

Religion in the Workplace



SABBATH—JULY 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 2:15; Genesis 3:17-19; Leviticus 19:35, 36; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Matthew 18:21; Luke 15:11-32.

MEMORY VERSE: “Anyone who lives without blame walks safely. But anyone who takes a crooked path will get caught” (Proverbs 10:9, NIV).

AFTER A FERRY¹ ACCIDENT IN 1987 NEAR BELGIUM, there was a problem naming all the victims who drowned. One of the victims had led a double life. He had lived for years under one name in England and under another name in France. How difficult it must have been for this man to live two lives. He had two families and two sets of friends in two different countries!

Christians also live two lives when they act one way in church and another way at work. We must be sure not to be different persons in different places. We must be the same kind of person in the workplace as we are at home or in church. We need to always act from the Christian values wherever we are.

This week we will take a look at some Bible principles² on how Christians should act in the workplace.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What happened to work after the Fall? What are the responsibilities of a Christian employer³ and/or employee (worker)? How should Christians give or receive correction?⁴

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 7.

¹ferry—a boat used to carry cars and people.

²principles—basic rules that are the basis for more specific rules.

³employer—a person or company who hires people to work.

⁴correction—telling someone he or she is doing something wrong, then helping that person do what is right.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 1

**WORK ETHICS⁵ (Genesis 2:15;
Genesis 3:17-19).**

What does Genesis 2:15 tell us about work before the Fall?



Adam and Eve worked in Eden. So work must have been something good. Work was an important part of God's original plan for the human race. After the Fall, work continued, but in a very different way.

What does Genesis 3:17-19 suggest about work after the Fall?

What does it mean that God “cursed . . . the ground” for the sake of Adam (Genesis 3:17)?

“The thorn and the thistle symbolize the problems and troubles that make our life a life of work and worry. These prob-

⁵ethics—the right things to do.

lems are chosen by God for our own good. They are part of God's plan to train and uplift us from the ruin of sin.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ (Jesus)*, p. 9. People who are involved in honest work usually get into less trouble than people who are lazy with nothing to do. There is something about work that can help build character.



The weeds in our garden are like the problems in our lives. Our problems are God's way of making us better people.

How have you experienced the blessings of work?

MONDAY—AUGUST 2

“WHATEVER YOUR HAND FINDS TO DO . . .” (Ecclesiastes 9:10, NKJV).

The paintings of Vincent Van Gogh, a famous Dutch artist, show the hardship of coal miners at work. The beautiful writing of Russian author Leo Tolstoy, shows hired workers in the field. People have always tried to show that we have to work. Most people have worked in one way or

another. Many people spend a great deal of their time working. The big question for Christians is: What kind of relationships⁶ should we have in the workplace?

What principle does Ecclesiastes 9:10 give Christians about work?



One thing most of us have learned is that if we claim to be Christians, people will watch us. As Christians, we make some bold claims. We claim that we have a new life in Jesus. We claim that we have a peace that we do not understand. We claim that we try to be like Jesus. We are witnesses⁷ in many different ways (Isaiah 43:10; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 3:2). What would give a better witness⁸ to your faith: (1) if you were a hard worker who did an honest share of work, or (2) if you were a lazy worker trying to cheat as much as you could? The answer is clear. There are all

kinds of situations that can make it difficult for us to be good witnesses at work. But Christians should be dependable, honest workers doing what they are paid to do. They know that the true reward is in a new heaven and a new earth.

Ellen G. White wrote of Jesus' early years: "He was not willing to be slack⁹ even in the handling of tools. He was a perfect worker, as He was perfect in character. By His own example, He taught that it is our duty to work hard. He taught us to work honestly and thoroughly. . . . All people should find something to do that will be a blessing to themselves and a help to other people. God meant work to be a blessing. And only the honest worker finds the true glory and joy of life."—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, p. 72.

How does your attitude¹⁰ about work compare¹¹ with Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Jesus' example? What changes do you need to make?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 3

CHRISTIAN VALUES IN THE WORK PLACE—PART 1 (Leviticus 19:35, 36).

Buying a secondhand car is often a "dangerous" adventure. The car may be cleaned and polished, but what dark secrets are hidden under the hood? Can

⁶relationships—the connections we have with other people in everything we do.

⁷witnesses—people who teach other people about God by what they say and do.

⁸witness—a person who teaches other people about God by what she or he says and does.

⁹slack—lazy; careless.

¹⁰attitude—how you think and feel about something.

¹¹compare—show how things are the same.

you trust the odometer?¹² One should never buy a car from a friend, since this may put the friendship in danger. But Christians should never have to worry about buying something from other Christians. Our business deals must *always* be honest. As Christians, we should be honest, honorable, and fair in all our work, because that is what God tells us to be.

What does each of the following verses say to Christians about their behavior in the workplace?

Leviticus 19:35, 36 _____

Proverbs 10:17 _____

Jeremiah 22:13 _____

Malachi 3:5 _____

As a Christian employer or employee (worker), we need to be honest and fair. There is only one thing worse than employees who abuse their work situation by being dishonest. This is employers who are dishonest with their workers.

What reason does Leviticus 19:35, 36 give for honesty in work?

The Christian understanding of right and wrong, good and evil, is not based on culture or time. It is based on the eternal¹³ God, who never changes (James 1:17). We should do what is right and honest, because what is right and honest comes from God, our Creator and Savior. We should not be honest and fair only when we want to. Instead, we should be honest and fair wherever we are in whatever we are doing.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 4

CHRISTIAN VALUES IN THE WORKPLACE—PART 2 (Proverbs 16:32; Luke 15:11-32).

What do Proverbs 16:32; Proverbs 10:1; and Proverbs 12:1 teach us about the importance of correction?

In the army or a school, in a factory or the home, correction is important. Correction is a coin with two sides. Most of us will, from time to time, have to correct¹⁴ other people. We must learn how to correct people with fairness and kindness. But we must also learn how to receive correction.

¹²odometer—an instrument that tells how many miles the car has traveled.

¹³eternal—lasting forever.

¹⁴correct—telling someone he or she is doing something wrong, then helping that person do what is right.

Jesus shows us how to forgive other people. What principles do the following verses teach that a Christian employer can use when there is a need to correct a worker? John 8:4-11; Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 15:11-32.

Sometimes a Christian worker will believe he or she has not been treated fairly by his or her employer. Read what Jesus said in Matthew 5:38-42 about the attitude people should have when they are not treated fairly. What do these verses teach us about what we should do or not do when we are not treated fairly?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 5

SEEING POTENTIAL (PROMISE) IN OTHER PEOPLE (Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11).

Unfortunately, we do not always look for the potential in other people. We often see the things other people cannot do rather than the things they could do if they were trained. We need to build on the strengths of the people we work with rather than complain about their weaknesses.

What kind of people did Jesus choose as His disciples? What does that teach us? Matthew 4:18-22; Matthew 9:9; Luke 5:1-11.

Most of us probably would not have chosen these kind of men to work so

closely with. But Jesus saw the potential in uneducated fishermen and in an unpopular tax collector. He challenged them to follow Him and work with Him. They received three years of continued training. Then they went out into the world. Jesus discovered them and recognized a potential in these men that most of us would have failed to see.



Jesus saw the positive things in people.

Paul disagreed with Barnabas about John Mark's work as a leader of the church. Barnabas believed there was potential in John Mark, but pointed to John Mark's weakness in the past. Read Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11. What lessons are here for us?

John Mark left Paul and Barnabas when they reached Pamphylia on their first missionary journey *before* the work was finished. Paul did not want to run the risk that John Mark would do this again.

We probably would do what Paul did. If we have a choice, we do not

continue with someone who has failed us at an important time. But we have all failed, even when given a second chance to prove ourselves!

Have you, too, quickly dropped someone who has failed you in the workplace or in any other situation? What can you learn from Acts 15:36-41 and 2 Timothy 4:11 that will help you to have more patience with a worker who has disappointed you?

FRIDAY—AUGUST 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “If you are involved in a dishonest business deal, you must make it right with God. Then you will be holy in His eyes. Dishonest things need to be corrected by our people everywhere. . . . When you take up this work of correcting yourself and getting right with God, the angels will cooperate with you. They will help to see where you have been dishonest. . . .

“God cannot bless people who are involved in dishonest business deals. It does not matter if the deal is done with other Christians or with people who are not Christians. People who are dishonest lose their good spiritual condition. They grow cold and selfish. They cover

up their past mistakes with ideas of their own that do not agree with the Bible.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 343.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What “good” jobs are there that Christians, in good conscience,¹⁵ should not do? Why should a Christian in good conscience not do these jobs?
2. Suppose your employer asks you to work on Sabbath. You say you cannot, but you know someone else in the office who would take your place. Or suppose your employer asks you to steal or lie. You say you cannot, but you know someone else in the office who would take your place. What is the difference between the two situations?

SUMMARY: As Christians, we bring our religion with us as we enter the workplace. There are usually limits on how much we can discuss religious subjects at work. But we must always work with Christian values. Working together with other people in a positive Christian spirit is important. Honesty, love, kindness, and justice should always control our actions. We also will try to bring out the positive in other people. We will do what we can to help them reach their full potential (promise).

¹⁵conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with a desire to do right.