

**REFORMED
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

***MORAL ISSUES
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE***

Work

Committee on Public Morals

Work

Leaders' Notes

1. Work - who commands it?

Who says we are to work? (Gen.1:28; Ex.20:8-10; Eph.4:28; 1Thess.4:11; 2Thess.3:10)
God commands us to work - a command given both at creation and at Sinai.

When was the command given?

The command was given before the man sinned, so work is *not* a punishment for sin.

In whom do we find a perfect example of work? (Ex.20:11; John 5:17)

God the Father and Jesus Christ. To be a diligent worker is part of godliness - being like God.

How did the entrance of sin into the world affect man and his work?

(Gen.3:17; Prov.6:6-11)

The entrance of sin brought pain, hardship and frustration into work and has given us all a tendency to laziness. It has not destroyed the fruit of our work for we receive our food from it.

2. Work - what kind?

List the forms of employment that are always wrong for the Christian.

Gambling, prostitution or the liquor trade are always inappropriate for a Christian. Thought might be given to whether a Christian should be a professional jockey, boxer, racing driver (in view of high risk to life of the last two) or film actor.

Is academic work more pleasing to God than manual work? - Explain.

(Gen.2:15; Mark 6:3; John 13:5; 1Thess.2:9)

Adam had to use his mind to categorise and name the animals, but he also worked as a common gardener in Eden. Prof. John Murray states, "Adam's labour consisted in dressing the garden and keeping it. The fact that this is so informs us that it was highly worthy of man's dignity as created after the divine image, to be employed in so mundane a task as that of a gardener. This is an eloquent warning against the impiety (notice what he calls it) of despising and counting unworthy of our dignity the tasks we call menial."

Our Lord working as a carpenter, his performing of one of the duties of the lowest slave in the house (John 13:5) and Paul's 'toil and hardship' at tent-making to provide for himself and his companions also illustrate the dignity of manual work. See how in 1Thess. 2:9 the apostle brings together 'labouring night and day' with 'holy and blameless'.

Is some work 'secular' and some 'sacred'? Explain. (1Cor.10:31; Eph.6:5-7; Col.3:23-24)

Some count the work of pastors, elders, missionaries and tasks done in the congregation and on Go Teams as 'spiritual' whilst other work is 'secular'. If any work could be termed 'secular' it would be that of a slave, yet Paul says to slaves in Col. 3:24, "...you serve the Lord Christ". Every task we engage in is to be work done for God and His glory.

3. Work - why do it?

2

Motive 1 (1Thess.4:11b,12b; 2Thess.3:10)

These verses clearly teach that we are to work to meet our physical and material needs without being dependent on others. We are to pray for our daily bread ('Give us day by day our daily bread'). The person who works for his bread and doesn't pray is a practical atheist. On the other hand, the person who prays and doesn't use God's appointed means (work) is presuming that God will provide when He gives him no grounds for that assumption. He who looks to God in prayer for his daily food and works diligently to earn that which will purchase it is an intelligent Christian.

Motive 2 (1Tim.5:3,8)

1Tim.5:3,8 teach that we are to work to supply the needs of our immediate relatives where necessary. In a day and in a culture where there was no social security, widows and orphans in the church who had relatives were to be provided for by those relatives so as not to be a drain on the church's fund for the poor. Those professing Christians who fail to make such provision deny the faith, which is a faith of compassion and concern. Paul actually calls such people 'worse than unbelievers', because many unbelievers care for immediate relatives.

Motive 3 (Eph.4:28; Gal.6:6-10)

Eph. 4:28 says to these recent converts that honest arduous toil must replace stealing to the end that they would have sufficient to relieve the need of God's people. Gal. 6:6 gives as a motive for work, having enough to provide for those who instruct them in the ways of God. Verse 10 speaks of doing good to everyone, especially, but not exclusively to those who are fellow Christians. In the context of the verse, doing good includes material help. Paul was an example in this regard as Acts 20:34 states. He laboured not only to supply his own needs but also those of his companions.

Motive 4 (2Thess.3:11; 1Tim.5:13)

These verses show that work can keep us from the temptations that come with idleness. The devil finds something for idle hands to do and that something is often wrong and harmful. 2Thess.3:11 refers to Christians whose hands are idle but whose tongues are active. In 1Tim.5:11 the way for young widows to avoid the habit of gossiping that comes with idleness is to heed the injunction of verse 14. They are to keep themselves busy. Idleness isn't only disobedience of the command to work but leaves the Christian open to the temptation of wasting time, interfering in other peoples' business and gossiping.

You might also discuss the opposite extreme of being a workaholic. What are the dangers inherent in that? How is Luke 10:41-42 relevant here?

Motive 5 (Phil.2:14-15; 1Thess.4:11b,12a; 1Tim.5:13,14)

All these verses stress that work is a way of maintaining a credible witness before an unbelieving world. Discuss how a failure to work presents a bad witness and the negative and positive results referred to in the texts.

Why is it wrong to work for purely materialistic reasons?

3

(Heb.13:5; 1Tim.6:9-10; Titus 1:7; Matt.6:19-21,24)

These verses are self-explanatory. A material motive for working is to be present but should not exclude or dominate the other motives outlined above. To work solely for money or things amounts to covetousness, which is idolatry. If after earning enough to cater for our own needs we are not looking out for our needy relatives and fellow believers who require our help and if we are not giving support to our pastor and mission work, then we are disobeying these clear directives from God's Word. We are to give time to gather and accumulate that which will be of value in the world to come.

Is it wrong to have ambition, to want to get to the top in our profession?

(Prov.12:24)

Prov.12:24 doesn't condemn ambition but stresses that it is the diligent and conscientious who are set over others. Christians are needed at the top where they can have a wider influence. We need Christian police inspectors, Christian professors in our universities, Christian chairmen at the head of international companies etc. If one has the gifts to reach the top then go for it. But care has to be taken not to seek advancement solely for status, power or a high standard of living. The path to the top is often strewn with many pitfalls. It is possible for the pressure of work to intrude on one's walk with God and have an adverse effect on family life.

Instead of suppressing the ambition of James and John, what did Jesus do?

(Matt.20:21-28)

These verses show that James and John were ambitious. In verse 26 Jesus redirected that ambition. In essence He said, "Be great if you want to be, at serving". Isn't that how Christ Himself excelled? (verse 28)

In our work life, as in other areas, what must we be careful to avoid?

(Rom.12:2)

We must not be pressurised into viewing work and doing our work as the world does. It is only as we follow the directions of Scripture that we will avoid letting the world squeeze us into its mould.

4. Work - how can we discover what God wants us to do?

4

What can we learn from God's providence?

(Rom.12:6ff; Eph.2:10; 2 Peter 4:10; Rom.8:28)

Rom.8:28 makes it clear that God is in control of the circumstances of our lives to bring about His own purpose. Does this mean that we can afford to be less than the best that we can be in whatever profession or occupation we intend to enter? Does that excuse us from preparing well for interview? Having done our best, however, we need to remember that God is in control so that it is in His will whether or not we get that particular position.

You might want to discuss how God, in His providence, can use unemployment, failure of job applications, having to take for a time a job that is less than satisfying, to shape and mould our character and to prepare us for the position He wants us to fill.

Rom.12:6ff and Eph.2:10 teach us that we all have a gift or gifts. We need to identify what we are good at.

Who has promised to guide us? (Isaiah 30:20b,21)

God Himself has promised to direct all our ways.

What other sources of help do we have? (Prov.12:15)

Teachers, parents and others may be able to help us to identify our gifts.

When looking for a job, what should our priority be? (Is.6:8, Matt.20:25-28)

The good of others. In Is.6:8, the prophet saw the need and wanted to meet it. In Matt.20:25-28, Jesus stressed the importance of serving others for their good.

Even if we are in management, we must seek the good of those under us.

Discuss the vocations which are aimed at the good of others. You might want to discuss the work of the pastoral ministry at this point.

Does our own preference come into it at all? (1Tim.3:1)

1Tim.3:1 indicates that it does. If God has planned that we follow a certain profession, will He not give us the desire for it? However, a desire can be born of wrong motives. One may desire to be a teacher for the standing it gives in the community or wish to be a pastor because of the love of being in the public eye. Nevertheless, if desire is prompted by the right motive, then, taken in conjunction with our gifts and the needs of others, it can point us in the direction of the work which God wants us to do.

Where do circumstances come in? (Acts 16:6; Jonah 1:3)

5

In Acts 16:6, Paul wanted to go in a certain direction, only to find that the door was shut. Similarly, having to care for an elderly parent may prevent us being able to take a job far from home. Asthma could stand in the way of someone being a PE teacher.

Circumstances, however, must be carefully assessed, for they are not always a reliable guide. In Jonah 1:3 the prophet, when running away, found a ship going to Tarshish and he had the right fare. That could have been taken that he was to go to Tarshish, when in fact it wasn't. A Christian may believe that God has called him to overseas mission work, but his parents are opposed to him going. That need not be a signal that he is not to go, but a means of demonstrating his love for Christ above that of his father and mother. Conversely, he may apply for the mission field and then find that circumstances clearly point to him not going eg if his father dies suddenly and he has to remain at home to care for his elderly mother.

What principle should we follow when leaving one job for another? (1Cor.7:20-21)

According to 1Cor.7:20-21, the slave was to be content to remain a slave, but if he could gain his freedom then he was to take his opportunity. We are not to flit about from job to job with the excuse that we are looking for more meaningful employment, when in fact we are just trying to escape the humdrum of work; but if God, in His providence, presents an opening where gifts can be better used and the change doesn't result in neglect of duty, then the opportunity should be seized.

5. Work - what about the boss?

What attitude should we show to those in authority over us in the workplace?

(i) (1Tim.6:1) This verse shows that whether the master is a believer or not he is to be shown respect and esteem because of his position.

Why this attitude?

For the honour of God and His truth (1Tim.6:1b) The Christian slaves whom Paul was addressing were to set aside their own feelings, desires and sense of injustice. As Christians they are called by God's name and are therefore to give respect to their masters so that the divine Name will not be slandered. Christians are to regard their foreman, shop manager, ward sister, college lecturer, professor etc with respect so that they are given no reason to say "You are no different from unbelievers who talk back to their boss, run him down, or show him contempt".

(ii) Col.3:22, Titus 2:9

What are we to do?

These verses indicate that full obedience is to be given to our superiors in everything, except, of course, when they tell us to do something which violates God's law.

What are we not to do?

6

Titus 2:9 says we are not to show resentment at our wages by stealing, nor are we to talk back, argue about how the job should be done or complain at having to do it. We are to behave in such a way that our superiors will feel that there isn't anyone that they can trust more than Christians to do the job.

Why this attitude?

Titus 2:10 says that we are to do this to make the gospel attractive, not only by what we say but by the way we live. In fact, in v.14 Paul says that the reason Christ died is that he might have a people eager to do what is good.

In the light of this biblical command you might want to discuss whether or not it is right for Christians to take strike action at the drop of a hat or go to all kinds of lengths to neutralise the commands of their boss.

(iii) 1Peter 2:18

What attitude are we to show?

This verse instructs us to show forbearance in the face of unreasonable and unjust behaviour from our superiors. These Christian slaves had no option but to put up with harsh treatment by their masters. We, on the other hand, may have the option of changing jobs. While that may be the easiest thing to do, it may not be God's will and we could miss some vital lessons for our spiritual development.

Why this attitude?

The Christian is to do his/her work primarily to God irrespective of the worthiness or otherwise of the earthly superior. V.20-23 emphasise that Christ is our example. Notice how He behaved. We are to follow Him. This sounds strange in a day when people everywhere are clamouring for their rights. However, if we are put in a situation where we suffer for doing what is right, it is our calling to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

6. Work - how should it be done?

Who are we really working for? (Eph.6:6)

Eph.6:6 says that we are the servants of Christ doing the will of God. Col.2:23 makes the same point. That means that the most menial task is done as service to the Lord.

Discuss: Can any job be humdrum or insignificant if it is done as service to the Lord? How can we do our work each day, conscious that we are not doing it primarily for our boss, but for the Lord? A housewife had this notice placed over her kitchen sink: "Divine service rendered here three times daily."

Of whom should we be conscious as we do our work? (Eph.6:7)

7

Eph.6:7 makes it clear that we are not to do our work only when the foreman or the manager is watching. If we do, it means we will only produce when under inspection. We don't shape up until the ward sister, the teacher or the boss arrives. It also means that we will only produce in outward action and not necessarily have our hearts in what we are doing. However, when we do our work conscious that Christ's eye is on us and wanting to please Him, we will work when no human is watching and will do it with all our might.

Under what shadow are we to do all our work? (Col.3:23-25)

The shadow of the throne of judgement. Col.3:23-25 points to a great accounting day. The work we do today will meet us at the last day. God's judgement will not simply extend to our work and witness in the church, but to our daily labour in the work place. If we knew we were to die tomorrow, would we not make sure that all is properly done and left in its proper shape for the person who will take over from us? The fact that we are going to give an account to God one day, exactly when we do not know, should govern the way we do our work. Col.3:24 speaks of a reward from the Lord. Surely the greatest motivation for us to be faithful and diligent workers is the awareness that we will one day give an account as to why and how we did our work.

Ways in which we should do our work

- **Cheerfully** (without grumbling and complaining)
- **Consistently** (not well done most days and poorly done on others)
- **Punctually** (At work on time, not procrastinating)
- **Neatly** (If it's writing an essay, keeping books, carpentry or painting etc)
- **Constantly** (not in fits and starts)
- **Accurately** (if you are a treasurer or a reporter)

Tease out any other ways the students can think of.

Work

"I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go." This is how many people view work. It must be done to pay the bills and keep the wolf from the door. Some play the lottery every week in the hope that by winning they will never have to do another day's work for the rest of their lives. There is dignity in work, however, and a satisfaction which comes from a job well done; but by themselves these do not provide the main reason for work.

1. Work - who commands it?

Who says we are to work?

(See Gen.1:28; Ex.20:8-10; Eph.4:28; 1Thess.4:11; 2Thess.3:10)

When was the command given?

Before man sinned

After man sinned

In whom do we find a perfect example of a worker?

(See Ex.20:11; John 5:17)

How did the entrance of sin into the world affect man and his work?

(See Gen.3:17; Prov.6:6-11)
.....

2. Work - what kind?

List up to six forms of employment which are always wrong for the Christian.

1 4

2 5

3 6

Is academic work more pleasing to God than manual work? Y / N

(See Gen.2:15; Mark 6:3; John 13:5; 1Thess.2:9)

Explain
.....

Is some work 'secular' and some 'sacred'? Y / N

(See 1Cor.10:31; Eph.6:5-7; Col.3:23-24)

Explain
.....

3. Work - why do it?

2.

We may do a right thing from a wrong motive.

What should motivate us in our work?

Read the passages below and find the five motives (from lowest to highest).

Motive 1
(1Thess.4:11b,12b; 2Thess.3:10)

Motive 2
(1Tim.5:3,8)

Motive 3
(Eph.4:28; Gal.6:6,10)

Motive 4
(2Thess.3:11; 1Tim.5:13)

Motive 5
(Phil.2:14,15; 1Thess.4:11b,12a; 1Tim.5:13,14)

We can see from all of these motives that it is wrong to work for purely materialistic reasons. Why is this so?

(See Heb.13:5; 1Tim.6:9-10; Titus 1:7; Matt.6:19-21,24)

.....
.....

Is it wrong to have ambition, to want to get to the top of our profession?

Does Prov.12:24 condemn ambition? Y / N

Instead of suppressing the ambitions of James and John in Matt.20:21-28, what did Jesus do?

.....
.....

In our work life, as in other areas, what must we be careful to avoid?

(Rom.12:2)

.....
.....

4. Work - how can we discover what God wants us to do?

What can we learn from God's providence?

(See Rom.12:6ff; Eph.2:10; 2Peter 4:10; Rom.8:28)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Who has promised to guide us?

(Isaiah 30:20b,21)

What other sources of help do we have? Give examples.

(Prov.12:15)
.....

When looking for a job, what should our priority be?

(See Is.6:8; Matt.20:25-28)

- Big salary Good pension Company car
- Short hours Long holidays Promotion prospects
- The most good for others What is available
- Early retirement

Does our own preference come into it at all?

(See 1Tim.3:1)
.....

Where do circumstances come in?

(See Acts 16:6; Jonah 1:3)
.....

What principle should we follow when leaving one job for another?

(See 1Cor.7:20-21)
.....
.....

5. Work - what about the boss?

4

Write down the attitudes to be shown to those set over us in the workplace.

(i) (1Tim.6:1).....

Why this attitude?

.....

(ii) (Col.3:22; Titus 2:9)

What are we to do?

.....

What are we not to do?

.....

Why this attitude?

.....

(iii) (1Peter2:18)

.....

Why this attitude?

.....

6. Work - how should it be done?

Who are we really working for?

(Eph.6:6)

Of whom should we be conscious as we do our work?

(Eph.6:7)

Under what shadow are we to do all our work?

(Col.3:23-25)

In the light of this write down as many ways as you can think of about how we should do our daily work.

Be prepared to explain the different ways you have chosen.

- (i)(v)(ix)
- (ii)(vi)(x)
- (iii)(vii)(xi)
- (iv)(viii)(xii)