

20 Does God Belong Here?



BEN AND ART ARE SENIOR MANAGERS IN A PUBLIC relations firm that employs thirty-five workers. Both have been with the firm for several years, and they and their families are close. Both attend church regularly and care deeply about their personal faith.

Art recently switched churches and now attends a congregation which teaches he should view his workplace as (1) a mission field full of people who need to be converted and (2) a place to earn money so the money can be given to church work. Ben belongs to a congregation that believes it is wrong to try to convert people unless they ask you, and eventually God is going to let everybody into heaven anyway.

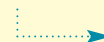
Over lunch, the two get into a discussion about faith and work. Ben argues his faith is evident when he does

his work competently, when he is scrupulously honest, and when he treats people with respect.

Art agrees with Ben but vehemently disagrees this is enough. He believes the workplace is full of misguided people who only need to be shown the truth, and then they will surely choose the right path.

They also disagree on what God thinks of work. Ben believes God only pays attention to the big details and what happens at work is something humans are responsible for while God deals with larger issues. Art disputes this, instead arguing the workplace must be reclaimed for God by making company policies consistent with the Bible's principles.

Discussion continues in the lead-in to this study.



Scripture Passages

Genesis 1:28

Genesis 2:15

Genesis 1:31

Introduction

In our opening snapshot both men agree the workplace is flawed because it is filled with people whose motives are selfish, and the workplace exists to serve the common good

first, and make a profit second. Describe why Ben's view might be offensive to members of other faiths?

Why would merely doing the right thing never be enough to separate one faith from another?

What flaws are there in Art's argument that people who are shown the truth will make the right decision?

What other problems do you have with either view of work?

Before we examine how God expects us to view work, let's look at three myths that often derail our impressions of work and faith.

Myth 1: Workplace Christian faith is only about ethics, or doing the right thing. Why is this a myth? How might practicing this myth make it more difficult for us be accepted in a multi-cultural work environment?

To be sure, Christians are to be ethical. In fact, Jesus calls us to move beyond mere ethics to a "second-mile" philosophy, doing the right thing in the right way with the right motives. Still, doing the right thing isn't a defining characteristic for a workplace Christian. Members of other faiths do the right thing; members of no faith do the right thing. And sadly, Christians, like members of other faiths and members of no faith, often don't do the right things. So, faith at work is not about ethics.

Myth 2: Workplace faith is only about evangelism, and we go to our offices every day purely to share the Gospel with our coworkers and customers. What's the problem with this idea? After all, we've already established the Great Commission supersedes even our assignment to work in God's order.

To be sure, Christians are supposed to talk about Jesus Christ at work, and it is the duty of every single Christian to give verbal assent to their faith. But Christianity is not a smoke-and-mirrors game where we pretend to care about our jobs simply to have the opportunity to sneak the Gospel in somewhere. Such thinking leads to actions that frequently dishonor God, like sharing our faith when it disrupts our work or the work of others.

Myth 3: We go to work to earn money to give to the church so it can do God's work. What's the problem with this thinking?

Yes, Christians are supposed to tithe, and yes, there are Christians whom God makes successful precisely because the talent/gift He's given them is the ability to give. But no, that's not what faith at work is about. The work of God in any culture is not the assignment of the church, but rather the assignment of the people who are called to serve in that culture, in the workplaces of that culture. In fact, the work of the church is to equip its members to serve God outside the walls of the church.

So, how does God view work? Read Genesis 1:28; 2:15; and 1:31. Before the Fall, mankind—male and female—was good. Before the Fall, *work* was good.

After the Fall mankind was tainted by original sin, meaning men and women could no longer be described as “basically good.” (See Romans 3:10, 3:23.) How does this view conflict with the culture's view of people?

After the Fall the nature of work also changed. No longer was work the joyful tending of a perfect Creation; mankind's disobedience changed work to a struggle not only to provide sustenance, but a struggle against the impact of sin on that perfect Creation.

It is important for us to remember the beginning even as we wrestle with the significance of work in our present culture. Creation was good, called so by the very agent of its birth, God. The components of that Creation were also once good. Despite the rebellious nature of humans, God did not choose to erase what He created. He chose to redeem it.

Much to the surprise of some, perhaps many, work is not a punishment for sin. We are made in His image, and we were made to work. Indeed, work is an expression of obedience to God, a way to honor Him by fulfilling the assignment He gave us on the heels of creating us.

True, like everything else, work was dramatically affected by sin's entry into the world, but its importance to the order of God's creation remained. Work is a holy endeavor to those redeemed by Christ.

We should be pressing to carry the effects of that redemption into every corner of our lives. Our families, our churches, our communities, and most especially (since we spend the greatest part of our waking hours there) our workplaces should be impacted by the changes our personal relationship with God brings about in us.

It is not enough to practice our faith on Sundays, or to commune with God in our quiet times. We must carry our faith to the jobs we do and the people we serve there.

Those of us who go to work in places other than churches every weekday morning are supposed to care for the culture and the people in it. Our assignment from God, given to humans when He created them, is to tend His Creation responsibly. We are to hold jobs that feed the poor, care for the sick, protect the environment, provide safety and security, and in other ways take care of the world God created. But even that is not the primary definition of faith at work.

No, the definition of faith at work is this: Discovering the number one priority in God's economy is for us to be in relationship with Him, and discovering He wants that relationship with us everywhere we go, especially in the workplace and the home. Being a Christian on the job means being aware of God's presence every working moment and allowing the relationship we have with Him to shape every decision we make, every word we say, every action we take.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- God wants us to be aware of His presence when we're working, and He expects us to glorify Him in the way we work.
- Evangelism and ethics are important components to a workplace Christian's faith, but they don't define workplace faith.
- Working is part of the assignment God gave humans at Creation.
- Work is a way to honor God.
- God created work, and before the Fall it was good. It will be again in Heaven.
- Just as God redeems us, we too should seek to redeem the culture by being active participants, even influencers.