

CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Commit your work to the LORD, and then your plans will succeed.

Proverbs 16:3

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded. 2 Chronicles 15:7

INTRODUCTION:

Would you agree that there is great tension between the world of work and the world of religion? Who do you think is winning the battle?

Recently, the Princeton Religion Research Center published a landmark survey conducted for the Wall Street Journal on the moral conduct at the workplace. The researchers measured a wide range of moral and ethical behaviors at the workplace, such as calling in sick when not sick, cheating on income tax, and swindling company supplies for personal use. The results were disappointing to say the least. But what the researchers found most startling was that there was no significant difference between the churched and the unchurched in their ethics and values on the job.

The Christian workers were just as guilty as the non-Christian workers when it came to calling in sick when not sick, cheating on income tax, and using company supplies for personal use.

To me, this survey suggests that many Christians are living double lives. At church they swear allegiance to values found in Scripture. But at work, they follow the values depicted by the world.

SINCE WORDLY VALUES ARE APPARENTLY INFLUENCING THE CHRISTIAN WORKFORCE, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO DISCUSS SEVERAL PRINCIPLES ON THE SUBJECT OF "CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORKPLACE."

I. FIRST, AS CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WE SHOULD RESPECT AND OBEY WHOEVER IS IN AUTHORITY.

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart" (Eph. 6:5-6).

1. In practical terms for us today, this passage is teaching us to obey our employers, just as though we were obeying Christ.

a. If our employers ask us to do something, we should do it without grumbling and complaining. We are to be model employees, always willing to go the extra mile to please our employers.

2. You may be wondering, do we have to obey our employers even if they want us to do something that is wrong and unethical? Absolutely Not.

3. If your employer asks you to do something that is wrong and against the Word of God, then you should not do it.

(Acts 5:29) "We must obey God rather than men."

4. As Christians, we cannot engage in sinful activities.

ILLUSTRATION:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, while serving as government administrators in Babylon, were told by their employer King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship a golden idol. They were given direct instructions by their employer to do something that was wrong and against their faith.

What did they do? Did they obey God or their boss?

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king."

But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

Since they would not obey the king's order, they were thrown into a furnace.

5. If you are every faced with this dilemma always obey God over your employer.

6. You may get punished; you may even get fired, however, God will bless you for standing up for the truth. He will rescue you from the blazing furnace, just as He did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

7. Brethren, we are to respect and obey our employers and do what they ask us to do as long as it is not wrong and against our faith.

II. SECOND, AS CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WE SHOULD ALWAYS DO OUR BEST BECAUSE WE ARE ULTIMATELY WORKING FOR THE LORD.

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:22-24).

1. This passage is teaching that while we are at work, we are to do our jobs with all of our hearts, not necessarily to please our bosses, but to please God, because we are ultimately working for Him. God is our employer.

ILLUSTRATION:

Several years ago, on an extremely hot day, a crew of men was working on the roadbed of the railroad when a slow moving train interrupted them. The train came to a stop and a window in the last car -- which incidentally was custom made and air-conditioned -- was raised. A booming, friendly voice called out, "Dave, is that you?"

Dave Anderson, the crew chief called back, "Sure is, Jim, and it's really good to see you." With that pleasant exchange, Dave Anderson was invited to join Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad, for a visit. For over an hour the men exchanged pleasantries and then shook hands as the train pulled out.

Dave Anderson's crew immediately surrounded him and expressed astonishment that he knew Jim Murphy, the president of the railroad as a personal friend. Dave then explained that over 20 years earlier he and Jim Murphy had started to work for the railroad on the same day. One of the men half jokingly and half-serious asked Dave why he was still working out in the hot sun and Jim Murphy had gotten to be president. Rather melancholy Dave explained, "twenty-three years ago I went to work for \$1.75 an hour but Jim Murphy went to work for the railroad."

2. If you only go to work to earn a paycheck, and that is your sole motivation, then all you will reap is a paycheck. You will dread your job and be unhappy. You will only give a half-hearted effort.

3. If you go to work to please God, and work for Him, then not only will you receive a paycheck, but you will also receive personal fulfillment and contentment. If you work only for pay, you will have a miserable day, but if you work for God, you will have happiness.

4. Whatever you do for a living, do your best, so that you will glorify your Father in heaven.

III. THIRD, AS CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WE SHOULD ALWAYS GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO BE KIND & FRIENDLY TO OTHERS.

ILLUSTRATION:

A cartoon sketch shows a patient having a conversation with his doctor.

Underneath the picture, the doctor says, "What you need, Mr. Brown, is a bit of human caring; a gentle, reassuring touch; a warm smile that shows concern--all of which, I'm afraid, were not part of my medical training.

1. As Christians, we are to care, be gentle, and show a warm smile. We are to be kind to others.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another..." (Eph. 4:32).

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12).

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone" (1 Thess. 5:15).

ILLUSTRATION:

In Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work, Naomi Rhode wrote of an experience she witnessed while working at a Hospital.

John was admitted into the emergency room and placed on the cardiac floor. He was unshaven, dirty, dangerously obese, and wore a black motorcycle jacket.

The nurses at the station looked wide-eyed as this mound of humanity was wheeled by, each glancing nervously at Bonnie, the head nurse. "Let this one not be mine to admit, bathe and tend to..." was their pleading, unspoken message.

One of the true marks of a leader, is to do the unthinkable. To tackle the impossible. To touch the untouchable. It was Bonnie who said, "I want this patient myself."

As she put on her latex gloves and proceeded to bathe this huge, very unclean man, her heart almost broke. Where was his family? Who was his mother? What was he like as a little boy? She hummed quietly as she worked. It seemed to ease the fear and embarrassment she knew he must have been feeling.

And then on a whim she said, "We don't have time for back rubs much in hospitals these days, but I bet one would really feel good. And it would help you to relax your muscles and start to heal. That is what this place is all about...a place to heal."

The thick, scaly, ruddy skin told a story of an abusive lifestyle: probably lots of addictive behavior with food and other things. As she rubbed those tense muscles, she hummed and prayed. Prayed for the soul of a little boy grown up, rejected by life's rudeness and striving for acceptance in a hard, hostile world.

As John rolled over onto his back, tears ran down his cheeks and his chin trembled. With amazingly beautiful brown eyes, he smiled and said in a quivering voice, "No one has touched me for years. Thank you. I am healing."

2. This special nurse went out of her way to show kindness to a rugged, and filthy stranger.
3. How many of you go out of your way to show kindness to your co-workers or customers?
4. How long has it been since you have approached a co-worker to tell him or her what a good job he or she is doing?
5. If you are an employer, how long has it been since you have done something nice for your employees besides giving them just their paychecks?
6. As Christians, we should flood our workplace with kindness. Every day we should touch lives by taking the time to care about others. This week, & the weeks to follow, let us go out of our way by reaching out with the spirit of kindness to everyone we work with, even those we may not like.

IV. LASTLY, AS CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WE MUST NEVER PUT OUR CAREERS BEFORE GOD AND OUR FAMILIES.

1. Let's face it, in our society, the family is in serious trouble because Careers are becoming more important than the family.

2. It is not enough anymore to just work 40 hours a week. Now, people are choosing to work longer hours or get second jobs so that they can make more money to keep up with the Smith's and the Jones'.

3. The family unit is disintegrating because husbands, wives, and parents are more preoccupied with their professions than they are with their own families' needs.

4. In the Bible, Eli, who was a Priest and Judge in Israel, was a man who spent more time working, then he did caring for his families' well being.

a. In fact, Eli was so preoccupied with his career that he did not even know about the trouble that his children were in.

Read (1 Sam. 2:22-25).

b. Eli's sons, (Hof-ny) and (Fin-e-has) had followed in their fathers footsteps by both becoming priests. However, these two ministers of God became so immoral that they were sleeping with their co-workers.

c. To make things even worse, their Father, the Priest did not even know what was going on, even though everyone else did. Because he was spending too much time at the office, Eli had lost touch with his family. His children even lost respect for him (v. 25).

5. If the family unit is going to survive, it must understand that God and family are more important than money and careers.

ILLUSTRATION:

When his wife died, the baby was two. They had six other children--three boys and three girls, ranging in age from 4 to 16.

A few days after he became a widower, the man's parents and his deceased wife's parents came to visit.

"We've been talking," they said, "about how to make this work. There's no way you can take care of all these children and work to make a living. So, we've arranged for each child to be placed with a different uncle and aunt. We're making sure that all of your children will be living right here in the neighborhood, so you can see them anytime..."

The man responded, "You have no idea how much I appreciate your thoughtfulness. But I want you to know," he smiled and continued, "if the children should interfere with my work, or if we should need any help, we'll let you know."

Years later, the children finally grew up and got married. Five of the seven went off to college, most after they were married.

Then came grandchildren. No one enjoyed grandchildren more than this man. They brought him great joy.

Finally, the youngest daughter--the baby, who had been two years old at her mother's death--got married. And within a short time, the man, his life's work completed, died.

6. This man chose his family over his career. His life's work was to raise his family.

7. What about you? What is your life's work? Is it your career? Or is it your family?

8. On the day of judgement, God is not going to be concerned with what type of career we had, how much money we made, or how many college degrees we acquired.

9. He is going to be concerned with how well we loved and served Him and how well we loved and managed our household.

10. If your career has become your first love, then you need to make some changes before it is too late. Don't sacrifice your salvation and your family, for prestige and the mighty dollar.

CONCLUSION:

1. If we want to be true Christians in the workplace, then we need to be actively following four principles:

WE SHOULD RESPECT AND OBEY WHOEVER IS IN AUTHORITY.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS DO OUR BEST BECAUSE WE ARE ULTIMATELY WORKING FOR THE LORD.

WE SHOULD ALWAYS GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO BE KIND & FRIENDLY TO OTHERS.

WE MUST NEVER PUT OUR CAREERS BEFORE GOD AND OUR FAMILIES.

V. (OPTIONAL) AS CHRISTIAN WORKERS, WE NEED TO BELIEVE IN OUR OURSELVES AND IN OUR ABILITIES.

EXPOSITION:

• ***"I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).***

1. I know that I have said this time and time again, but if it is the Lord's Will, we can do anything that we set our minds to do.

2. But before we can accomplish anything, we need to strike from our vocabulary the words "I can't" and replace them with "I can."

• I looked up in my Bible software the phrase "I can, and I can't." The phrase "I can" appeared 50 times in the NIV from Gen. to Revelation. The word's "I can't" appeared only 4 times throughout the entire Bible. And every time that phrase was used, it was shown in a negative and defeating light.

• If we use the phrase "I can't" we will fail. However, if we use the phrase "I can, then we will be successful."

3. If we believe in ourselves, we can achieve success.

ILLUSTRATION:

Steve Morris was not a typical child. But when you're nine years old, the desire to be typical is very strong.

Steve was born in Saginaw, Michigan. When he was very young, his folks moved to Detroit, to a little apartment on Hastings Street.

Of all the people and things Steve has since forgotten and remembered from those early years, one woman stands out in his mind--his elementary-school teacher, Mrs. Beneduci. This woman encouraged him and told him he could do anything that he wanted to do if he would just believe in himself.

One day, Mrs. Beneduci called her class to order. "Come on, Jesse. Annette. Settle down, people...we're going to open with history today..."

The little ones squirmed in their seats, suppressing the nervous giggles of infant inmates wishing to be sprung.

"I know you'd rather be outside playing," said Mrs. Beneduci. "It's a lovely day. But if you learn nothing in life, all you'll ever know how to do is play." The teacher gave a sympathetic half-smile.

Young Steve Morris was quiet. "Amy," asked Mrs. Beneduci, "who was Abraham Lincoln?" Amy stared at her desk. "Uh...he, uh, had a beard." The class collapsed with laughter.

"Steve Morris?" Said the teacher, "Same question." "He was the sixteenth President of the United States," came the answer. Solidly. Without hesitation.

Steve's problem was not the answers. He had them all. In fact, little Steve Morris also had a rather remarkable gift. But answers to questions would mean nothing in themselves, unless Steve could be made to realize just how important that gift really was.

"All right," Mrs. Beneduci continued, "Abraham Lincoln was our sixteenth President. He was President during the Civil War--"

Then she stopped, as though she were listening to something. "What's that?" asked the teacher. "Who's making that noise?"

The puzzled classmates looked at each other. Steve sat quietly. "I hear something like scratching...it's very faint," said Mrs. Beneduci. "It sounds...it sounds like a mouse."

The little girls screamed. Some stood on their chairs with the speed of ascending lightning. "Calm down, everyone," said the teacher. "It's nothing to get excited about. Steve, will you help me find the poor little creature?"

Steve sat straight upright in his chair, brightening considerably. "OK," he said, "Now everybody be quiet." In the sudden stillness Steve cocked his head, hesitated for a moment, and pointed slowly to the wastebasket. "He's right over there." said Steve proudly. "I can hear him."

And so he was, a frightened little gray mouse that had been rummaging beneath the wastepaper, hoping to go undiscovered. But he had been discovered by little Steve Morris, whom nature had given a remarkable pair of ears in compensation for having denied him eyes since birth.

So the class settle back to business. And the little gray mouse became a mascot. In the heart of small, unsighted Steve, a pride was born...and that pride is with him still.

After the incident, Mrs. Beneduci would continue to encourage the talent that the whole world now knows and respects and she always reminded Steve to believe in himself and in his abilities.

In time, the marvelous ears of Steve Morris, who by the way is known as Little Stevie Wonder, gave popular music something to be proud of...a singer-composer-musician-producer with five Grammys in '75...seventeen gold singles...four albums...four platinum records.

-- It is amazing what people can do if they just believe in themselves. Steve Morris became someone special, all because a teacher taught him to believe in himself.