

The Wise Worker is Trustworthy

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Proverbs

Trustworthiness is the foundation of wisdom and virtue. God created people to work in concert with each other, and without trust this is not possible. Trust requires adherence to ethical principles beginning with faithfulness in our relationships. What are the workplace implications of being trustworthy depicted in the book of Proverbs?

First of all, a trustworthy worker is faithful to fiduciary responsibilities. We work for the benefit of others as well as for our own benefit. And we must not do our employers harm in the pursuit of meeting our own needs. We may dispute with them or struggle against their treatment of us, but we may not work them harm. For example, we may not steal from, vandalize or slander our employers in order to air our grievances. Some applications of this are obvious. We may not charge a client for hours we didn't actually work. We may not destroy our employers' property or falsely accuse them. Reflection on this principle may lead us to deeper implications and questions. Is it legitimate to cause damage to the organization's productivity or harmony by failing to assist our internal rivals? Is access to personal benefits—trips, prizes, free merchandise and the like—leading us to steer business to certain suppliers at the expense of our employer's best interests? The mutual duty that employees and employers owe each other is a serious matter.

The fear of the Lord is the touchstone of fiduciary responsibility. All people are tempted to serve themselves at the expense of others. That is the consequence of the Fall. However, this proverb tells us that fear of the Lord—remembering his goodness to us, his providence over all things, and his justice when we harm others—helps us fulfill our duty to others.