

Living in Tension – How Sin Distorts Our Work

OVERVIEW

Watch an episode of the show “The Office” and you’ll see the reality of working in a sinful world portrayed in living color. It makes for great television, but how does sin distort the way we experience work? This discussion explores sin’s impact on modern work and the tension we feel as we work redemptively in a fallen world.

DISCUSSION

- Brainstorm a list of negative stereotypes our culture has about work:
 - Work as toil - a result of sin’s curse / God’s punishment to people
 - TGIF / Living for the Weekend / [“It’s 5 o’clock somewhere”](#) (Fun video of this Alan Jackson song)
 - In Christian circles work may be treated as secondary to ministry or “Kingdom work”
 - A means to an end – since it’s not ministry, at least it generates money that can given for ministry projects
- How do you think we developed these stereotypes? How do they differ from the picture of work we saw in the first discussion (creation mandate, created to labor alongside God, work as worship)? What results from this negative thinking about work?

1. THE CURRENT REALITY: What Scripture tells us about work after the fall

Genesis 3:17–19: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Psalm 14:1-3

Psalm 90:10

Proverbs 14:12

Romans 8:20-22

- What words would you use to describe life in a fallen world?
- Where do you see the consequences of sin expressed in your work or industry? (Note: While sin is expressed through individual attitudes or behavior, it also shapes workplace culture as a whole and industry practices.)

“We are born into a world in which, for centuries, sin has damaged the great interactive network of shalom*—snapping and twisting the thousands of bonds that give particular beings integrity and that tie them to others...Corruption is thus a dynamic motif in the Christian understanding

of sin: it is not so much a particular sin as the multiplying power of all sin to spoil a good creation and to breach its defenses against invaders.”
- Cornelius Plantinga¹

*Shalom: Means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. Shalom comes from the root verb shalom meaning to be complete, perfect and full.

2. LIVING IN TENSION: We will live—and work—in tension between the way life IS and the way God created it TO BE.

VIDEO: [“Ought Is Can Will”](#) by the Clapham Institute (5 minutes)

- How do the principles shared in this video help us navigate the tension of living and working in a fallen world?

3. A CALL TO RESTORE:

Mark 16:14-15 – In these verses, Christ instructs his followers to “proclaim the gospel to the *whole creation*.” It’s a command to share the gospel, the “good news”, that Christ’s death frees individuals—and the entire created world—from the consequences of sin.

When God saves us from our sins, he brings us into relationship with him and begins restoring our lives to the way he intends them to be. He also calls us to join him in the process of restoring all of creation using the resources he gives us (roles, relationships, talents, time, treasure, influence, etc.)

Our work is a critical way in which God is caring for human beings and renewing his world. It expresses his love for the world and serves it.

Read the following passage from Cornelius Plantinga’s book *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*. As you read, consider its implications for your work:

God isn’t content to save souls; God wants to save bodies too. God isn’t content to save human beings in their individual activities; God wants to save social systems and economic structures, too. If the management/labor structure contains built-in antagonism, then it needs to be redeemed. If the health care delivery system reaches only the well-to-do, then it needs to be reformed. The same goes for hostile relationships of race, gender, or class. The same goes for proud and scornful attitudes among heterosexuals toward homosexuals. Landlord and tenant, student and teacher, husband and wife—these and countless other roles and relationships may develop warped expectations and unfair practices...

Everything corrupt needs to be redeemed, and that includes the whole natural world, which both sings and groans...The whole natural world, in all its glory and pain, needs the redemption that brings shalom. The world isn’t divided into a

sacred realm and a secular realm, with redemptive activity confined to the sacred zone. The whole world belongs to God, the whole world has fallen, and so the whole world needs to be redeemed—every last person, place, organization, and program...The whole creation is ‘a theater for the mighty works of God,’ first in creation and then in recreation.ⁱⁱ

- What’s the significance of these words for your life and work?

Application:

- In what ways do you feel burdened about the effects of sin in your workplace or industry?
- How might God be leading you to redeem this area?
- Think practically: How will you navigate the tension of working in a fallen world? What issues or temptations could cause you to become discouraged? What do you need to do to remain hopeful?

ⁱ Plantinga, Cornelius. *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living*.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.