

## How to Work For God in Everything

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Colossians

In the book of Colossians, Paul calls us to a reorientation. “Set your minds on things above, not on the things that are on earth,” (Colossians 3:3). This does not mean that prayer is necessarily preferable to painting a house. Christian progress does not consist of thinking less and less about our work and more and more about the world to come. Rather, setting our mind on thing above means expressing the priorities of God’s kingdom in the midst of our work.

The contrast in Colossians between heavenly and earthly things is the difference between living by Jesus’s values, or living by the values of the world system that sets itself in opposition to God and his ways.

Paul lists several ungodly values in Colossians. “You must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.” (Colossians 3:8). In the workplace, greed, anger, and lying and often appear within what would otherwise be legitimate business pursuits.

For example, it is proper and necessary for a business to make a profit or for a nonprofit organization to create added value. But if the desire for profit becomes boundless, compulsive, excessive, and narrowed to the quest for personal gain, then greed has taken hold.

Similarly, it is necessary for conflict to be expressed, explored, and resolved in any workplace. But if conflict is not dealt with openly and fairly, it degenerates into unresolved anger, rage, and malicious intent.

All companies desire to portray their product or service in the most favorable light, but when business practices cross the line into deception, the sin of lying has taken hold. A sales brochure ought to describe a product in its highest, best use, along with warnings about the product's limitations. A stock prospectus ought to describe what the company hopes to accomplish if it is successful, and also the risks the company may encounter along the way.

What does it mean to do our work “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17)?

First, we recognize that we represent Jesus in the workplace. If we are Christ-followers, how we treat others and how diligently and faithfully we do our work reflects on our Lord. How well do our actions fit with who he is?

Working in “Jesus’ name” also implies that we live recognizing that he is our master, our boss, the one to whom we are ultimately accountable. This leads into Paul’s reminder that we work for the Lord and not for human masters. Yes, we most likely have horizontal accountability on the job, but the diligence we bring to our work comes from our recognition that, in the end, God is our judge.

Paul writes, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). We can understand this verse in two ways: a shallow way and a deeper way. The shallow way is to incorporate some Christian signs and gestures into our workplace, like a Bible verse posted on our cubicle or a Christian bumper sticker on our truck. Gestures like this can be meaningful, but in and of themselves they do not constitute a Christ-centered work-life. A deeper way to understand Paul’s challenge is to pray specifically for the work we are in the midst of doing. For example, “God, please show me how to respect both the plaintiff and the defendant in the language I use in this brief.”

An even deeper way would be to begin the day by imagining what our daily goals would be if God were the owner of our workplace. In God’s kingdom, our work and prayer are not two separate activities that need to be balanced, but two aspects of the same activity. When we work in Jesus’ name, we work to accomplish the work God wants accomplished.