

# Gospel and Dignity of Work

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## 1. Introduction

Many Christians have faulty views of their daily work at home or where they earn a living (office, factory, farm, services, etc).

- They think only church ministry members do real “spiritual” work.
- They think working at home or in their workplace to earn a living is not as important as volunteering to help in Sunday School or go on a mission trip because only then would they do something really “spiritual”.
- They think the church ministers are serving God and powerfully pleasing God, whereas those who earn a livelihood in their workplace serve themselves and do not please God so much.

Now, volunteering to conduct Sunday School or go on a mission trip is always a blessing, but to think that their work at home or in their workplace is less important or less spiritual is just not true — because it goes against the gospel

## 2. Gospel and your Work

For Martin Luther, the revelation of the Gospel in Jesus set him free of the guilt of sin and brought him rest and peace in his relationship with God. And as he meditated on the gospel, he began to teach the **Doctrine of Work** in church, state, and family, transformed society during his time (around 1530 AD) and can transform our present Christian culture.

Before Luther, the church taught that certain works in life were more holy than others. They said that the priest, monk and nun were in a better position than a farmer to go to heaven because the priest, monk and nun served God, whereas the farmer served only himself. But Luther said everybody is a sinner and needs a Saviour (Jesus); salvation is only by faith in Jesus. Luther used the term “vocation” (calling) for every work that a Christian might be engaged like a farmer, mother, wife, cobbler, cook, director, driver, accountant, pastor etc., and all have equal standing before God based on salvation by faith alone and not by works (the gospel).

The Gospel removed the difference between sacred and secular work because it taught that one’s work,

whether inside or outside, never determined one's salvation. We receive salvation only by faith in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord— the Gospel.

Now, when God declares a sinner is righteous *apart from works*, he is free to perform good works in every area of his life: in church, in the home or the workplace (office, factory, farm or services).

*Eph 2:8-10 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

### **3. The Doctrine of Work and the Dignity of Work.**

When we pray “Give us this day our daily bread”, in the Lord's prayer, Luther argued that the farmer ploughed his field and produced the wheat that the carriage driver brought to the worker at the mill who grinds the grain into flour, which the baker made into bread, which the grocer sold to the community. Therefore, he said that all the workers in the food chain—the farmer, the driver, the miller, the baker, and the grocer, were part of how God gives us our daily bread.

We can truly say that the term “bread” can include every human necessity, like housing and sanitation, food and clothing, education, entertainment, governance, the justice system, etc. God is using all workers in these professions to provide our daily necessities. Though **hidden**, God was behind everything and every job, so Luther concluded that they all wear the “masks of God” just as those who provide our spiritual food like in ministry do.

When Christians work, this one thing alone should motivate us that we serve and benefit others in all that we do, And when we do it with faith, excellence, hard work and joy in our heart to help our neighbour — we reflect the goodness and provision of God in all our work.

- ✓ Mothers work to keep a well-kept home for their family.
- ✓ Fathers works to provide daily necessities for his family.
- ✓ Farmers provide wheat for their community.
- ✓ Drivers carry wheat to bakers, who bake bread for the community.
- ✓ Labourers provide buildings and houses for the community.
- ✓ Police provide safety for the community.
- ✓ Soldiers protect the community.
- ✓ Judges and the courts provide justice for the community.
- ✓ Pastors provide scriptural food and counsel to the community.

Luther said, “God does not need your good works, but your neighbour does.”

We also sin in our place of work when we insist on being served rather than serving, loving ourselves rather than our neighbours.

But as we hear God's word, the Holy Spirit convicts us, and we repent. God forgives us and sends us back into the world with all its trials to live a life of faith, love and serve our neighbours, be holy, display Christ in our character, and glorify God. The gospel must shape our hearts to serve our neighbour with the gifts God has given us.

#### **4. Doctrine of Work & Discipleship**

Pastor Nicky Gumble of London spoke of a lady who operated the cash counter in the local supermarket. She always had the longest queue of shoppers to pay their bills at her counter than on other counters. Because she did her work with kindness, genuinely asking each shopper about their health, their family etc. and said she would pray for them. Her service attracted shoppers, who didn't mind standing in long queues to pay their bills.

The entire community attended her funeral when she died because she had made a difference in their lives. She believed God had called her to work at the cash counter, and she did her job cheerfully and excellently. She served her community, displaying the character of Christ there. We would call her a good disciple of Christ.

Likewise, a mother of four young children, wiping their snotty noses, changing their diapers, keeping home etc., should not wonder whether she is serving Christ here — she is! Especially when she is always loving them, disciplining them and eventually teaching them the ways of God as they grow up.

In 2 Kings 5, we read how the prophet Elisha miraculously healed the enemy commander Namaan of leprosy. But the young Israelite servant girl, whom the enemy had captured and made to serve Namaan's wife, played a significant role in encouraging Namaan to meet Elisha, obey his instructions, and receive his miraculous healing (2 Kings 5:2-3, 13). This young servant girl did not sulk at her position of being a captive and a servant of the enemy, but she encouraged her master to humble himself before Israel's prophet. I believe she pleased the God of Israel.

But some young men today excuse their poor work habits at their workplace because they think evangelism matters more. Then they are not disciples.

#### **5. Doctrine of Work and Priesthood of all Believers:**

In Luther's time (1530 AD), Western society had three social classes of people:

- Priests, monks and nuns prayed and took vows of chastity (no sex, remaining single), poverty, and obedience. People considered them more holy than the others.
- Kings and warriors ruled the state and fought in wars.
- Labourers worked. But were uneducated.

But Luther said prayer is for every believer, not just for the priestly class. The state is for all its citizens, not just for the kings. Work is for everyone, not just for labourers. If they want to, family is for everyone, including the priestly class.

Everyone prays. Everyone rules in their sphere of responsibility. Everyone works.

Everybody wanted to read God's Word. So, Luther and his followers started schools, and so, education flourished.

Educated labourers moved up the social ladder and would eventually govern themselves.

Workers, who loved and served their customers with excellence and hard work, found financial success.

At their workplace, Christians embraced new opportunities God was calling them. Thus, Luther's teachings brought enormous social transformation. So, proper preaching of the gospel will prosper society.

#### **6. Doctrine of Work and Authority in Work**

Responsibility accompanies authority and vice versa. And God establishes all lawful authority.

*Rom 13:1-2 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup> Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*

In the church, the elders have the authority of God's Word.

The person himself does not carry the authority, but the person's office has the authority. In all cases, authority at work does not matter who gets to boss whom. But all those who exercise authority must exercise it in love and service to those in their sphere of responsibility.

*Matt 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Gene Edward Veith writes, "This self-sacrificial love is the foundation of Christian authority. It allows for no tyranny. A husband is not called to hurt, use, or brutalise his wife. Rather, he is called to love and serve her by giving himself up for her sanctification (Eph 5:26). Parents are not called to harm their children or even provoke them to anger but rather to "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).

*Earthly rulers, too, are to exercise their office in love and service to their subjects. According to Romans 13, earthly rulers are called to protect the innocent and punish wrongdoers. A ruler who protects wrongdoers and punishes the innocent has no call — and thus no authority — from God.*

*God is hidden in vocations that bear authority. But that puts the pressure on the human being who exercises that authority to act with God's justice and grace."*

## **7. Conclusion**

*"The Christian life is to be lived in the work that God has called us, in the seemingly ordinary walks of life that take up nearly all the hours of our day. The Christian life is to be lived out in our family, work, community and church. Such things seem ordinary, but this is because of our blindness. God is present in them and us in a mighty, though hidden, way." (Gene Edward Veith)*

There is dignity in all our work in our journey with God to become like Christ. So, let us work with faith, love, and excellence to serve our neighbour and glorify God.

## **References:**

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2. Authority in Vocation by Gene Edward Veith <https://bit.ly/348rY4z>
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