Economic Fruit of Faith

Dr. James Kennedy in "What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?" made the following observations on the role of faith in economics: "Why has America and, for the most part, the West, enjoyed such material abundance? Why have some of the Asian countries also prospered after they adopted economic ideas from the West? If you look at the poor nations around the world, you will find that what the Bible says is true: they are what they are because of what they believe. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he' (Proverbs 23:7). Look at India, a nation that has stagnated in its poverty for several millenia. Why? Because of what its people believe. Its Hindu religion teaches that there is no reality to matter. The external, visible world is unreal; therefore, you do not try to correct an unreal world; you try to escape from it. Consequently, progress dies. The belief in reincarnation has also had a devastating effect on the nation's prosperity. Or consider North Africa, which for centuries has been sunk in poverty, superstition and ignorance. Why? Because of what its people believe. The fatalism of Islam has kept the Muslims from progress because human initiative can accomplish absolutely nothing and all that is Allah has fated; therefore they are left in perpetual stagnation. Or consider the many nations of the East

(prior to Western influence), whose religion is Buddhism, which teaches that life is irreparably evil and cannot be changed. Man's only hope is to rid himself of all desire for any improvement in this life. The goal is not a more abundant life, but its extinction - absorption into the world-soul - and so the very roots of social amelioration are severed. Not so with the nations that have had a Christian base, especially when they have applied a more Biblical interpretation of economics."

Foundations for Sound Economic Policy

Many would be surprised to learn that there are over 700 references to money in the Bible. Nearly two-thirds of the recorded parables of Christ deal with the use and handling of money. In the Ten Commandments God laid the foundation for all good economics: private ownership of property. The right to life, liberty and property and the importance of the family unit as the basic building block of society are all spelled out in Exodus 20. The commandments, "Thou shalt not steal... Thou shalt not covet..." have inspired millions of believers to work hard, show up on time and to be honest. The free enterprise system has generated the highest standards of living on the face of the earth since the creation of the world.

Conversion Brings Transformation

Many Christians can testify to the fact that when they became Christians they began to prosper. Firstly, this is because they stopped wasting their money on frivolous fashions, alcohol, gambling, cigarettes, drugs, prostitutes, pornography or other vices. (1 Peter 4:2-3)

Secondly, they began to have a purpose for their lives and work. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Colossians 3:17

Thirdly, Christians have new wisdom, inspiration and strength from God (James 1:5, Philippians 4:13).

Fourthly, Christians are freed from many of the anxieties, worries and fears which so frustrate and limit one (Philippians 4:6).

The Effects of Sin on Work

When man rebelled against God, the ground that man had to cultivate was cursed, but the task of cultivating it was not a punishment (Genesis 3:14-19). Granting sinful man the responsibility to undertake some constructive work is actually a gift of grace. The devil finds evil work for idle hands, so productive employment is actually a protection from falling into even worse sins.

Inaction, Idleness and Indolence

Inaction speaks louder than words. Idleness is an enemy of the soul. Our idle days are Satan's busy days. As C.H. Spurgeon said: "Some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations come to the idle."

The Curse of Sin

Sin, however, made work harder. The burdensomeness of work is a result of the Fall. The sinfulness of man leads to the deception, dishonesties and degeneration which affect the business world. People lie, cheat, steal, overcharge, waste valuable time and money, engage in corruption and produce shoddy workmanship. Often Christians who sincerely want to work with integrity are forced to deal with unethical suppliers. Even Christians of integrity often need to battle their own sinful temptations to laziness, stubbornness, selfish ambition or pride.

Idolatry in the Workplace

Many in our culture have made an idol out of their work. Instead of seeking to glorify God by colabouring with Him and serving His creatures, many workaholics and overly-ambitious individuals try to climb the corporate ladder at any cost. Instead of finding their worth as children of the Living God they seek to prove their worth by financial prosperity, or career success, academic degrees or promotions.

True and False Success

However, success in life is measured by how faithfully we love God, our family, our neighbours and God's creatures - not by work status. God rewards faithfulness. God is more interested in the heart motivations, attitudes and integrity of a person than in his public prestige and position. While careful planning, efficiency and hard work are commendable, nothing justifies unethical work practices, damaging God's creation, or destroying lives and property. "Success" at any price is a sure recipe for failure. A man whose children are on drugs, whose marriage is on the rocks and whose employees despise his lack of morals, is a failure in God's eyes, even if he is "successful" in business. "For what advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world and is himself destroyed or lost?" Luke 9:25

To the Glory of God

It would be worthwhile for each of us prayerfully to examine our motives for working. Sinful motivations and attitudes would include: a lust for wealth, status, prestige, or power, to avoid responsibilities at home, or just to collect a pay cheque without due concern for the quality of our work. Selfish ambition, greed or careless indolence are equally wicked in the sight of God. On the other hand, God-honouring motives include: the desire to meet the needs of God's creatures to serve and honour Christ and to glorify our Creator.

There is No Substitute for Hard Work

Our responsibility is to do our work to the very best of our ability, out of love for Christ and to the Glory of God. As the great inventor Thomas Edison (who invented the light bulb and much else) said: "There is no substitute for hard work... I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work."

Devotion to Duty, Dedication and Diligence

A dictionary is the only place where you will find success before work. An idle life and a holy heart are a contradiction in terms. Salvation is a helmet - not a nightcap. Our work should be an overflow of our devotion to God.

Firm Foundations

The foundations for a truly free and prosperous nation can only be laid in characters, minds and lives changed by the grace of God. In order to be successful, a society needs to be made up of honest citizens who will not steal; diligent people who are hardworking and productive; compassionate families who are concerned for their neighbours and responsible workers who will fulfil their obligations and be faithful stewards of public resources.

The Basic Building Blocks of Society

For nations to be strong their families need to be strong. For governments to be good their citizens need to be good. Those who cannot control themselves are not capable of ruling over a city (Proverbs 16:32). Those who cannot manage their household well are not qualified to lead others (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

For this reason, the message of "repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached... to all nations." Luke 24:47

The Church is to "make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20.

Each one of us needs to: "...be transformed by the renewing of your mind; that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Romans 12:2

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