

Corruption! Embezzlement! Theft! Strikes!

“The man with the key is not here!”

These are some of the now familiar words which describe the crisis in all too many of the work places of our continent. Unless this disastrous trend is dramatically reversed, the economy will eventually collapse. The inevitable results of undermining the productivity of the economy are seen in increasing poverty and widespread unemployment. What is needed is for our people to rediscover the Christian work ethic.

At the very dawn of history God called man to work. God ordained work before the fall. Work is not a part of the curse. Adam was commanded to tend the garden before he fell into sin (Gen. 2:15). Labour is a God-given responsibility. Work is not a curse to be avoided, nor is it an undesirable activity only to be pursued when necessary. In the Bible we are commanded to:

“be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed . . .” 2 Tim 2:15

Before the coming of Christ, the heathen nations despised honest work and consigned it to slaves. When Christ was born, half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Three-quarters of the population of Athens were slaves.

When Luke visited Athens he noted that ***“all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”***
Acts 17:21

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

“The hand of the diligent makes one rich.” Proverbs 10:4

God is a worker. God worked to create the world and He works to sustain it. He is also constantly at work fulfilling His purposes in history and in the life of every person (Phil 2:13). As our Lord Jesus declared ***“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working”*** John 5:17.

God called His work *“good”*, confirming that work has intrinsic worth. Work is no disgrace – the disgrace is idleness.

“He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.” Proverbs 18:9

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

“Therefore . . . whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” 1 Corinthians 10:31

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

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

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

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

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

For Fulfilment of the Great Commission

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

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

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

For most Christians our workplace is our main mission field. Our job is not secondary to the making of friends and proclaiming the Gospel. In fact, completing our “*secular*” work in a God-honouring way is one of the most powerful demonstrations of the Gospel. Through meaningful work we can reveal our love for God, His Word and His people by: serving people, meeting our own needs, meeting our family’s needs, and earning enough money to be generous to others, practice hospitality and support our local churches, charities and missions. As John Wesley taught:

“religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality.” □

When we realise that God has placed us in our job to co-labour with Him, contributing to His creation, it leads to a sense of dignity and destiny in our work.

The Scripture declares that an industrious housewife and hard-working mother pleases the Lord and delights her husband (Proverbs 31:10-31). A man who fails to provide for his family . . . **“has denied the Faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”**

1 Tim 5:8. Christians are commanded to learn to devote themselves

“to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”

Titus 3:14

In the parable of the talents, Jesus teaches us to serve Him faithfully with the talents He has entrusted into our care (Matt 25:14 - 30). Christians must work in order to give to others: **“Let him who stole, steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need”**

Ephesians 4:28. Being a faithful worker is a powerful testimony to outsiders:

“...aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly towards those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.” 1 Thess 4:11 – 12

The Scriptures are scathing in recording God's denunciation of laziness:

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

“Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks .” Thess 10:18

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

It is a disgrace to be lazy (Prov 10:5). Lazy people always find excuses not to work (Prov 15:19; 26:13 16). Those who love sleep will grow poor (Prov 19:15;20:13).

“I went by the field of the slothful, by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; And there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles, its stone wall was broken down... a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come like a prowler...” Proverbs 24:30 - 34

Therefore, the Apostle Paul taught:

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you...but worked with labour and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you ... to make ourselves an example...

We command you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” 2 Thess. 3: 7 – 10

On the day of judgement ***“each one’s work will become manifest”*** 1 Cor 3:13. Jesus taught that ***“whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.”***
Matt 20:26.

The Economic Fruit of Faith

Dr. James Kennedy in *“What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?”* made the following observations on the role of faith in economics:

“Why has America and, for the most part, the West, enjoyed such material abundance? Why have some of the Asian countries also prospered after they adopted economic ideas from the West? If you look at the poor nations around the world, you will find that what the Bible says is true: they are what they are because of what they believe.”

‘As a man thinketh in his heart so is he’

(Prov 23:7). Look at India, a nation that has stagnated in its poverty for several millenia. Why? Because of what its people believe. Its Hindu religion teaches that there is no reality to matter. The external, visible world is unreal; therefore, you do not try to correct an unreal world; you try to escape from it. Consequently, progress dies. The belief in reincarnation has also had a devastating effect on the nation’s prosperity. Or consider North Africa, which for centuries has been sunk in poverty, superstition and ignorance. Why? Because of what its people believe. The fatalism of Islam has kept the Muslims from progress because human initiative can accomplish absolutely nothing, and all that is Allah has fated; therefore they are left in perpetual stagnation. Or consider the many nations of the East (prior to Western influence), whose religion is Buddhism, which teaches that life is irreparably evil and cannot be changed. Man’s only hope is to rid himself of all desire for any improvement in this life. The goal is not a more abundant life, but its extinction - absorption into the world-soul - and so the very roots of social amelioration are severed. Not so with the nations that have had a Christian base, especially when they have applied a more Biblical interpretation of economics.”

Many would be surprised to learn that there are over 700 references to money in the Bible. Nearly two-thirds of the recorded parables of Christ deal with the use and handling of money. In the Ten Commandments God laid the foundation for all good economics: private ownership of

property. The right to life, liberty and property and the importance of the family unit as the basic building block of society are all spelled out in Exodus 20.

The commandments, **“Thou shalt not steal ... Thou shalt not covet”** have inspired millions of believers to work hard, show up on time and to be honest. The free enterprise system has generated the highest standards of living on the face of the earth since the creation of the world. Many Christians can testify to the fact that when they became Christians they began to prosper. Firstly, this is because they stopped wasting their money on alcohol, gambling, cigarettes, drugs, prostitutes, pornography or other vices. (1 Peter 4:2-3)

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

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

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

The Effects of Sin on Work

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

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

Sin, however, made work harder. The burdensomeness of work is a result of the Fall. The sinfulness of man leads to the deception, dishonesties and degeneration which affect the

business world. People lie, cheat, steal, overcharge, waste valuable time and money, engage in corruption and produce shoddy workmanship. Often Christians who sincerely want to work with integrity are forced to deal with unethical suppliers. Even Christians of integrity often need to battle their own sinful temptations to laziness, selfish ambition or pride.

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

However, success in life is measured by how faithfully we love God, our family and our neighbours - not by work status. God rewards faithfulness. God is more interested in the heart motivations, attitudes and integrity of a person than in his outward appearance and position. While careful planning, efficiency and hard work are commendable, nothing justifies unethical work practices or hurting people. *“Success”* at any price is a sure recipe for failure. A man whose children are on drugs, whose marriage is on the rocks, and whose employees despise his morals, is a failure in God's eyes even if he is *“successful”* in business. “s

“For what advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?” □ Luke 9:25

To the Glory of God

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

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

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

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

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

For this reason, the message of ***“repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached . . . to all nations.”***

Luke 24:47

The Church is to ***“make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”***

Matt. 28:19 - 20.

Each one of us needs to:

“...be transformed by the renewing of your mind; that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:2

Frontline Fellowship
P O Box 74
Newlands 7725
Cape Town

South Africa

admin@frontline.org.za

www.frontline.org.za

Frontline Fellowship USA

P.O. Box 728

Manitou Springs

CO 80829

Tel: 719-685-2899

Fax: 719-685-9330

Web: www.frontlinefellowship.net

Email: info@frontlinefellowship.net