

Biblical Work Ethics

“do good to all men”

Key question

How do Biblical ethics impact the modern work place?

Key text

Acts 17:24,26,27

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth . . . From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the while earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.”

Introduction:

In the Spring of 1999 in what was labeled the worst cheating scandal in San Diego State University history, 25 students were caught cheating on a quiz. The class? Business ethics.

1. **A basic truth:** “The most critic al element for a healthy work environment or any other environment is trust. ... Trust is composed of two elements, competence and keeping commitments. This again becomes a belief based on observation of your actions, not words. Simply put, ‘do you do what you say you will do.’” David G. Rohlander, Business Life Magazine
2. **A harsh reality:** “Business leaders have sometimes exploited workers, deceived customers, damaged the environment, and tried to manipulate family life, political power, and religion for gain.” Max Stackhouse, On Moral Business
3. **A practical test:** The four-way test for things we think, say, and do from Rotary International:
 - a. Is it the truth?
 - b. Is it fair to all concerned?
 - c. Will it build good will and better friendships?
 - d. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?
4. **A Christian challenge:** Biblical teaching is felt to be of little value in business ethics because:
 - a. **Legalism:** It is “rule” oriented and not flexible enough to cope with complex real problems. While we can see the rules applied to other’s situations we tend to see in the uniqueness of our circumstances a case for an exception.
 - b. **Ocasionalism:** It is limited in its application to a different historical setting and is not sensitive to modern dilemmas.

- c. **Pluralism:** It is to be applied to the Christian community only and not to the whole of society. This is only true if the Christian God is not Lord of all creation.

Note: If these observations are true then the Bible really does have little to say to us.

5. Implications:

- a. The grounds on which a company begins its business is very important.
 - b. The values that are modeled by an organization’s leaders are important.
 - c. Sound ethics must be practiced and not just voiced.
 - d. Community support and personal spiritual disciplines play an important role in developing an ethical character. A spiritual discipline is an activity that you have the will and ability to practice in order to develop strength to do other things that you may, at present, feel powerless to do. I can avoid certain friends that have a negative influence on me. I can expose myself to spiritual truths that renew my mind from improper thoughts.
6. There are two observations that can be made from **Eph.4:28** ““Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.”

This is “in”	This is “out”
<p>Serving</p> <p>Empowerment of others</p> <p>Need centered work</p> <p>Usefulness</p> <p>Personal investment</p> <p>Community</p>	<p>Stealing</p> <p>Exploitation of others</p> <p>Greed centered work</p> <p>Idleness or business</p> <p>Capital investment only</p> <p>Individuality</p>

Principle # 1

The secular world offers partial but inadequate insight in a search for an ethical base.

- A. Most modern theories are relativistic.** How would you critique each of the four theories below?
- 1. Moral impulses are unavoidable. We all must make moral judgments based on some standard.
 - 2. Religious foundations for ethical norms have been largely abandoned in public debate in favor of other foundations. These foundations or systems each reflect a measure of truth.
 - a. **Human nature** – Moral values that we all share in common are the basis of ethics. This form of “natural law” was popular in early American history. It is true that the image of God in each of us links us to basic moral truths. The challenge is how do we identify these basic moral impulses?
 - b. **Pragmatism** – Whatever works is ethical. The greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, is the only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human actions. From this principle emerge general universal rules of conduct. Christian ethics tend to work for our ultimate (and often immediate) good. The danger is that the ends define and justify the means.
 - c. **Legislation** – Whatever the civil law allows is ethical. Because there is no authority beyond the human individual we are left with social contracts through government. Civil law in the USA is largely based on a Judeo Christian worldview and as such reflects reality. But our obedience must be motivated by something deeper than a human court’s ruling.

- d. **Moral Relativism** – Moral norms are seen as emotion-driven preferences rather than the proper subject of rational argument. It is true that a certain amount of relativism in applying Biblical ethics is unavoidable but radical relativism demolishes normative ethics.
- e. **Biological instincts** – Survival instincts conditioned over years of evolution produce sophisticated ethical impulses. It is very likely that our biology does effect our moral behavior but how much so?

Note that in each of these systems, religion may play a role but only as a “store front” or consequence of moral obligations, not a presupposition of moral norms. The operative questions in professional ethics usually are about how to stay out of trouble – with the law, with our clients, and with our fellow professionals.

- 3. Before the modern era, virtue was equated with happiness based on quasi religious grounds (revealed or civil religion). Today, freedom is equated with happiness and all restraints are seen as threats to freedom. What is often overlooked is the important distinction between:
 - a. **The Reflexive will** – doing what you want at the moment. While this may seem to offer immediate fulfillment and express momentary freedom, it in the end may undermine both.
 - b. **The Reflective will** – doing what you see would be the best given the whole picture and the long-term result. True freedom is best sustained by respecting the common good over the long term.
- 4. While it may be impossible to create a Christian based moral consensus in modern secular America such a consensus should be possible in the Christian community.

Principle # 2

The character of God is the basis of Christian work ethics.

B. “Without God everything is permitted” Dostoyevsky. Which of God’s attributes most effect business ethics?

- 1. Three basic character qualities of God that find a parallel in business.

<i>Characteristic of God</i>	<i>Ethical principle in business</i>
Holiness	Integrity
Justice	Fairness
Love	Compassion

- 2. **Holiness** – a sense of what is most important
 - a. **Zeal for God** – God is the first priority.
 - b. **Purity** – Integrity of character in being separate from all evil.
 - 1. **Moral integrity** – consistently making decisions that respect the purposes of God.
 - 2. **Moral separation** – being responsible for guarding our associations and good name.
 - 3. Areas of application in business
 - a. Purity in communication – telling the truth.
 - b. Purity in sexuality – respecting sexual boundaries.
 - c. Purity in purpose – having good intentions.
 - c. **Accountability** – respecting a system of rewards and punishments that discipline us and others to grow to maturity.

- d. **Humility** – placing the welfare of community and others above our selfish interests.
- 3. **Justice** – a sense of the dignity of humanity
 - a. **Procedural rights** – fair process in decision making.
 - 1. **Due process** – guards the rights of the individual when accused.
 - a. Decision makers are to be impartial.
 - b. Fair and adequate evidence is presented.
 - c. An opportunity to tell all sides of the story.
 - 2. **Equal protection** - prohibits discrimination.
 - b. **Inalienable rights** – core rights that are to be protected by procedural process.
 - 1. **Universal norms** – private property, bodily safety, access to the truth, mutuality in social and business relations, etc.
 - 2. **Occasional norms** – unique to a particular place and or time (citizenship, copyright, tax rates, etc.)
 - c. **Merit** – respecting a relationship between cause and effect.
 - 1. Free will produces differences in the distribution of goods and services.
 - 2. Incentives for responsible behavior are an important part of growth.
 - d. **Contractual justice** – the honoring of formal agreements.
 - 1. Respect for laws that limit our freedom for the protection of others.
 - 2. Respect the civil procedures that enable community to exist.
 - 3. Respect for contracts.
 - e. **Compensatory justice** – reimbursement or compensation for violation of rights.
- 4. **Love** – a sense of meaning for self in relation to others and priority purposes.
 - a. **Empathy** – feelings that comes from putting oneself in the place of others.
 - b. **Mercy** – actions that respect, accept, and forgive others who have not earned it.
 - c. **Self sacrifice** – the willing to give up our rights out of respect and concern for the welfare of others.

Principle # 3

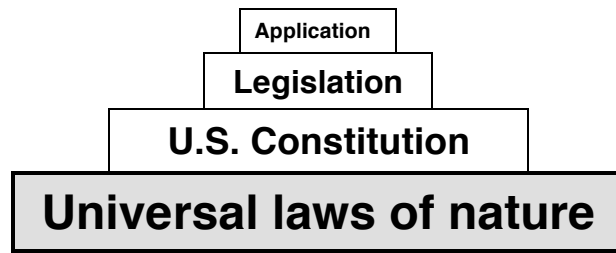
Eternal principles must be applied with sensitivity to the immediate context.

C. Absolute principles or laws may require sensitive application in a complex environment. What are some of the challenges that come with local application of universal values?

1. Thomas Aquinas distinguished between “primary” law and “secondary” law.
2. Aristotle distinguished between “natural” and “conventional” law.

Universal values	Honor due process	Make restitution	Promote sexual purity	Protect life	Rest from work
<i>Local applications</i>	<i>Three year limit to file lawsuit</i>	<i>Compensate in damages</i>	<i>Restrict TV ads</i>	<i>Test legal drugs</i>	<i>Blue laws</i>

3. American legal philosophy was historically based on a notion of universal “natural” laws.



Principle # 4

Three popular forms of business ethics that should be avoided.

D. Alternative basis for business ethics. Which of these systems is most popular in your world?

1. **Dual standard** – a separation of personal and professional ethics.
 - a. Illustration: J.D. Rockefeller was a “conscientious Christian who struggled to end the livelihood of his every rival.” While giving millions to world missions from his personal fortune he also said, “I cheat my boys every chance I get, I want to make them sharp.”
 - b. This morality violates the principle of holiness in that it does not recognize God’s authority over all of life. It violates the principle of justice in that it sacrifices means for ends. It violates the principle of love in that it does not treat others with the respect that it wants from them.
2. **The letter of the law** – do what ever you can without getting arrested.
 - a. Positivism – ethics is a technical issue to be decided in courts of law.
 1. This separates law from ethics. The law has to do with how things work not what is right or wrong.
 2. This defines law as whatever the government says it is.
 3. This assumes that the law can be studied scientifically. It does not have a theological or philosophical basis.
 4. This looks at the law as a challenge to the creativity of leaders to find loopholes.
 - b. Criticisms of positivism
 1. Laws are imperfect products of a political process. They do not have authority over our souls.
 2. Laws can justify immoral behavior in that they cannot cover every conceivable situation.
 3. God is dethroned as the ultimate authority in this system. He is replaced by the Supreme Court.
 4. Legalism leads to more government regulation of business.
3. **When in Rome do as the Romans** – an employee may be torn between what they personally feel is ethical and their commitment to obey what the company asks them to do.
 - a. A Christian can feel conflicting obligations to:
 1. God
 2. The public good
 3. The employer
 - b. Two models
 1. The **Submissive** model – the employer bears responsibility for the acts of employees who are asked to behave in questionable ways. I Pet.2:18-19, Col.3:22-4:1, Eph.6:5-9

2. The **Purist** model – The employer is third on the list of authority figures to whom the employee must answer. Acts 5:29, Dan.6:10. While this model is to be preferred to the submissive model we must make a distinction.
 - a. The **legalistic purist** – Whatever bothers my conscience I will not do. This tends to reflect a superficial attitude toward real life problems while promoting a self-righteous judgmentalism. It under emphasizes grace and mercy. It often lacks creativity in seeking solutions to ethical dilemmas.
 - b. The **accommodating purist** – The employer is viewed as the neighbor. There is a willingness to be tolerant in morally ambiguous situations. There is respect for an ethic of “damage control.” There is often a creative alternative to difficult ethical situations.

Principle # 5

Truth telling is more complex than some may realize.

E. Truth telling.

Illustration: In the January/February 1968 issue of *Harvard Business Review*, Albert Carr argued that business practices should be measured with the same moral standards as those used in a poker game, where bluffing is acceptable strategy. How far should a start up company go in creating an image of size and credibility that is bigger than reality?

1. **Honesty** is important for three reasons.
 - a. **Trust** – Coworkers work harder in an environment of trust. Fewer lawyers are needed, along with less red tape. Capitalism itself can only thrive as there is trust.
 - b. **Community** – Relational networks are built on honesty.
 - c. **Dignity** – People deserve to know the truth. Dishonesty is an expression of disrespect.
2. **Slander** is using the truth to hurt another. Telling the truth is not always a loving act.
 - a. Speaking the truth in love is a virtue. Speaking the truth with the intent of hurting others is not a virtue.
 - b. The truth can be used selectively to selfish ends.
3. **Deception** – purposefully leading others to believe something we ourselves do not believe.
 - a. **Lying** – includes three elements.
 1. **Intentionality** – The liar intends to deceive.
 2. **Communication** – The untruth is expressed.
 3. **Believing that the audience accepts the untruth.**
 - b. **Is deception ever justified?** The Hebrew midwives in Ex.1:15-22; Josh.2:1-24; Rahab Heb.11:31; Jas.2:25
 1. Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley would not permit any exceptions.
 - a. Some lies are worthy of greater punishment than others but all bring guilt.
 - b. God will always provide a means of escape so that no moral duty need be violated.
 - c. Some lying is not sinful because it is not really voluntary. It is coerced.
 2. Luther, Bonhoeffer and others would make some exceptions. They respect a hierarchical ranking of duties.
 - a. When moral duties conflict, the lesser of two evils is the preferable selection and does not incur guilt.
 - b. Three questions that must be answered.

1. Have all other honest options been exhausted?
 2. Is the situation sufficiently dire?
 3. Are the deceiver’s motives selfless?
- c. **Artistry or mutual deceits** – when normal wise persons would recognize that technical truth telling is not expected (athletic faking, theater acting, war, hyperbolae, etc.).
 - d. **No right to hear the truth** – in the case of the Nazis and burglars, etc. it is possible to forfeit the right to be treated honestly. This might also include deception of the enemy in times of war.
 - e. **Exaggeration** – this can easily become a form of lying and should be treated as such.
 - f. **Ambiguity** – this can be intentional or unintentional but is a form of lying when it serves a selfish end.
 - g. **Polite accommodation to cultural civility** – encouraging children, students, friends, etc. “The desert was delicious.” (It really was “so so” but telling the truth would not serve the noble commitment to encourage good effort.)

Telling the truth	Athletics, Artistry, War	Social Civility	Ambiguity	Self serving Distortion	Slander	Selfish lying
Require sensitivity to circumstances				Tolerated	Inexcusable	

Principle # 6

Concealment is a legitimate part of Christian business ethics.

F. Concealment and disclosure.

1. **The duty to conceal** includes the following.
 - a. Privacy rights – Relational intimacy is impossible without shared secrets.
 - b. Property rights – trade secrets, research intentions, etc.
 - c. Loyalty rights - A company exists as a unit in respect to its inner life. It should be treated with the same respect that personal secrets would enjoy.
2. **Limitations to secrecy rights** include the following.
 - a. Laws may put limits on privacy rights – child abuse is an example.
 - b. At some point loyalty rights must be subservient to personal ethics – for example a person should not feel obligated to lie for a superior.
3. **The duty to disclose** includes the following.
 - a. Right to know – patents, contracts, employment application, etc.
 - b. Golden Rule – What would a reasonable person expect to be told?
 - c. Prevention of significant harm - Does a nurse have an obligation to inform a patient of their doctor’s drinking problem and poor performance?
4. **Whistle - blowing** should take place only after being able to answer each of the following questions.
 - a. What are the motives of the whistle – blower?
 - b. Is the information accurate?
 - c. Have internal authorities been confronted?

- d. Three levels of whistle - blowing
 1. Is this a private matter that should not be shared with anyone?
 2. Is this a matter for internal adjustments only?
 3. Is this something that should be exposed externally?

Bibliography.

1. **Just Business – Christian ethics for the marketplace** by Alexander Hill, IVP (An excellent concise treatment for the beginner. Much of its contents are included in the above outline.)
2. **On Moral Business – Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life** edited by Max Stackhouse, Dennis McCann, and Shirley Roels, Eerdmans (A great resource pulling together the best stuff over the years from a Christian perspective.)

Human nature and Work.

Seven ways your work can remind you of what it means to be human.

“The most exciting breakthrough of the twenty-first century will occur not because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human.” *John Naisbitt* It is this question that gives the Christian tradition a wonderful opportunity for an audience with modern culture. The dogmatic attempts by anthropologists and sociologists to explain human nature from an evolutionary model will continue but they will fall short of satisfying the deepest inner longings of the human soul for an identity with transcendent connections. The Christian story will address and satisfy the deepest longings of the human soul in ways that modern science will not. Christians do not have to defend the Biblical story, they need merely tell it with all its power and glory and allow the soul of the listener to notarize it with the deep inner peace of the heart.

Listen to but a part of the Biblical story from Genesis 1:26-27 “then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the earth, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Later in the story we read that this image of God renders human life sacred – so sacred that those who shed human blood are asked to forfeit their own life. (Gen.9:6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.”). We even read that the way we talk about other people is a special issue in our ethical systems because of this “likeness of God” in humans. When the Apostle Paul confronted the Athenians with the message of the Christian gospel in Acts 17 he appeals to the common nature shared by all humans. This nature links us to our Creator in such a way that we have an innate knowledge of his presence and an ability to relate to him. Acts 17:28 “In him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

But what about the growing wealth of material that links us not with God but with lower forms of life? While there may be many similarities between lower forms of animal life and humans the differences are dramatic. We are told that we share over 98% of the genetic material of chimps but this is not to suggest that we are 98% similar to Chimps. When we go to the zoo we are not confused as to which side of the cage we belong. Even a small child knows the dramatic differences between chimps and people. But when we try to put our finger on what is it that marks people as distinct from chimps or clams, we generally focus our attention on four things. First, people are self-aware. They are able to step outside themselves and look at their behavior, attitudes, feelings, and beliefs with some objective critique. “Why did I do that?”, is an expression most of us have uttered or understood. It is one of the many ways we illustrate our unique humanity. Secondly, humans have a moral conscience. There is no indication that animals feel shame, guilt, or moral duty. Man is the “beast with the red cheeks” who can feel shame. Third, only humans have creative imagination that can produce art and solve complex problems in truly innovative and artistic ways. Animals display remarkable abilities to overcome obstacles in reaching goals but the kind of creativity that is a mark of the human animal is in a very different category. It is related to and grows out of the human self awareness and moral conscience. Human language is perhaps that greatest expression of human creativity. Animal language lacks anything like the creative touch of human communication. Fourth, humans have an independent will to act. Animals make choices more by instinct and training than by anything else. We certainly have instincts and are trainable but beyond all of the training there is within humans this remarkable will that can be appealed to with reason and emotion.

The ancients (from the classical Greeks to the church fathers) understood that the unifying principle of the ancient world was virtue (living fully as a human made in the image of God). The basic organizing purpose of a society should be to improve the character of the citizens. Plato sums up this ethos when he writes in the *Laws* that politics is “the art whose business it is to care for souls.” The ancients believed that just as man had a “lower nature” in common with the animals, he also had a “higher nature” that was unique to him and that marked him as a distinct bearer of God’s image. To the ancients, the most important question was not, how can we harness nature so as to make our lives more comfortable in a material sense but rather, what was the meaning of it all, of life and death? I sense that Jesus would have agreed.

It might be useful to seek ways of expressing out humanity in the way we work. The Biblical story of creation offers hints as to how our humanity might be expressed in life.

Principle #1

Creativity

We are most human when we are creative in our work.

Work is Godly. The first act of God in the Biblical record is His work in creating. When we work we are acting as an extension of God’s nature. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing;” Genesis 2:2. God’s work is creative. There is some indication that the creation narrative deals with preexisting material that God shapes into a meaningful environment. Genesis 1:2-3 “Now the earth was formless and empty,... and God said let there be light.” Work creates an opportunity for a deep sense of significance in that it invites us to experience and express the nature of God the Creator. We are invited to be creative in our work.

Does your work bring meaning from chaos? Perhaps there are opportunities for creativity that would make your environment more humane and meaningful for you and those around you. Strive to bring order, meaning, and usefulness to your environment. It may be cleaning a garage, cultivating a garden plot, preserving a nature park, or turning wood and metal into useful tools.

This principle like all others can be abused. Some people tend to make creativity a god where everything (including theology) is expected to be shaped or reshaped by our human imagination. This principle, like all the others highlighted below, needs to be taken as a part of a mosaic, each creating a context for the other principles. It is significant that Gods creativity had a goal or purpose. It was not meaningless expression. This will be highlighted below.

We tend not to press ourselves to be creative in creative ways. One of the tragedies of so much of modern educational systems is the fact that our children are not encouraged to be creative. When we learn early how to express ourselves and solve problems with our creative imagination, we not only stand to make a contribution to the public good but also experience a deep sense of what it means to be fully human.

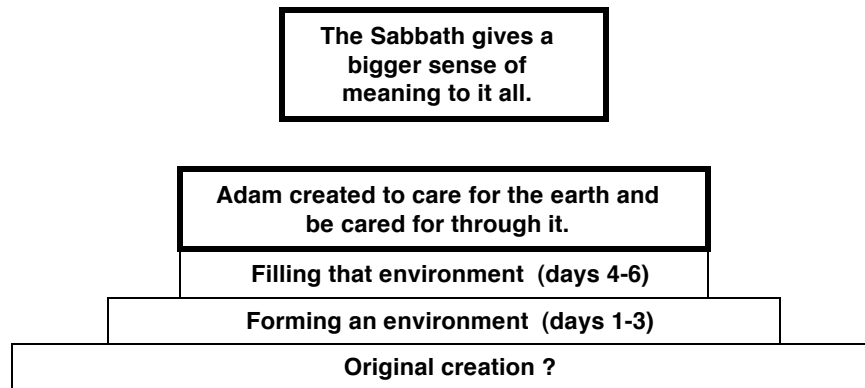
Principle #2

Service

We are most human when we serve the deep needs of humanity.

The Biblical six days of creation provide a setting or context for God’s human image bearers. The creation of Adam is the climactic end of the process. God’s work is purposeful, sensitive to the whole of

life, and focused on what is good for the welfare of humanity. The six days of creation culminate in the creation of humans. All that comes before is but a stage for humanity.



Work creates for us an opportunity to serve human needs. Some types of work are directly related to serving the needs of others, like social worker, teaching, farming, etc. But there is significance in many other forms of work that may not be so directly linked to a specific human need. It is important to have some understanding of how our labor makes a difference to issues that are important for the human race. How does your work reflect the work of God in creating an environment suitable for human habitation. Is your work constructive? In what ways does your work serve to build and support the needs of humanity?

This principle can be abused. We can make service of humanity an end in itself. The social gospel had its origin in the evangelistic passions of Christians at the turn of this century but it quickly took on a life of its own. It was not long before serving human needs became the essence of religious faith. While loving one another is a part of the great commandment it is but the second part. The first part has to do with the love of God. We can worship social ethics and make Jesus simply a chaplain for values. We must not lose sight of the context of the creation narrative which ends with the Sabbath reminding us of the ultimate Creator.

The “needs” of humanity are too often defined by “wants” stemming from a culture steeped in short term gratification, material comfort, and selfish indulgence. We are called to serve the true needs of our fellowman which includes, in deed starts with, the deep unmet longings of the soul alienated from God, others, and nature.

Principle #3

Meaning

We are most human when we find the right meaning in our work.

Adam was created to work, it was a part of his nature. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” **Genesis 2:15**. While the Biblical Fall dramatically effected the nature of our work it was not the origin of work. Work was a part of the goodness of creation before the Fall.

Work has a stewardship aspect that involves caring for the creation itself. We like Adam have a responsibility to be conservationists not just consumers. As Adam was first asked to work in conserving or caring for the garden so we are first asked to tend and care for the earth. The creation reflects and belongs to the Creator. We are stewards of the creation under His commission. We must be careful to recognize that the creation is not to be an object of worship. We are not servants of nature. We conserve nature so that it serves human needs which is God’s purpose.

A life of leisure without work is not natural. There is something about our humanity that is best experienced and expressed as we engage in the work of caring for our environment. I am of the conviction that most of us do not look forward to a weekend, a vacation, or retirement in order to escape work but rather to be freed from the pain of work that is unfruitful, frustrating, and poorly suited to our abilities. It is the Fall that renders our work unpleasant. Unfortunately we tend to throw out the work with the frustration.

Work involves both giving and receiving. Adam was to eat from the earth as well as care for the earth. The balance between consuming and conserving is an important part of our commission. The Levitical laws reflect this important balance. Work can become the end or sole purpose of our existence if we are not careful.

This principle can also be abused. We too often find our identity and personal need for meaning primarily in our vocation. Some of us have no life outside our work. Why is this such a temptation? Is it because we have invested so little in any other aspect of our life? Our interests will follow our investments. If we do not have a rich personal family life, personal spiritual life, or community related existence we will probably get lost in our work.

On the other extreme are those who look at work as labor to be finished as soon as possible so we can do the things that constitute “real living.” It is true that many of us do not have a great deal of freedom in what work we do. Our work calls us to be creative and positive where we are not where we wish we could be. Balance is called for.

Principle #4

Worship

We are most human when we respect God as the source and end of life.

Work is not the end or ultimate purpose of life but points us to an end. The Sabbath is the focal point of the creation narrative and is set as the counterpoint to work. The Sabbath’s meaning is enhanced by the context of work. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” Genesis 2:2-3 “six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work,” Exodus.20:9-10

While work is seen as worthy of respect and dignity, it is not the only reason for existence. Sabbath is a major theme in the Biblical story and speaks to the importance of thankful reflection, relaxation, and reverence. Some scholars believe that the creation account in Genesis is primarily designed to explain the significance of the Sabbath. As engaging and challenging as the cosmos is to mankind, the call to respect and worship the Creator is even more important. The reader of Genesis does not have the option of getting lost in the wonder of the garden of Eden. The creation exists to give glory to the Creator. We are most human when we live on the earth with an eye to heaven.

One of the great abuses of this principle is to ignore it and worship and serve the creation rather than the Creator. When we define reality and make decisions as though God does not exist we consign ourselves to a lonely existence where we have too much to live with and not enough to live for. We find ourselves responsible for too much or too little in a reality that is defined in terms of space, time, and matter/energy plus nothing else. We abuse this principle when we neglect our need for rest and reflection. The Sabbath respects the need for rest in the world of work. Our work is richer and more meaningful when we are reminded of why we are doing it.

The day of rest reminds us that God is ultimately responsible. It is not designed to be a burden on mankind but rather a reminder of what life in the final analysis is all about. When and if we divorce the Sabbath from our attitude at work and make it a dead ritual, we lose the designed blessing and simply add another burden to our lives.

We also abuse this principle when we worship the experience of worship. It is not God's intent to be a worship director as though worship was for our good feeling about life. Worship is not about or for us so much as about and for God. For some people worship is the spiritual counterpart to a drug fix. It is sought for the effect it has on the worshiper not for or as a vehicle for carrying an offering from our heart to God.

Principle #5

Longings

We are most human when we allow our frustrations to lead us to rest in Christ.

Work creates an opportunity for us to get in touch with our deepest longings for rest in the Lord of the Sabbath. Work is expected to be a frustrating challenge that will lead us to seek rest in God. "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground," Genesis 3:17-19.

Work in a fallen world provides a powerful context for displaying certain attributes of God like courage, perseverance, wisdom, etc. While the frustration of work in a world of sin where things are not fair or fun causes much pain it also affords unique opportunities for living out a life of faith, hope, courage, grace, etc. But even more important the pain of life and work in a fallen world creates a deep appetite for the Garden of Eden and its peace. This unmet longing should lead us to seek and respond to the gift of God in Christ.

In Genesis 3:17-19 it is expected that there will be a correlation between work and sustenance in life. It is this appetite for the goods that the earth provides that creates a powerful incentive for our work. While the profit motive is a very effective drive that unleashes creativity, sacrifice, and risk, it also can become a vehicle for abuse, greed, manipulation, and the worship and service of things rather than God. When we love things and use people we do not find the peace that our soul's long so much to experience. We must ask ourselves this important question – For what does the frustration of our work create an appetite – more stuff or God, material security or spiritual life? Do we medicate our pain with the creation rather than a relationship with the Creator?

Principle #6

Enjoyment

We are most human when we enjoy the fruit of our labor.

Work creates an opportunity for personal reward. The riches and rewards of hard work are a gift from God to be enjoyed by those who produce them. "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God." Ecclesiastes 5:18-19.

Christians should not feel badly about doing well and enjoying the fruit of material success. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." Colossians 3:17. It is important to submit all of our lives to the Lordship of Christ, respecting

His priorities and values. It is equally important to receive with thanksgiving the just fruits of our labor. While God is sensitive to the poor this does not mean that he despises prosperity. Those who work hard and wise can expect to reap material rewards for their labor. This is to be received as a blessing and a gift from God as the Master of the universe.

There is no distinction between secular and sacred work or workers when it comes to the Lordship of Christ. All are called to respect the principles that mark us as human. God is interested and involved in every area of life not just the formal religious parts of our culture. The word that is most descriptive of a mature human is “integration” – integration of each area of life under the Lordship of Christ.

When Paul addresses the issue of slavery he takes a position that at first seems strange in that it does not condemn slavery as an institution. “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. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.” **Ephesians 6:5-8**. Paul seems more concerned about how we respond to our circumstances than changing those circumstances. It is more important to “do good” and not just “do well”. Social justice is not as important to Paul as is the need to be like Jesus in whatever state we find ourselves. Many of us will face injustice in this life with respect to the fair distribution of goods, services, and recognition in response to our labor. While we should seek justice as do others in the world, we should seek first the Kingdom with its values and vision.

We abuse this principle when we become consumers like most people around us and live for the pleasures of this life more than the values and calling of the Kingdom of God. It is hard to justify a lavish life style of consumption when those we love are in need of basic sustenance.

Some of us can also make the mistake of feeling guilty for enjoying good things. Certainly, if we live a lavish life style while those we love go with unmet basic needs, we are not walking in the spirit of Christ. But obedience does not demand poverty for everyone. Love is to set our standard of living.

Principle #7

Ministry

We are most human when we minister to others.

The church has a responsibility to help the needy and discipline the lazy. “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Ephesians 4:28. “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life . . . For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order; If anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread.” II Thessalonians 3:6-12. We are each vital parts of a community of people where there is need and opportunity for us to serve the common good. As we do this and only as we do this will we create the kind of environment that we need to prosper and realize the full blessings available to us. Community is the end-game in the sense that without due respect for it we all suffer. It is by helping the least among us that we all rise to a higher level.

It must be noted however that because we live in a fallen world where there will always be individuals who are irresponsible and in need of discipline, we will have to hold one another responsible. We must seek the wisdom to know when to be generous with those who lack and when to exercise “tough love”.

We abuse this principle when we neglect tough love. We abuse this principle when we forget about the priority of community and think only of ourselves and our close friends and family. When we ignore the truly poor we ignore Jesus.