

WORK FOR GOD'S SAKE

Written by Calvin Fox

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The Biblical Mandate to rule & subdue (have dominion over and cultivate) the earth (Genesis 1:26-31 with 2:15, as well as the 4th Commandment: "you shall labor") is still in the Bible and never annulled, but it is consistently misused. All kinds of selfishness, greed, waste and exploitation are justified with the Mandate. A standard is needed to decide whether specific work is as God intends it to be. When is a specific work activity (or work environment) bad and to be rejected.?

What is the Standard by which to judge "work"?

That standard is the "image of God". It enables us to answer this question biblically. God did not say: "I have made human beings. They have authority to rule the earth." God said: "I have made humans to be like me, to image Me. Because they are my image and as my Image, by lieu-tenants on earth, they are to rule the earth." The Image is not itself the mandate to have dominion. The Image determines how we are to have dominion. Human beings are to obey the "cultural mandate" as bearers of the image of God. The image is meant to govern the entire enterprise. The "Image" is what makes us "persons". This has practical implications: to act according to the image of God is to act according to the characteristics of God, as follows:

1. The Personal- the "person"

All that we do must value and respect "persons" above all- not simply "people", but all that is meant by "person". A "person" has infinite value. A "person" is defined by the ways in which God is a "person". It means a living being who is self conscious, knowable, who communicates meaningfully and can share in "personal" relationships; a person has a will and makes considered judgments. Like God, all Persons have the faculties of rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality.

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Work which demeans, exploits, neglects, injures or destroys persons as "persons" is evil

2. The Rational- rationality

God thinks and makes decisions in a reasonable, logical, orderly way All of creation reflects these qualities of its creator.

Work of any kind which is essentially, characteristically, unreasonable, illogical or chaotic is not acceptable

3. The Creative- creativity

All work should seek, in appropriate ways, to be creative, artistic and beautiful, as is God and the natural world He has made.

Work which is uncreative, boring, deadening, repulsive or ugly should be rejected

4. The Moral- morality

All work must be moral, righteous and just, as God defines those terms in his Word.

Work which is immoral, sinful or corrupt, must be rejected

5. The Communal- community

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The work of cultivating and of culture must be done in, of and by a community ("Community" could simply be one's co-workers, a team or unit. It could be a Company or Corporation. It could also be a neighborhood or town. etc.) Work must seek to promote the welfare and good of all members of the (appropriate) community. We are our brothers and sisters keepers, accountable for the welfare of all. Work that is good will serve the good of the whole.

Work which is done for selfish purposes or for self aggrandizement is not good. Work that harms the community or violates personal relationships in the community is sinful.

Work that is dehumanizing, unreasonable, ugly, immoral or selfish is bad work. If we want to be "Christ-followers", Christians are not to engage in "bad" work or support the work of others that will knowingly harm, ruin, destroy or otherwise exploit themselves, their community or the Creation. Taking this stand and explaining why, would be a strong witness for God, the Creator.

Note- Doing this could lead to reform –to the redemption of that work- or to demotion - or to loss of employment. That loss would be the cost of discipleship, of being faithful to God in that situation which is, after all, what being a Christian is really about.

SUMMARY

Allowing the image of God concept to guide us, requires these 5 principles. All employment, every project and work environments should be evaluated on these terms. Work that respects persons and thus is reasonable, beautiful, moral and good for the community is work for God's sake.