

Adversity in My Vocation

Faith at Work – February/March 2022

Working in a fallen world

How did the fall and the curse impact work?

Work before the fall

- Genesis 2:5-19: [...] there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— [...] And the LORD God planted a garden [...] And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. [...] A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, [...] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [...] Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

The fall

- Genesis 3:4-6: But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Work after the fall

- Genesis 3:16-23: To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. [...]”
And to Adam he said, “[...] cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. [...] therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.
- The curse reveals the difficulty, pain, and futility of life apart from God

What should we expect?

These things are true about the world we live in now:

1. Creation and reality are still ruled by the same God as before the fall
2. We still experience the same temptations that led to the fall
3. The world is still experiencing the effects of the fall

We'll look at three ways we want to lower expectations, and three ways we want to raise them.

Lower: Expect some work to be difficult

- Work seems "harder than it should be"
- Temptation: complain
- Godly reaction: patient perseverance

Lower: Expect some work to be painful

- Work that takes a toll on the worker; physical/mental injuries; small or life-changing
- Our expectations can radically change our response to the same circumstances
- Temptation: avoid pain by shirking God-given responsibility
- Godly reaction: continue at God-given work, even when it involves pain

Lower: Expect some work to be fruitless

- Sometimes effort doesn't produce immediate results
- Sometimes effort doesn't produce any results at all
- Sometimes efforts are not recognized or rewarded
- Things we build don't last
- Temptation: root our hope in fruit, be discouraged/depressed/give up
- Godly reaction: root our hope in God, persevere at what God calls us to

Raise: Expect God-given provision when faithful work proves fruitless

- Matthew 6:25-34: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. [...] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. [...] Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [...] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."
- Temptation: anxiety, fear
- Godly response: trust God can and will provide
- Temptation: be discontent with what God does provide
- Godly response: trust in God to provide what is good

Raise: Expect God-given joy when faithful work is toilsome

- Excellent sermon on Ecclesiastes by Eric Holter on the proper perspective on work in this life (“under the sun”)
 - <https://cornerstoneapex.org/messages/living-simply-under-the-sun>
- Ecclesiastes 2:24-26: There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.
- Temptation: find meaning apart from God in what we produce
- Godly reaction: Root our identity in God
- Ecclesiastes 5:18-20: Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.
- Temptation: plod hopelessly, not giving up, but also expecting nothing
- Godly reaction: enjoy the work and rest God gives us, regardless of what we accomplish

A proper perspective on work in this life gives us a strong foundation for joy, a cure for anxiety, and a cure for selfish ambition.

Raise: Expect an eternal inheritance

- The most significant, immovable, final aspect of the curse was death... no matter what else happened in this life, our efforts would end and be undone by death
- As Christians we have the hope of redemption of creation, and defeat of death itself
- 1 Peter 1:3-4: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,
- John 11:25-26: Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:57-58: But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Specific hostility to Christians in the workplace

Key scriptures: Matthew 5-6, 1 Peter 2-4, Romans 12

A Faithful Christian Life is Attractive

Work diligently and do good

- Matthew 5:16: ...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
- 1 Peter 2:12-15: Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.
- Romans 12:11: Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.
- Colossians 3:23–24: Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.
- Proverbs 22:29: Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.

Give no cause for offense other than what the Bible says is true

- Romans 12:18: If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12: ... aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.
- 1 Peter 4:15: But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.
- 1 Peter 3:15–16: but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience

Work humbly

- Colossians 3:22: Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.
- Philippians 2:3-4: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- Philippians 2:14-15: Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

- 1 Peter 2:18-21: Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, ...
- 1 Peter 3:9: Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.
- 1 Peter 4:19: Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.
- Romans 12:14-19: Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. [...] Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God,

A Faithful Christian Life is Offensive

- The truth and belief that motivates us as Christians is "Christ alone is Lord of all"
- "Christ is my Lord" is not especially offensive
- "Christ alone is Lord of all" is offensive
- John 14:6: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- Acts 4:12: And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
- Romans 1:18ff: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
- Refusal to worship the world's idols provokes strong opposition.
- Daniel 3:12-13: "There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.
- John 3:19-20: And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.
- 1 Peter 4:3-5: For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;

Prepare yourself

Be uncompromising in affirming truth and rejecting lies

- The character of Christianity as founded upon a message is summed up in the words of the eighth verse of the first chapter of Acts--" Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."
Christianity is based, then, upon an account of something that happened, and the Christian worker is primarily a witness. But if so, it is rather important that the Christian worker should tell the truth. When a man takes his seat upon the witness stand, it makes little difference what the cut of his coat is, or whether his sentences are nicely turned. The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. - J Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*
- Romans 12
Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. [...] Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. [...] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- Matthew 5
You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
- *"Father, make of me a crisis man. Bring those I contact to decision. Let me not be a milepost on a single road; make me a fork, that men must turn one way or another on facing Christ in me."* - Jim Elliot
- Daniel 1:8: But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

Serve God rather than man or money

- Matthew 6
“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.
“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, [...] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
- Be willing to lose our job if needed to remain a faithful witness
- Be willing to limit our career if needed to remain a faithful witness
- Be willing to be spoken ill of and lied about if needed to remain a faithful witness
- If we're not willing to put faithfulness to God over these things, they are an idol to us

Don't be surprised by insults or lies about us, our intent, or our actions

- 1 Peter 2:12: Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.
- 1 Peter 4:12-16: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. [...] Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.
- Matthew 5:11-16: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- Matthew 10:24–25: “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Don't be surprised if opposition doesn't feel super spiritual or meaningful

- "career limiting" moves, getting ignored or passed over for opportunities or advancement
- “boilerplate” business conduct guidelines or employee agreements we can't agree to
- ridicule for not participating in normalizing ungodly worldviews and immorality

(Some) Idols of this age

- Money (always a popular one; gaining more or not losing what you have)
- Tolerance (“everyone's gods are equally legitimate”)
- Feelings and desires (“How I feel or what I want is more important than what is true”)
- Personal truth (“I get to define reality apart from God”)

Concrete example: gender self-identification, “preferred pronouns”

System based on specific examples of three of the idols mentioned above:

- Idol of personal truth
- Idol of feelings and desires
- Idol of tolerance

What is the truth?

- Every person has immense worth because they are created by God in His image
- God as creator defines what is good, acceptable and true
- God created each person male or female
- God’s bounds for sexuality are one man and one woman, in marriage
- Every person has a sin nature producing strong, enduring desires contrary to God’s will
- Pursuing desires contrary to God’s will leads to destruction
- Acknowledging Christ’s lordship, repenting of sinful desires and actions, and finding forgiveness in Christ leads to joy

How can we apply these truths?

- Treat all people respectfully because they are made in God’s image
- Honor God as creator by affirming what He has made is good
- As much as it depends on us, live peaceably with all
- Refuse to be conformed to the world’s definition of “respect” that requires affirming lies
- Seek the good of those around us by not helping make it more comfortable for them to pursue desires contrary to God’s will

What opposition can look like

- Pressure to participate and normalize by listing your own “preferred pronouns”
- Pressure to participate by using other people’s “preferred pronouns”
- Accusations when someone simply and calmly rejects this system
- Pressure to formally agree to use preferred pronouns as part of an employee agreement, and get fired if unwilling to sign

1 Peter 3:14–17

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.