

***Christians in the
Workplace***

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Christians in the Workplace

Introduction

Lesson 1

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

A Worthy Topic

To many, this topic may seem a strange one for a Bible class. For those who see our individual lives as consisting of distinct, separate areas: a home life, a social life, a work life and a church life; a Bible class focused on our work life will indeed seem odd. Those two aspects of our life, church and work, would be viewed as having little relationship to each other. But a Christian who recognizes his entire life is to be devoted to Christ, and that he is to be directed by the will of Christ in every phase of that life, will acknowledge the value of this study. This is the point of Paul in Colossians 3:1-3, 17. Consider also this passage from Philippians 3:13 – 4:1.

¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. ¹Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

1. What was the driving force of Paul's life?
2. What does he command us to do in regard to his example?
3. What are the consequences if we set our minds on something other than Christ?

For many of us, the greater part of our waking hours are connected in some manner to our jobs. Besides the hours actually spent working, there is the time commuting to and from the job, the hours outside of work thinking about the job, and the need to plan periodically on how to keep or obtain a job.

If we do not learn how to serve Christ and bring glory to His name while we are engaged in the workplace, it is clear we will never truly be individuals who follow Christ.

Structure of the Class

This is a broad topic, and even in thirteen lessons, we will not fully explore all of its relevant issues. This is not a class about how to be successful in the workplace; instead the emphasis will be on subjects that affect our relationship with God. Below, is a schedule that describes the general structure of our study:

Lesson	Title	Date
1	Introduction – A Biblical Subject	Sunday, October 23, 2011
<i>Biblical Foundation</i>		
2	God’s Viewpoint of Our Work	Sunday, October 30, 2011
3	Our Viewpoint – Work Unto God Not Unto Men	Wednesday, November 2, 2011
4	Viewpoint of Others – Working as Godly Examples	Sunday, November 6, 2011
<i>Issues with the Pursuit and Achievement of Success</i>		
5	Pride and Competition	Wednesday, November 9, 2011
6	Materialism	Sunday, November 13, 2011
7	Misplaced Priorities	Wednesday, November 16, 2011
<i>Issues with Workplace Adversity and Failure</i>		
8	Bitterness and Resentment	Sunday, November 20, 2011
9	Discouragement	Sunday, November 27, 2011
<i>Workplace Temptations and Challenges</i>		
10	Corporate and Peer Pressure	Wednesday, November 30, 2011
11	Lying and Integrity	Sunday, December 4, 2011
12	Women in the Workplace	Wednesday, December 7, 2011
13	Stress and Anxiety	Sunday, December 11, 2011

A Study with Applications for All

Admittedly, this class will have the greatest application to those who currently have a full-time job. But even if that is not the case in your circumstance, you can benefit from this study:

- Lessons will emphasize principles that apply to any situation in our life that consumes the majority or a significant portion of our time – as a student, in raising children, in caring for a loved one. (e.g. Ecclesiastes 9:10)
- It is beneficial to understand the challenges that other Christians face in the workplace. This knowledge may allow you to be more effective in warning and encouraging your fellow brothers and sisters (cf. Romans 12:15, I Corinthians 12:16). It may help you to be a better parent in preparing your children to live in this world.

We should also note that every job and work environment is different. Not only are there distinctions between blue collar and white collar jobs, there are retail jobs, food service jobs, medical positions, contract positions, governmental jobs, jobs on commission, etc. Even within the same company or division, two people can have vastly different experiences because of who they work with or for.

Blaine and I will offer some personal advice, based on our experiences, but that advice will be influenced by the nature of the work we have done. Your willingness to share your experiences will be helpful as well. However, this study, as is the intention of all classes here, will stress what the Bible teaches on this subject.

Exercise – Your Work History

1. List every job you can remember having. Include those for which you may not have been paid.
2. Decide which workplace was the easiest for you to live and practice what the Bible teaches. Decide on the one where it was the hardest.
3. As you reflect on those jobs, what were the key differences in the two circumstances?
 - a. In regard to the work environment (co-workers, bosses, nature of the work, etc.)
 - b. In regard to you (age, spiritual maturity, etc.)

Christians in the Workplace

Biblical Foundation God's View of Our Work Lesson 2

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

This lesson and the next two will help establish the Biblical foundation for the more practical lessons at the end of the study. It is important to understand what God thinks of our jobs, the viewpoint that He expects us to have in regard to our employment, and to recognize what our co-workers should see in our actions and words on the job.

We begin by acknowledging that God expects us to work and be engaged in the activities of the world. This may come as a surprise to someone who believes the holiest and most righteous individuals are those who remove themselves completely from the world, whether as monks or hermits or other holy men. While Paul taught that *our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:20), he also commanded that his example be followed: ¹⁷*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* As we shall see, Paul was an individual who held a job and used his experience to encourage other Christians to do likewise.

Work in the Old Testament

1. What were the occupations of the following Old Testament characters: Abraham and Lot, Joseph, Moses, David, and Daniel?
2. How did God use the occupations and achievements of Joseph and Daniel?
3. Review Exodus 31:1-10, 35:10, 35:30 – 36:2 and comment on the importance of artisans and craftsmen.
4. What principle is taught in Ecclesiastes 9:10?
5. What principle is taught in Psalms 128:2?

Paul and New Testament Examples

1. List the occupations of the following New Testament figures:
 - a. Lydia – Acts 16:4
 - b. Erastus – Romans 16:23
 - c. Luke – Colossians 4:14
 - d. Manaen – Acts 13:1

2. What was Paul's occupation in Acts 18:3? Who were his co-workers? What were they able to do, perhaps as a result of the income they earned (Romans 16:3-5, I Corinthians 16:19)?
3. Read the following passages regarding Paul's example as a worker:
 - a. I Thessalonians 2:9. How does Paul describe his labor?
 - b. II Thessalonians 3:8. What was a purpose behind Paul's working?
 - c. Acts 20:34-35. What does Paul say his work accomplished? What was the lesson they were to learn from his example, as reinforced by the words of Christ?

Paul's Teachings

1. Read Paul's words to the Thessalonians regarding their responsibility to work (II Thessalonians 3:6-12)

⁶Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹²Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

 - a. What did Paul say about idleness?
 - b. What was to be their attitude toward those who were unwilling to work?
 - c. What were individuals commanded and encouraged to do (vs. 12)?
2. Read Ephesians 4:28:

²⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

 - a. What would be a sign of repentance of a thief? What good would result?
3. Read I Timothy 5:8:

⁸But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

 - a. What responsibility do we have in providing for the physical needs of others?

Christians in the Workplace

Biblical Foundation Our Viewpoint – Work Unto God Not Unto Men Lesson 3

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

In our previous lesson, we established that God expects us to work and be engaged in the activities of the world. We have two more lessons laying the foundation for the practical lessons ahead. This lesson explores the attitude we must possess regarding our employment or any activity that dominates our time and effort. In the next lesson we will explore the good or bad that can result from the example we set in the workplace.

Working unto God

Most of us have had bosses, teachers or supervisors that were disappointing or frustrating to us. Part of the key to having a godly attitude in the workplace is to recognize ultimately we are not working for the supervisor or instructor. We are expected to see that we are working unto God. Two passages specifically make this point.

1. Read Ephesians 6:5-9 below. We are no longer in slave and master relationships, but it's easy to see the application that can be made to work circumstances. The principles here address our responsibility toward those in authority and in regard to the effort to be made in work.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

- a. What indicates the respect we should have for those in authority?
- b. What are some improper reasons given in the passage for which an employee would work hard on a job?

- c. What are some spiritual dangers that could come from working *by the way of eye-service* or *as people-pleasers* (cf. Philippians 3:19)?
 - d. Find the statements in the passage that describe the real motivation for our hard work:
 - e. Can you add other proper, Biblical reasons for working diligently at a job (refer to our previous lesson if needed)? How can you reconcile those motives with the call here to render service as to the Lord?
2. Read Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 below.

²²*Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

¹*Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.*

- a. Can this passage be applied to activities other than a job? Why or why not?
- b. What describes the degree of our effort?
- c. For whom are we working? Who are we ultimately serving?
- d. What are we to expect as our reward?

Viewpoint of a Supervisor

Of course, you may be the supervisor or the business owner. The two passages above still make it clear that your work effort is governed by God.

1. What do you think is meant by the instruction to masters in Ephesians 6:9: *do the same unto them*?
2. What are masters to stop? Why?
3. What are masters commanded to do (Colossians 4:1)? Why?
4. Give some practical examples of how these commandments would affect our behavior as supervisors, teachers, business owners or other positions of authority:

Christians in the Workplace

Biblical Foundation Viewpoint of Others – Working as Godly Examples Lesson 4

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

This is the last of three lessons intended to give us a Biblical foundation for understanding how we are to act in our workplaces. We have seen the importance that God places on work; the expectation that we will not be idle, that we will provide for those for whom we have a responsibility. We have also examined the attitude we should possess towards our jobs – that we are working for the Lord, not for our own glory, and not merely for the good of the one with authority over us. In this lesson, we will take a look at the effect that our actions in the workplace have on those who observe us.

Influential Exiles

A common message of the New Testament is the need for Christians to recognize that they do not belong to this world. A full acceptance of this fact gives us strength to overcome the influences and temptations of this life. An example of this teaching is the description of Abraham and other heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:13-16) who are said to have *"died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."*

And yet we are repeatedly told that we must balance this attitude with a recognition that we have to live among the unbelievers of this world (I Corinthians 5:9-10), and set an example for them that would draw them to Christ. This would be especially applicable to work situations – or any place we spend most of our time – where our godly behavior is expected to be a stark contrast to those who live self-indulgent lives.

1. Read Philippians 2:14-15.
¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world
 - a. How is the world described?
 - b. What is our responsibility in the world?

- c. What is said of the actions we are to take and the character that we are to have?
 - d. Would this behavior and character stand out in your workplace?
2. Read I Peter 2:11-12.
- ¹¹Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*
- a. How does Peter make it clear that we both live in the world and live apart from it?
 - b. What kind of conduct must we have among unbelievers (Gentiles)? How would this conduct be seen by others in your workplace?
 - c. What may be the initial result of our example? Why do you think the example may be more powerful over time? If this is true, what trait is being required of us?
 - d. What may the ultimate result of our example?

Lessons from the Sermon on the Mount

1. Read Matthew 5:14-16. Here again we see the theme of living in, but different from the world. *¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*
2. Based on the passage, what does it mean to let your light shine? What will be the result in the lives of those who see this?
3. Given the context of this passage, it seems clear that our good works, which are to be seen, are to result from possessing the character described in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). For each of the eight beatitudes be prepared to explain how possessing that character would have an impact on others in your work environment:

Summary of the Foundation

We have finished our study of foundational matters. These are three things to always bear in mind in regard to our work life. They constitute the mindset we must have as we engage in the activities of work (or other consuming activities) from day to day:

1. God's view – work is a good thing and generally expected of us. It is not a separate part of life unrelated to our service to Him, but from God's view it is a righteous endeavor and one where our conduct must honor Him.
2. Our view – we are working to please God, not to please others and not for some selfish end. This viewpoint, if constantly kept in mind, will have a dramatic impact on our conduct and contentment. Once again, work is not a compartmentalized aspect of our lives, but fits within the context of all that we do in service to God.
3. The view of others- they are watching and we seek, not to please them, but to influence them by being a living example of the gospel's power.

Christians in the Workplace

Pride and Competition

Lesson 5

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

The last three lessons were intended to lay a Biblical foundation for the examination of a number of challenges and issues related to our work life. In the next three lessons, we will turn our attention to spiritual issues connected with the pursuit of work success and the potential problems that result from its achievement.

<i>Issues with the Pursuit and Achievement of Success</i>		
5	Pride and Competition	Wednesday, November 9, 2011
6	Materialism	Sunday, November 13, 2011
7	Misplaced Priorities	Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Christians – Successful Workers

Generally speaking, Christians will be successful in their jobs – meaning that they will be viewed as valuable workers, commended for their efforts, and (especially early on) worthy of future advancements and increases in responsibilities. That may seem a bold statement, but think of this: Christians who follow the principles discussed in the last three lessons, are hard workers, even when the boss/job doesn't really deserve it. They work without complaining, with a degree of diligence and care. They treat others with respect and cooperation. In my experience, it's hard to give a better description of a valued and successful employee.

In the scriptures, we see multiple examples of godly individuals who were successful in highly challenging roles: Joseph, Daniel and Nehemiah come to mind. But with success (however you define it) will come temptations. In this lesson, we will focus on two issues: pride and ambition. Pride is a sin, and we need to be aware of the factors in the workplace that can lead us to possess it. We also need to become more adept in overcoming a proud nature. Ambition is the focus on a future goal. It is not necessarily a sin, the determining factors being, of course, the goal in mind and the motivation for achieving the goal. We will examine both pride and ambition through the lens of our three foundational lessons.

Pride

How does pride develop from success in our jobs? Voices are telling you how good you are, how important you are. You may detect from others, admiration or envy as to what you are accomplishing. This can easily lead to pride, as we begin to give ourselves undue credit or attention for the success we have had. Let's take a look at our accomplishments from God's perspective and from the view of others.

1. As we noted pride is a sin. Read Proverbs 11:2 and 29:23, James 4:6, I Peter 5:5. What is God's view of pride? Whom does he choose to honor?
2. Remember that God views work as honorable and gives us reasons to be engaged in it (providing for our families or to have the means to share with others, etc.).
 - a. Are we working for reasons that are beyond the purpose God has given for work?
 - b. Even if we accomplish all that God intends, what should be our attitude (Luke 17:10)?
3. God commands us to be *rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man* (Ephesians 6:7).
 - a. Who is to receive the glory for what we accomplish (I Cor. 10:31)?
 - b. Read I Cor. 4:7. What should we recognize about our ability to be successful in our work?
4. Pride will destroy our ability to influence others in the workplace.
 - a. What other sins are listed with pride in II Timothy 3:2-5?
 - b. Be prepared to comment on how these other sins can easily develop from unchecked pride. What would be the effect on our example if co-workers conclude that we are proud, lovers of self and arrogant?

Overcoming Pride

The beatitudes as a whole (Matthew 5: 3-12) give us the picture of a Christian who will be an effective example to others, pleasing God and bringing Him glory through our labors.

1. Look at the first three beatitudes – poor in spirit, mourning, meekness. How will developing these three in particular help us to overcome the temptation to have pride?
2. What is our real standing before God without His mercy and grace?

Ambition

As we noted above, ambition is not necessarily a sin. Read the passage below to gain an understanding of what might constitute sinful ambition.

James 3:13-17

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

1. Is it appropriate to have an ambition to accomplish the goals God has in mind for our employment?
2. Consider the concept of selfish ambition (James 3:16). How is it different from the commandment of Ephesians 6:7 and Colossians 3:22-23?
3. How can ambition damage the opportunities we have in the workplace to be examples to the ungodly? In other words, what harmful impressions are made on others because of our ambition?
4. James 4:16 condemns selfish ambition and Philippians 2:3 a spirit of rivalry (ESV and NIV). How might our ambition lead us to an ungodly spirit of competitiveness in our work environment? How is this type of competitiveness often encouraged?

Christians in the Workplace

Materialism

Lesson 6

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

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3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

This is the middle of three lessons about spiritual issues connected with the pursuit of success in our jobs, and the potential problems that result from its achievement. We noted in the previous lesson how Christians will generally be successful in their jobs; that they are likely to be viewed as valuable workers, commended for their efforts, and (especially early on) worthy of future advancements and increases in responsibilities. Such success can lead to pride, a sense that our accomplishments are due primarily to our own effort and skills. Usually with success will also come greater compensation and the related temptation to become focused on material possessions. We will look at the dangers of materialism in this lesson and, in the next, the manner in which success often leads us to put too great an emphasis on our jobs.

Bible Teaching on Materialism

Materialism is a temptation to everyone, rich or poor. It is an attitude focused on this world and its possessions and pleasures (1 John 2:15-17 - ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world— the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.* ¹⁷ *And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*). Our workplaces can be environments that make the constant temptation of materialism far stronger, especially when we have achieved some measure of financial success. Nevertheless, the Bible is clear: materialism is a sin.

1. Read Philippians 3:18-19. We looked at this passage in Lesson 1. Those who are described in vs. 19 have what as their god? In what do they glory? Where is their mind set?
2. In Luke 12:15, Jesus taught "*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*" Why do we need to guard against the sin of covetousness?
3. Read Matthew 6:19-24. This is part of the Sermon on the Mount.
 - a. Where are we to lay up treasures?
 - b. Where is our heart?

- c. What choice must we all make (vs. 24)?

Work and Materialism

Success in our jobs generally means more money, and whether it is a small amount or large, there is a temptation to put undue attention on worldly goods. The reality is, with most jobs, you are surrounded by individuals whose primary focus is on how much they make, and what they have. It's easy to get caught up in that viewpoint and be frustrated that we don't make more, or become singularly absorbed by how to do better financially.

1. What opportunities exist in your workplace to make more money? Think of how those opportunities can turn into temptations to sin (e.g. cut corners in order to achieve certain incentive compensation goals, take actions to win the boss's favor). List some of these temptations:
2. What changes when your focus on the job is principally about your compensation?

Materialism in View of the Foundational Lessons

For each of the foundation lessons (as summarized below), explain how a materialistic attitude is opposed to what God expects of us in our jobs:

1. God's view of our work. (Remember the goals God has in mind for labor: that we would earn our own living, that we would not be a burden, that we would provide for our family, and that we would share with others).
2. Working unto the Lord rather than unto men.
3. Working as godly examples (being lights unto the world).

Proper Attitude toward Material Success

There are many scriptures that explain the attitude we should have towards physical possessions and the actions God expects of us. Consider these:

1. I Timothy 6:6-10. Also I Timothy 6:17-19 which reads *17As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life..*
2. Example of the Macedonians, II Corinthians 8:1-5, 13-15; 9:6-11.
3. I John 3:17-18.

Christians in the Workplace

Misplaced Priorities

Lesson 7

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

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3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

This is the last of three lessons about spiritual issues related to the pursuit and achievement of success in our work life. We recognized how Christians will generally be successful in their jobs; and looked at two sins that can result, in part, from that success: pride and materialism. In this lesson, we consider how doing well in a job, along with the praise and appreciation that accompanies good performance, can lead to a changing of priorities – a shift away from putting Christ first in all things to making unwise compromises.

Following Christ – Our First Priority

We looked at passages early on in our study that stressed the need to have Christ at the center of our lives.

- Colossians 3:3 ³*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*
- Colossians 3:17 ¹⁷*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*
- Galatians 2:20 *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

There are also a number of scriptures, generally in the words of Jesus, which challenge us to put our service to Him above everything else in life, regardless of how important those other matters are. Consider the following:

1. Matthew 10:37-39
 - a. Our love of Christ is compared to our love of whom? What does it take to be worthy of Christ?
 - b. What does it mean to take your cross and follow Christ?
 - c. How does one find his or her life?
2. Matthew 16:24-25
 - a. What must we do to come after Christ?

- b. How does one save his or her life? In practical terms, what does that mean?
3. Luke 9:57-62
 - a. What did each of the men who came to Jesus claim they were ready to do?
 - b. What was Jesus' concluding remark (vs. 62)?

The Challenge of Success

Sometimes we make our job the center of our life for reasons that are clearly sinful. We're driven by selfish ambition to seek honor and glory from others. The physical possessions and social status that come from having a higher income spur us to make any sacrifice to get ahead in the job. But sometimes, a Christian finds that his or job has taken on an inappropriate level of importance for far more complicated reasons than these. Consider this.

A young man or woman begins a new job and takes to heart the lessons we have already studied. They strive to do honorable work, they give service with a good will, work heartily whether anyone is watching or not. Because they take the principles of I Corinthians 13 and Matthew 5:3-10 to heart, they are kind to others, cooperative, willing to work sacrificially. Because of their approach to their job, if they have any measure of skill or talent, they will likely be told how important they are to the company, promised future advancement and potentially greater pay.

1. Is it possible to have such success almost as an unintended consequence? That is, our goal is to please God, but we end up also impressing supervisors, mentors, co-workers, etc.?
2. In a circumstance such as this, is it necessarily the case that bosses, co-workers, etc. realize that we are *working as unto the Lord*? What might they believe?

What happens next is the expectation that this young man or woman will be willing – as others are – to make any sacrifice to further their career: time, ethics, family, and time in worship.

3. Read I Peter 4:4. Should we be careful about the expectations of worldly individuals in our jobs?

There is even the insidious effect of being needed. You live as a Christian and become so important to your employer that now they lean on you. Can that good thing become a challenge? For those later in their work years, there is often the concern that if you fail to live up to what may be unrealistic expectations you will lose your job, a job that may seem to us to be impossible to replace. If we ignore the principles of Matthew 6:25-33, it is easy to commit too much time, attention and worry to our jobs.

Self-Evaluation

We must never forget the Lord whom we are ultimately trying to please. It is important to examine what is happening in our jobs and challenge ourselves to examine if we are truly putting Christ first. We should examine our priorities in light of the three foundational lessons.

1. God's View of Work. What are our current goals in our jobs? Do they have agreement with the goals that God has for our labor?
2. Our Viewpoint – Working unto the Lord. For whom are we really working? The company and its success? Our personal advancement? To continue the praise of others?
3. Viewpoint of Others. What do our co-workers see? Are we having a godly effect on them or do they believe our priorities are like theirs – centered on earthly matters.

Case Study

John Goodman is 32, married with two children ages 4 and 6. John has been a Christian since he was 14, and he and his wife and children are members of the Fifth Street Church of Christ. John is an attorney in the corporate division of a law firm. John has had a successful career by any measure: excellent performance reviews, regular raises, and a number of clients who have asked specifically for John to be assigned to their account. John has enjoyed his position. The work has been interesting, the partners of the firm are morally minded, and he has never been asked by a client to do something that would violate his conscience.

Nevertheless, John has an uneasy feeling about the effect of his job on his family and he is beginning to worry if it is affecting his relationship with Christ. Two years ago, a favorite client went through a series of business transactions that required John to work 65 to 75 hours a week for a number of months. He remembered going days in a row without any meaningful interaction with his children. He missed the Wednesday services on a regular basis, and during the Fall gospel meeting, he was only able to attend the Sunday morning service. Yesterday, he heard that this client was preparing to go through an even more intense period of transactions. One of the partners has come to John with “good news”. This client has stated John’s work will be a critical factor in their success and a primary reason why they have continued to use John’s firm. The partner points out if all goes well, this opportunity will almost certainly assure John’s chance of making partner at the firm.

Instead of being excited, John is worried about his soul. He also worries that another period of intense work will reduce the spiritual influence he feels he should have in the lives of his wife and children. John has calculated that if he were unemployed he has savings sufficient for six months. The job market for corporate attorneys is really not good at the moment, and he wonders how he would ever explain his decision to leave. He can’t imagine getting a recommendation from anyone at his firm if he left at such a critical moment. He has come to you for advice.

- What questions would you have for John?
- Do you have any advice in mind?

Christians in the Workplace

Bitterness and Resentment Lesson 8

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

We have completed three lessons focused on the spiritual challenges that accompany success in our jobs. In this lesson, and the next, we turn our attention to issues that result from difficulties in the workplace. The lessons are organized as follows:

<i>Issues with Workplace Adversity and Failure</i>		
8	Bitterness and Resentment	Sunday, November 20, 2011
9	Discouragement	Sunday, November 27, 2011

Workplace Adversity and Failure

Failure in our jobs can be just as challenging, perhaps more challenging than success. In a broad sense, what we mean by failure is any outcome in our jobs that is less than what we had desired or expected, perhaps less than what we deserved. Adversity refers to an on-going circumstance, one which is a difficult burden to bear whether it directly affects us spiritually or not. Such failures or adversities are not always attributable to our performance or abilities. Sometimes we face situations in which our determination to serve God puts us at odds with an individual or organization in such a way that we simply cannot be successful; we will look at such situations later. But, perhaps more often, failure or adversity occurs because of circumstances beyond our control – a company has to downsize, our responsibilities are beyond our training or skills, a co-worker is more talented, etc.

For each of the following areas, list as many job-related failures or adversities as you can:

1. General work circumstances (examples –loss of a job, failure to advance or receive a promotion)
2. Related to co-workers (examples – name calling, falsehoods)

3. Related to company condition (examples – relocation of an office, financial instability of the organization)
4. Related to supervisors (examples – unappreciative, unrealistic)

Temptations Associated with Success

Interestingly, when faced with adversity or failure at work, we can be challenged with aspects of the same temptations we saw prevalent with success. Be prepared to explain why we might struggle with each of the following during a difficult period at work.

1. Pride (James 4:6, I Peter 5:5)–
2. Materialism (Luke 12:15) –
3. Misplaced Priorities (Matthew 10:37-39)–

In earlier lessons, we addressed why the above are dangerous sins. But there are other temptations posed by failure also:

Bitterness, Resentment and Other Sins

Our jobs are important to us, and when we experience problems and failure in them, it is tempting to look for someone to blame. It may even be true that a specific individual is responsible for the difficulties we have faced. In such a circumstance it is easy to be tempted to be bitter and to have a sense of resentment. We may for the first time feel an intensity of emotion unlike anything we have previously experienced – anger, frustration, and envy. Remember these verses:

1. Ephesians 4:31
Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
 - a. What other sins are likely to accompany bitterness?
 - b. For each sin, be prepared to explain how difficulty in the workplace can lead to its existence.
2. Hebrews 12:14-15
¹⁴*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*
¹⁵*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*
 - a. What two things should we strive for?

- b. What are the dangers of allowing a root of bitterness to spring up?
-
- 3. Proverbs 14:30
A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.
 - 4. Philippians 2:14-15
⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,
 - a. When we feel oppressed, what is often a sinful reaction? What are we warned against here?
 - b. By handling adversity well, what may we be able to accomplish?

In View of the Foundational Lessons

We should examine the manner in which we address failure or adversity in light of the three foundational lessons.

- 1. God's View of Work. If we are bitter or angry, we should think again about what we are trying to accomplish. Are our goals in our jobs in harmony with God's or are we frustrated over our failure to accomplish something of a more personal basis.
- 2. Our Viewpoint – Working unto the Lord. For whom are we really working? Is it primarily for us and to build up our own pride or sense of accomplishment?
- 3. Viewpoint of Others. Are we really concerned about the example we set? What better time to shine our light than when we have been misused. Consider that I Peter 1:12 speaks of a *day of visitation* which may be a reference to a period of trial, whether for us or for those who observe our conduct.

Christians in the Workplace

Discouragement Lesson 9

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

Christians often experience a measure of success in their jobs and chosen vocations. In lessons 5 to 7, we looked at the temptations associated with such success, but beginning with our last lesson we recognized that Christians also frequently face adversity and even failure in their job circumstances. Consider situations such as this:

- Bob was recently let go from his job of 30 years. He is embarrassed to tell the brethren where he worships what has happened. He was given a severance package that will last a few weeks, and after that he is uncertain what he should do.
- A new supervisor was assigned to Mary's team at work. The previous supervisor was a kind, and understanding individual. The new supervisor is abrasive, generally making fun of most of the team members. Mary feels that she is especially picked on because of her moral standards.
- After 15 years, John felt confident that he would be promoted but instead was overlooked. He is not sure why it happened, but it has taken all of the enjoyment away from his work. He also finds it difficult to work with those who were promoted, as he believes they have been unfairly rewarded.
- Maurice owns his own business. He employs two others, both of whom are Christians who are members of the same local church as he. The sales are declining in his business and it is looking likely that he will need to let one of his employees go. Maurice cannot stop thinking about his dilemma, especially when he is at a worship service.

It's only natural to feel a sense of discouragement when the activity to which we devote the greatest amount of time is a place of failure. But to become overly discouraged is to demonstrate that we don't understand what matters the most or what God wants us to achieve in our jobs (remember the principles of our first two foundational lessons). It's also a sign that we lack the proper vision discussed in II Corinthians 4:16-18:

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), and whatever disappointments we face in this life, we must remember the value we have in the eyes of God. We are far more than our jobs.

Passages about God's Constant Care

From beginning to the end, the Bible describes a God who cares for His people. Please take the time to read through the following passages. When finished, consider the total weight of these scriptures and the fact that they are but a small sample of similar verses throughout the Bible:

1. Isaiah 41:10
2. Psalms 55:22
3. Psalms 138:3
4. Matthew 11:28-30
5. I Timothy 6:17b
6. Hebrews 13:5-6
7. James 1:16-17

Passages about the value of trials

God understands what we need far better than we do. There are times when the trials we face in our jobs will strengthen us spiritually. Consider the following passages:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 7:14.
 - a. What are we told to do in the day of prosperity? Would this be hard?
 - b. In the day of adversity we are told to consider, i.e. to think and learn a lesson. Why does adversity provide a better opportunity to learn than prosperity?
2. Read Hebrews 12:11. What is the expected result of discipline?
3. Read James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5
 - a. What is to be our attitude about trials or suffering?
 - b. What can be the positive results of our trials and testing? Do these results depend in part on us?

Consider the possible benefits that a Christian may gain from hardship faced in the workplace. Trials can:

- Harden and toughen us for even more difficult days ahead. Successfully enduring a trial will give us confidence for those we face in the future.
- Help us appreciate more the blessings that we have. Think of how often we take our blessings for granted until they are placed in jeopardy.
- Help us to examine and recognize what truly matters most in life. A loss of a job or declining income can focus our attention on our family, on our brothers and sisters in Christ, and hopefully on or relationship with God.
- Help us to cease depending solely upon our own strength. We frequently forget to depend upon God who is our helper (Hebrews 13:6), but a trial can cause us to turn to Him.
- Draw our attention away from the material things of life. Look at Paul's comments about what we really need in life (I Timothy 6:6-10). Unfortunately, we sometimes must suffer loss to understand that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out.

- Helps us to recognize the temporary nature of life. James says that our life is a mere vapor that appears for a moment and disappears (James 4:14). Paul told the rich (I Timothy 6:17-19) to look beyond the uncertainty of riches and store up a “*good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*” But all too often, it takes a period of hardship to help us see this truth.

Of course as you look over the list of benefits above, it is also easy to see how an individual can suffer a trial and allow the very opposite of these benefits to result.

Psalms 73 – a Big Picture Viewpoint

As we noted at the beginning, discouragement can be a dangerous emotion. Our jobs take on such a high degree of importance, that we may question the goodness of God when our work circumstance is a source of suffering. This is especially true when we witness ungodly individuals who either cause our suffering or do not seem to suffer the appropriate consequences of their actions. Asaph was a man who questioned God and appears to have had his faith nearly shattered. But he also came to a deeper understanding, one that would be useful to us whenever we are tempted to be discouraged by the actions of others in the workplace.

1. Casually read the entire Psalm through once and then read it carefully at least one more time.
2. How did Asaph describe his condition at the beginning of this Psalm (vs. 2)? Note also his description in vs. 21-22.
3. What had he observed that troubled him? Be specific.
4. What doubts were created by his observations (vs. 13-15)?
5. Was he initially able to understand and make sense of this (vs. 16)?
6. What was the turning point in his understanding?
7. What did he come to understand about God and about the wicked?

Christians in the Workplace

Corporate and Peer Pressure ***Lesson 10***

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

Beginning with this lesson, and for the three to follow, we will look at specific forces or circumstances in the workplace that can challenge Christians. This lesson will examine the pressure that certain companies and/or co-workers place on an individual worker to take actions that are in opposition to God's commandments. We will give particular attention to the issue of alcohol use and the role it plays in many work situations. In the next three lessons we will examine questions of lying and integrity, take a special look at the role of women in the workplace, and conclude with a study of the dangers of stress and anxiety.

Corporate and Peer Pressure

In most jobs, we will feel some element of pressure from two groups to conform our behavior to someone else's standard. There is the influence exerted by the organization for which we work. The policies established, the mandates set down by the head of the organization, the actions taken by the individual leaders of the organization (including our own supervisor) all play a role in pushing us toward a manner of thinking or action which may, or may not be, be pleasing to the Lord. Similarly, the long hours with our co-workers, especially when they as a group strongly share a common set of mores, will inevitably produce peer pressure that, again, may be a force for good or evil.

The Bible speaks about both of these sources of pressure but not in direct connection with the workplace. The idea of corporate pressure fits with the Bible's teaching on the place of authorities in the lives of Christians: the proper responsibilities and attitudes toward those in authority. The Bible is also full of teaching about the dangerous influence that individuals or groups of individuals can have. Let's look at some scriptures.

1. Role of Authorities.
 - a. Read I Peter 2:13-18.
 - i. Why are we subject to every human institution (vs. 13)?
 - ii. What do we owe to authorities according to vs. 17?

- b. Read Romans 13:1-7. This passage is about governing authorities, but consider how it has application to our attitude toward our employer.
 - i. What is the danger of resisting authorities (vs. 2)?
 - ii. What are two reasons to be in subjection according to vs. 5?
 - iii. What else do we owe (vs. 7)?
- 2. Corporate Pressure (limitation of authorities)
 - a. Look again at I Peter 2:15. Despite the command to be subject to every human institution, what conduct does God expect of us?
 - b. Look again at Romans 13:3. What are Christians commanded to do? Would this restrict the extent to which we follow the dictates of our employer?
 - c. Read Acts 5:27-29. What general principle must always be considered in terms of the pressure exerted by any authority?
- 3. Peer Pressure
 - a. Read John 12:42. Why did some believers in Christ fail to confess their faith?
 - b. Read I Peter 4:1-5.
 - i. What is the reaction of worldly individuals to our failure to act as they do?
 - ii. How might they treat us?
 - iii. How are we to live (vs. 2)?
 - c. Read I Corinthians 15:33-34. Based on this passage, why should we be concerned about the individuals we are with?
 - d. Read II Corinthians 6:14. Should we be careful about the influence we allow someone to have over us? Why is this especially important with an unbeliever?

Special Situations - Use of Alcohol

This is a topic that could occupy a complete class period. It will require at least a few preliminary observations, but it is an important subject when we consider the challenges faced by a Christian in the workplace. Though it may be acknowledged there are no scriptures that say clearly "thou shall not take even a single drink of alcohol", the scriptures, nevertheless, are clear in their condemnation of drunkenness:

I Peter 4:3-4

³For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you

Ephesians 5:18

¹⁸*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,*

For many job situations, the use of alcohol is either a well established part of the company culture or something which is assumed to be necessary for real success. Consider situations such as:

- The after work beer – an opportunity to fit in, to know the boss better, and show you are a team player.
- Company parties – where you are not required to drink, but may stand out if you don't.
- Sales dinners or lunches with client who choose to drink.
- Formal business dinners with the rituals of selecting and drinking the right wines.

In the judgment of the writer of this material, when applying all the scriptures – a Christian should not drink alcohol on any occasion. Each individual should engage in a study to be fully assured in their own mind; such a study is beyond the purpose of this class, but there important questions we should ask in regard to drinking related to our work:

1. Consider your motives – are you trying to please God or seek personal pleasure?
2. Are you truly working as unto the Lord, or is your motive to advance your career?
3. What will be the impact on your example if you are known to take even a single drink? Are you more concerned about your reputation as a good employee or as a godly person?

As a matter of personal advice, (based of course on my own conviction): don't take even a single drink. Be consistent; it may very well hurt your career (perhaps to your spiritual good), but that has not been my experience. Instead, co-workers and supervisors tend to respect consistency. It is nearly impossible to draw a line when you have indulged on occasions.

Special Situations – Worldly Corporate Culture

Many companies, especially larger corporations, have adopted politically correct policies under the premise of toleration. Toleration can be a Biblical concept, but not if it implies the acceptance of sin. Any Christian should avoid working for a company that is actively engaged in a sinful practice, but it is more difficult to know what actions we should take when our company appears to take a stance that might encourage an immoral activity. In looking at Romans 13:1-7, we saw the need to submit to governing authorities, but with the limit that we do not fail to do good. No governing authority fully follows the will of God, so we must exercise an element of judgment to determine when our company's policies either require us to do something sinful or damage our reputation as a Christian. Consider these tough questions:

1. How should we react when asked to show no partiality to those who are living in sin? What if we are told to give preference to homosexuals as a "protected group"?
2. How should we act when asked or pressured to support social causes or charities not in keeping with God's will?
3. How should we act when our own beliefs are suppressed by company policy or culture?
4. How should we react when asked to promote someone's ideas, even when those ideas are in conflict with God's teaching?
5. How can we be an influencer rather than being unduly influenced?

Christians in the Workplace

Lying and Integrity Lesson 11

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

No Christian can doubt lying is a sin. From beginning to end, the Bible explains the sinful nature of lying and describes its damage in detail. Satan lied to Adam and Eve, and he is called the father of lies (John 8:44); lying was condemned in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:16); and liars are said to have their place in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

Despite our clear understanding, lying is often a problem in the workplace even for those who bear the name of Christ. Sometimes, it is a place where the temptation to lie is stronger than in any other circumstance of life; on other occasions it produces dilemmas in which the proper course of integrity and truth is not immediately apparent.

Lying in the Workplace – A Sin

Let's look at some of the passages that make it clear we should be careful to always tell the truth.

1. We have looked at Ephesians 4 previously because of the emphasis on the new man (vs. 22-24) and because of the instruction for the thief to learn to do honest work in vs. 28. Look at vs. 25:

²⁵Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another

- a. What are we to put off? What are we to do?
 - b. What reason is given for telling the truth?
2. Revelation 21:8 ⁸ *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.* Note with whom liars are associated. What is their fate?
 3. I Timothy 1:10. Again note the sins with which lying is associated. To what is lying contrary?

4. Read Acts 5:1-11.
 - a. To whom did Ananias and Sapphira really lie?
 - b. What do you think was the motivation for their lie? Is that likely to be a temptation on a job?

These passages should help us to overcome the temptation to commit acts of dishonesty in the workplace or to have the courage to facedown someone (boss, co-worker, etc.) who asks us to lie. They explain clearly we have an obligation to tell the truth and to act honestly.

Honesty in the Workplace – A Matter of Maturity

While the commands are clear, nevertheless it is often difficult to know whether we have done all that we should in terms of honesty on the job. Our responsibility to tell the truth is sometimes surprisingly complex in application. The “boldface” dishonesty we know is wrong:

- Lying to gain the next promotion
- Making a promise to a sales prospect or to a job candidate that you know will not be honored
- Divulging company secrets or competitive advantages to a competitor
- Putting blatantly false information on your resume
- Breaking confidentiality about something entrusted to you
- Engaging in insider trading
- Offering or taking a bribe

But it’s really not the “bold-face” lie that causes a struggle; it’s not being sure we have told the whole truth or said all that we should have in a given situation. Temptations to blur the truth come in many forms on the job. Business is competition: company against company, employees vs. employees. In sales and negotiations there may be winners and losers. In this environment, a Christian may be torn in knowing when a fiduciary responsibility to the company leads to a violation of the commandment to be honest. For example:

- Do I explain to a client everything that could go wrong in my company’s effort to serve them?
- Do I mention that a key employee is leaving and we don’t know what impact that will have?
- When do I tell the boss about a problem, and when do I just try to fix it?
- When is silence a lie?
- As a supervisor how do I handle sensitive company information that my staff are not privy to?
- When has a line been crossed from tax avoidance (a legal concept) to tax evasion? And just because it is legal, is it right?
- When does “creative accounting” or “clever advertising” become a form of deception?
- When would it be wrong to use political connections to gain an advantage over a co-worker or competitor?

These are situations that often require a high level of spiritual maturity to determine the right course of action. Fortunately, the Bible recognizes it will not always be immediately obvious what is right or wrong, but we are still expected to develop the maturity necessary to make godly decisions. Look at these two passages.

1. Read Hebrews 5:12-14.
 - a. What should Christians will be able to handle after a period of time has passed?
 - b. What will the mature (*those of full age* – NKJV) be able to determine? How will they come to have that skill?

2. Read Ephesians 5:6-17.
 - a. Note the possibility of being deceived by worldly people as to what is right - walking in the light – (vs. 6-9).
 - b. Instead, what should we endeavor to determine (vs. 10, 17)?
 - c. How then should we walk (vs. 15)?

Gaining the needed spiritual maturity will take time, and will entail a commitment to Bible study, prayer and meditation beyond what we may have previously practiced. When faced with a moral dilemma, we should look for advice from those who are clearly striving to walk in the light, and who have already demonstrated the spiritual wisdom to which we aspire.

Practical advice

Even as we strive to grow there are some practical steps we can take to know what is right and to increase our determination to please the Lord in everything we do in our jobs. For example, when we are genuinely confused, we need to apply the golden rule of Matthew 7:12

¹²"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The question to ask is whether I have said everything to someone (a client, a boss, a co-worker, etc.), and in such a manner, that they have learned exactly what I would have felt entitled to know if I were in their shoes. It is also helpful to review again our three foundational lessons:

1. God's View of Work. Are our goals in our jobs in harmony with God's or are we "stretching the truth" in order to gain some advantage?
2. Our Viewpoint – Working unto the Lord. For whom are we really working? Is it primarily for us, to build up our reputation or perhaps to protect our employer?
3. Viewpoint of Others. Are we really concerned about the example we set? What will others think of us if they learned the "whole truth"? Can we justify our actions and words to other Christians?

Christians in the Workplace

Women and the Workplace Lesson 12

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Introduction

Much of what we have studied to this point has equal application to men or women. We will look back to the three foundational lessons and see how Christian men and women should both be mindful of the same principles in their work conduct. However, the scriptures ascribe different roles in the church to men and women, and give women special responsibilities within their families. For this reason, it is worthwhile to examine our subject from the viewpoint of a woman, and note where there may be special challenges or decisions that await her in the workplace.

Biblical Foundation for Work

The principles we examined in lessons 2 – 4, Biblical Foundation, have had application in every lesson we have studied since. Those three lessons were:

Biblical Foundation	
Lesson 2	God's Viewpoint of Our Work
Lesson 3	Our Viewpoint – Work Unto God Not Unto Men
Lesson 4	Viewpoint of Others – Working as Godly Examples

1. In lesson 2, we examined the purpose that God has for labor or work. We listed the following:
 - That we would burden no one (I Thess. 2:9, II Thess. 3:8)
 - That we would provide for our family (I Timothy 5:8)
 - That we could share with others (Acts 20:35, Ephesians 4:28)
 - That we would not be idle (II Thess. 3:6-7)

Read also I Timothy 5:13 regarding the danger of idleness for young women, and I Timothy 5:16 regarding the responsibility of a believing woman to care for widowed relatives. In lesson 2, we also saw the need to have the following spirit and attitude in our work.

- Sacrificial spirit (II Thess. 3:8)

- Full effort (Acts 20:35)
 - Quietness (II Thess. 3:12))
 - Concern for others (I Tim. 5:8)
 - Honesty (Ephesians 4:28)
- a. Based on your reading, be prepared to explain if there are any differences in the purpose of work for men or women.
 - b. Is there any reason to believe women would have a different attitude on the job?
2. In lesson 3, we establish the need to work heartily as for the Lord and not for men (Colossians 3:23). Is there any reason to draw a distinction between the responsibility of men or women in this regard?
 3. Read Philippians 2:14-15 and I Peter 2:11-12 which we covered in lesson 4. Does a Christian woman have the responsibility to set a godly example at work?

Should a Woman Work?

If the responsibilities while in the workplace are essentially the same, perhaps the real question is whether a woman should work, and if so, in what capacity. There are two passages that need particular attention:

I Timothy 5:14

¹⁴So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.

Titus 2:3-5

³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

1. Both passages speak of a woman's responsibility to her husband or children.
 - a. Would a single woman be responsible for earning her own living (II Thess. 3:10-12)?
 - b. In the context of I Timothy 5:1-15, what concern of Paul's (vs. 13) motivated him to desire the young widows to marry? For those without an opportunity to marry, would employment also serve to address Paul's concern (cf. II Thess. 3:6-7)?
2. Based on these two passages, it should be apparent that a wife's or mother's primary duty is to her family as a manager of the household and as a worker at home, yet this alone would not preclude her from working outside of the home.
 - a. A married woman's first consideration must always be: what is in the best interest of her husband or children. The same thing, of course, must be said for husbands

(Ephesians 5:25). A question of working is secondary to determining whether she is truly fulfilling her duty within the home.

- b. If she intends to work, she should also ask what is her motivation? Here it is helpful to remember the goals or purposes for employment that God has established. Do they agree with the reasons a mother or wife is seeking employment? If instead, the goal is material comfort or the satisfaction of personal ambition, she would be well served to proceed cautiously, regardless of how well managed is her household.
 - c. There are also occasions in which a mother or wife may have to work. I Timothy 5:16 seems to imply that she has an economic obligation to her widowed relatives. What are other situations in which she may have to work due to necessity or to the nature of this fallen world?
3. As to the nature of the work in which a woman may engage, we noted in the introduction, there are different roles for men and women within the church and different responsibilities in the family. It is not as clear that there are to be distinctions on the job. I Timothy 2:11-15 is used by some to say that a woman should avoid any work role that involves supervising a man. A detailed study of this passage is beyond the scope of this class, but it does explain why many Christian women feel uncomfortable with supervisory responsibilities.
- a. Should this consideration have an effect on a woman's choice of a degree or career to pursue? In what ways?
 - b. Would the responsibilities given in I Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:3-5 have a similar effect?
4. Every godly woman should devote time to a careful study of these scriptures and questions. One of her goals should be to establish clearly a set of personal convictions so that she can be fully convinced in her own mind that what she is doing is right (Romans 14:5), otherwise it may be a sin simply because she doubts whether she is acting appropriately (Romans 14:23).

Practical Advice

We have touched on some sensitive subjects, and it should be acknowledged that each family circumstance is different. God's standards remain the same, but it often takes wisdom and spiritual maturity to know how to apply His principles in a given situation (Hebrews 5:14). Here are two additional thoughts based on my personal experience of over 30 years of working:

- Decisions made early in a career or early in a marriage often limit the flexibility that men and women have in regard to jobs later in life. For example, financial obligations that require, or are likely to require, two incomes should be avoided if at all possible. If they are made from a covetous or greedy heart, they are, of course, sinful in nature. On the other hand, saving money early on, especially when you are single, may play a key role later in the decisions a family is able to make.

- In my work experience, I have met many talented, hard-working women who demonstrated the ability to be leaders and successful at any level of the organization in which they worked. A lot of those women – Christians and unbelievers - also expressed an intense desire to spend more time with their children. I have worked with many fathers, who felt the same way, but the mothers were much more emotional about what they believed they were missing and the effect it had on their children. Many no longer felt they had any choice but to continue to work, and while we would try to find alternative solutions (four day weeks, flexible hours, etc) that eased their concerns, they recognized an important fact – our goals for our careers and families are not always compatible. Recognizing this early on should have a powerful impact in how a young Christian woman approaches life decisions.

Dangers for Men and Women

This last warning doesn't really belong in a lesson about women in the workplace, but this is a good place to discuss a danger faced by men and women in their work environments. We spend more hours at our jobs than we may at any other activity in life. We will naturally form friendships with those with whom we work. We must be careful about the influence those friendships have on us in general (II Corinthians 6:14-15), but married men truly need to avoid an emotionally binding relationship with a woman co-worker, and married women should avoid such a relationship with a man other than their spouse.

Our jobs often require us to work long hours with such an individual; there are the shared experiences of a difficult job or the shared experience of a job well done. Required travel, etc. may provide temptation and opportunity unlike any other aspect of a Christian's life. It is important to recognize the danger and be determined to live the lives of purity and commitment that God asks of us.

Christians in the Workplace

Stress and Anxiety Lesson 13

Overall Goals of the 13 Lesson Study

By the end of the study each one of us will:

1. Work for God's glory rather than our own
2. Identify and endeavor to overcome the spiritual challenges of our main vocation
3. Be a more Christ-like example to our co-workers
4. Make more godly decisions while in the workplace

Now that we have reached the end of our studies, it would be good to reflect on the degree to which you have made progress with each of the four goals of the class or with other goals you may have set for yourself.

Introduction

We began our study of Christians in the Workplace by looking at the examples of individuals in the Bible who labored in a variety of jobs. In particular, we saw the example of Paul who often worked as a tentmaker while he preached the gospel. In his labors, Paul felt stress – the pressure to accomplish difficult and important tasks without sufficient time or resources – and had many causes for worry and even fear. He wrote frequently of such matters, even describing a time when he expected to die. He mentions the daily pressure and anxiety in II Corinthians 11:28, ²⁸*And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.* Yet he claimed to overcome the potentially debilitating effects of this stress and worry (II Corinthians 4:8-10):

⁸*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;*
⁹*persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* ¹⁰*always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*

Similar to Paul, most of us are likely to experience situations in our jobs or vocations where we feel overwhelmed, unable to accomplish all that may be asked of us due to factors that appear beyond our control. In addition, given the importance of our jobs in accomplishing godly goals – not being a burden to others, providing for our own needs, having something to share – when those jobs are threatened, it will be easy to give in to worry and anxiety. We need to learn to have the attitude and vision of Paul (II Corinthians 4:16-18).

Answer these initial thought questions:

1. What are causes of stress in the workplace, school, etc.?
2. Recall a period of stress and worry at work (or school). What was the effect on your worship and your service to God during this period?

Bible Teaching on Anxiety

The Bible has a lot to say about the subject of anxiety or worry.

1. Read Matthew 6:25-33.
 - a. How many times does Jesus command us not to be anxious (or to worry)?
 - b. What reasons are given?
 - c. What are we accused of lacking (vs. 30)?
 - d. What is to be our attitude about tomorrow?
 - e. What is the connection between our jobs and being anxious about food, clothing and drink?
2. Read Luke 10:38-42.
 - a. With what was Martha distracted? Did she consider that to be the right approach to her situation?
 - b. How did Jesus describe her? What was the one necessary thing to which Jesus alluded?
3. Read I Corinthians 7:32-34.
 - a. What is a married man or woman naturally concerned about? Would this be even more pronounced in regard to children they may have?
 - b. What may be the effect of this anxiety about worldly things?
4. Psalms 127:1-2.
 - a. What is true of all of our labor?
 - b. In what way is our early rising and working late done in vain?

Biblical Answers for Stress and Anxiety

In addition to the scriptures we have noted above, the Bible also gives some important answers for how to deal with the stress we face in our jobs and vocations, and how to avoid the worry that God commands us to lack.

1. Read Philippians 4:6.
 - a. What is Paul's commandment about being anxious?
 - b. How are we to respond?

2. Read I Peter 5:6-11.
 - a. What should we do with our anxieties? Why?

 - b. What can we count on God to do for us?

3. Read I Corinthians 7:29-31.
 - a. This passage may have special meaning for a certain kind of time – a present distress as Paul puts it in vs. 26 – but the general thought will help us avoid anxiety.

 - b. What should be our general attitude in dealing with the world?

An Opportunity to Set a Godly Example

We have frequently discussed the opportunity and responsibility we have to serve as examples of godliness to our co-workers (Philippians 2:14-15, I Peter 2:11-12). Part of that responsibility is to convey to others the confidence and faith we have in God. If we are known as individuals who claim to trust in God, we will be watched closely when we are subjected to a period of stress and anxiety. Should we fail to act in a calm manner, with that peace that passes understanding, we may communicate to those around us that we trust in God only when times are easy. On the other hand, we truly are lights to the world when we *are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.* May God help us to be such shining lights.