



Lesson Guide

Lesson 11 - Labor: Created to Create

Introduction

We now turn our attention to the northwest and embark on a tour of our fifth social sphere: *Labor*. By the time this tour is finished, we will have made a number of striking discoveries about this system. We will have found that creative labor is a vital element of God's plan for the social realm; that work is *not* a "curse," as it is often represented today, but an essential element of our humanity; that it is, in fact, rooted in the nature of God Himself, the Original Worker. We will also learn that the structure of this sphere parallels that of the others we have already visited in that it also appears triune in design. And we will begin to see that the importance of work is closely related to our divinely given responsibility to care for the poor.

Themes

"What is work?" Present that question to a cross-section of the population and you'll probably receive a wide variety of answers. Unfortunately, within the context of contemporary culture it's increasingly likely that a preponderance of these responses will be negative in tone. Many people use phrases such as "a bummer," "what I have to do for money," or "the only way to get to Friday" to describe their feelings about work. Even Christians sometimes reference the fall as support of their view that labor is nothing but a *curse*.

In this Lesson, Dr. Tackett makes the case that these disparaging attitudes toward work are completely at odds with the scriptural worldview. He even goes so far as to argue that they can be interpreted as yet another manifestation of the *Cosmic Battle* – in other words, that they are destructive *lies*. Far from being a curse, creative labor is a glorious privilege. It flows out of the heart of God Himself, who labored six days to bring the world into existence, stamped His inventive and energetic image upon mankind, and placed Adam in the garden to tend it, beautify it, and increase its productivity. The creativity of man, then, while subject to the effects of the fall, is nevertheless a mirror-image of the creativity of God. It is designed to be a source of joy so fulfilling and wonderful that the Lord deemed it necessary to give us the fourth commandment in order to insure that we would set our work aside and rest at least one day a week!

This sphere, like that of the family, the church, and the state, is founded upon *relationships*. These relationships, which are ordered according to scriptural principles (see, e.g., Ephesians 6:5-9), fit the general triune pattern we have observed in other areas. God has granted the stewardship of His *material goods* to *owners*; and these *owners* are in turn accountable to Him for the use of His "stuff" and responsible for the welfare and productivity of the *workers* who operate under their direction and authority. Within this sphere, which Dr. Tackett calls the "engine room of culture," wealth is generated that has the potential to meet the physical needs of mankind; and the responsibility for the compassionate use of this wealth, he argues, falls primarily upon the shoulders of those who are engaged in the field of Labor.

As a special sub-heading of this topic, we will also consider the implications of this discussion

for media and the creative arts. Here, too, says Dr. Tackett, there is a fundamental “truth issue” at stake; for under the sovereignty of God and His eternal ethical standard, *beauty* in the arts should be consistent with *goodness* and *truth*. This is a subject of special concern in a time like ours when, as Dr. Francis Schaeffer averred, “Whoever controls the media controls culture.” Within this context, it is imperative that Christians begin to make their influence felt in the field of creative art.

Points to Watch For

Participants on this tour may find themselves challenged – in some cases uncomfortably so – in the area of their personal views of work. It may be important to handle the discussion in such a way that they will be gently *encouraged* to explore the joy of engaging in creative labor rather than made to feel guilty about having a “TGIF” attitude toward the working week. It’s also worth noting that Dr. Tackett’s ideas about compassion and relief for the poor – namely, that labor needs to create job opportunities for the needy rather than leaving this area of concern solely to the state – may become the occasion of some lively political and social debate.

Discussion Questions (Pick 3 or 4 for your discussion time.)

(Make these questions your own. That is, don’t just “read” them, but become familiar with them so that they don’t appear as simply an item to get through. Go through them yourself before your group meets and ponder them.)

1) Opening Question: (this may be the only question you need to ask).

A. Ask your guests to list what they saw on the tour. Here are some of the key items: The “labor” command; the command to work and rest; the world’s view of work; is work a curse?; the “God of Wonders” video clip; Gutenberg’s work; God is the original worker; creative work is a divine attribute; the positive and negative importance of this sphere; the general economic model; the sphere of labor & its design; “I wish I could hire a Christian!”; the seven principles of economics: 1. all things belong to God, 2. God appointed man to be a creative steward with ownership rights, 3. theft and coveting of another’s property is wrong, 4. skills and abilities to work come from God, 5. work is profitable, good and to be pursued; laziness is not, 6. love God and not your goods, 7. be compassionate and generous with your good to those in need; the responsibility of this sphere to the poor; the implications for the arts & media; the question of whether or not “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”; biblical standards for the creative arts; the overwhelming presence of media in our culture; “I will set before my eyes no vile thing”; Bach and Soli Deo Gloria.

C. Ask your guests to point out the ones that were particularly interesting or striking to them and why. Ask if this particular area struck anyone else as well.

D. Ask if there were other items that they saw that stood out to them. (You may want to read back through the list if you need to.)

2) Dr. Tackett begins this tour by reminding us of the 8th Commandment – “Thou Shalt Not Steal” – and what it implies about property and ownership rights. How is this relevant to the ensuing discussion of labor and economics?

(From a biblical perspective, the whole sphere of work and economics is *founded* upon the concept of “rightful possession.” Material goods and wealth are not evil or negative things, nor are they matters of indifference with which we can play fast and loose. God entrusts *His* “stuff” to us in order that we, like the servants in Jesus’ parable of talents,

might do something creative, inventive, and useful with it. In the process, we enhance our own dignity and the dignity of others as people made in the image of the creative God. We also produce goods and labor opportunities with which to alleviate the physical sufferings of the poor and needy. Collectivist economic systems destroy the incentive to work precisely by destroying the concept of private property.)

- 3) **Why does Dr. Tackett temporarily re-name the fourth commandment “The Labor Command?” How does this tie in with Jesus’ declaration that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”?**

(The point here is that we tend to focus our attention exclusively on the “Sabbath rest” aspect of the command and forget that it also says, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work ...” [Exodus 20:9]. This is not a pronouncement of some kind of “doom,” but rather a statement about the basic design of human nature. Man was not only made to work, but to find great joy and fulfillment in the exercise of this facet of the *Imago Dei*. This is what Jesus had in mind when He said, “The Sabbath was made for man ...” He was assuming that without this part of the commandment, we might be tempted to go on working without a break.)

- 4) **Read Genesis 3:17-19. What is the focal point of the *curse* that God pronounces on Adam in these verses? How might a correct understanding of this curse impact our thinking about the sphere of labor and the place of work in our lives?**

(Dr. Tackett points out that the curse is directed not at labor itself but at “the ground” and the practical *results* of our work. In a fallen world, we are not able to accomplish our aims and goals with the same degree of *ease* and *satisfaction* that we would have experienced before the advent of sin; we are, in a sense, always rowing upstream. Properly speaking, this aspect of our existence is an occasion for sorrow and regret – a reminder of what was lost when Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge. As such, it is also to be understood as part of the “groaning” and “labor pangs” of creation which are to be reversed at the advent of Christ’s kingdom. In other words, work is just one of the many facets of human life that are being *redeemed* by the blood shed on the cross.)

- 5) **What are some ways that the Old Testament principle of “gleanings” might be applied within the context of our modern economy? What is the key difference between this approach to helping the needy and that of the “welfare state”?** (Discussion can be spurred by reminding participants of the example Dr. Tackett provides – i.e., the woodworker who allowed the poor to come into his shop after hours, sweep up the sawdust, and sell it to a pulp processing plant. This approach involves coming up with creative ways to let the poor *work* for their living rather than robbing them of their dignity with state-subsidized handouts.)

- 6) **Makoto Fujimata, founder of the International Arts Movement, argues that the Church needs to find ways to re-establish itself as a *center* of creative and artistic activities. Why is his vision so important to the future not only of the Church, but of western culture as a whole?**

(Increasingly, the creative arts have become the *major* vehicle for propagating contemporary *philosophical* ideas – ideas that exclude God and exalt the concept of the *cosmic cube*. In other words, the real dialogue about truth is taking place not in academic classrooms, but in the realm of movies, music, advertising, and mass media. This is why Dr. Francis

Schaeffer said, "Whoever controls the media controls culture." This is one of the major fronts on which the *Cosmic Battle* will be won or lost in our time. Christians, who have the compelling and winsome message of God's truth, need to find effective ways of re-engaging the culture by dedicating themselves to excellence and committing their creative and artistic endeavors to the Lord.)

Tour Guide Notes: Why is Labor a Social Sphere?

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In all my years of teaching, it was not until recently that I was asked this question. It may have something to do with the climate of our culture where work is increasingly viewed as a necessary evil. If that is the attitude, then how could one view it as being instituted by God? I will attempt to answer that question here.

First, we must ask ourselves "what constitutes a social system?" If we are going to argue one way or the other, that is, the sphere of work is or is not a valid social system designed by God, then we better have clear in our mind what a social system is. Only then will be able to determine if "labor" meets that criteria. When my friend was arguing that labor was not a valid social institution, I asked him to give me his criteria for what constituted a valid social institution. His halting response made it clear that he really hadn't given it much thought. That's not a personal criticism. I've yet to meet anyone who has given this much thought.

However, we must walk carefully here because the truth of the matter is, we have no biblical text that directly answers this question. Indirectly, yes, but directly, no.

So, with that caveat, let me give you my criteria and why.

First, and most obviously, it must fit the category of a social system. And what is a *social system*? Well, since it is "social" we will say that it includes people, and since it is a "system", we will say that the members are in some ordered relationship for a greater purpose. Second, we must have clear evidence that God created and instituted this system and it therefore has a divine purpose. Third, we must find the Scripture defining the roles and responsibilities within the system. If these are met, then we will assume we have found a valid biblical social institution that God has created and He is concerned enough about it to give us clear, objective directions as to how that social system should work.

Given that, let's test it.

Has God created anything like this? Well, yes, the family comes to mind. Does it meet our criteria? I believe so. Let's look at it.

The creation and institution of the family happens early. In Genesis, we find God's command that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two were to become one flesh. Jesus restates this in Matthew 19:5-6 and states that God had brought them together, so therefore no man should separate them. Does the Scripture lay forth any directions for the roles and relationships within this system? Sure, not only in the Old Testament, but we find directions given to the husband, the wife and children in several of the New Testament epistles:

Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, Titus 2, 1 Peter 3, for example. Is there a clear purpose? Yes, several. Malachi 2:15 says that God created it because He wanted godly offspring.

We could do the same thing with the other social spheres, showing the structure, the roles, and the member responsibilities within each system. But our task is to examine the sphere of labor. Is it a valid sphere?

Well, I think so. First, let's answer the question of my friend, who didn't think that work was a "social" system. Is it? The Scripture lays out clear guidelines for both the employee and the employer, describing their roles and responsibilities, the authority and submission required. It should be of great interest to us that these social requirements are addressed in Ephesians 6 immediately after Paul had been dealing with the roles and responsibilities within the sphere of the church and within the sphere of the family. In Colossians, Paul deals with the social responsibilities of the family in chapter 3 and then immediately deals with the sphere of labor. In Titus 2 Paul deals with the responsibilities that young women have to their husbands, then he immediately deals with the workers responsibility to the employer. In 1 Timothy, Paul does not deal with the family, but he does deal with the sphere of the state (chapter 2), the sphere of the church (chapters 3 and 4) and then the sphere of labor (chapter 6). In Peter's first epistle, he deals with the family in chapter 3, but in chapter 2, where he states that we are to submit to every authority instituted among men, he then lists, in verse 17, our responsibilities to submit to the brotherhood of believers (church), fear God (God & man), honor the king (state) and then in all of verse 18 he addresses the worker's responsibility to his employer (labor).

Even before God had created Eve, He commanded that Adam was to work the garden. In the Ten Commandments, we are told "thou shalt labor six days". The Old Testament is filled with references to our responsibilities in this sphere and the consequences if we do not.

I am not interested in splitting hairs over this, nor am I interested in making this a deep doctrinal issue. But our consistent ignoring of this critical social sphere has resulted in vile movies, vile music, vile art, vile literature and pornography, oppression of workers, cheating on employers, vast poverty, and on and on, not to mention the terrible witness that modern Christians are in the workforce, both as the employer and the employee.

Let's change it.

Historical Figure: Johannes Gutenberg

Though many of the factual details of his life remain shrouded in mystery, the historical significance of Johannes Gutenberg's achievement is beyond dispute. In his role as a diligent craftsman and an innovative entrepreneur he left a legacy that shaped the course of Western history. His invention – the printing press and the mass production of books – introduced a new age: the era of reading, rationalism, and logical discourse. No wonder historians and cultural analysts have dubbed him “The Man of the Millennium.”

Johannes (or Henne) Gensfleisch zur Laden was born in Mainz, Germany around the year 1400, son of Friele Gensfleisch (a cloth merchant or metal worker) and Else Wyrich (daughter of an aristocratic house). Among the prosperous merchants of Mainz names did not automatically pass from father to son; and in view of the meaning of *Gensfleisch* in the German language –

“Gooseflesh” – it is perhaps not surprising that Johannes elected to adopt the surname Gutenberg (“Goodhill”) after an estate in the possession of his mother’s family.

Little is known about Gutenberg’s childhood and early life. The sons of patrician families usually attended one of Mainz’s seminaries or convent schools, and it is likely that his academic training followed this pattern. He may also have spent some time as a student at the University of Erfurt, *alma mater* of the Mainz archdiocese. Whatever his formal educational background, it is certain that he eventually became involved with the mechanical arts, attaining considerable knowledge in the fields of metalworking, goldsmithing, and gem-polishing.

Records indicate that by 1430 Gutenberg had moved out of Mainz, possibly in reaction to disputes between the patricians and the trade guilds, and migrated to the town of Strasburg, where he quickly made profitable use of his practical skills. He joined the goldsmiths’ guild, established a manufacturing business, acquired pupils and associates, and busied himself with gem-polishing and the production of small looking-glasses. He also began to experiment with movable typography and the development of oil-based inks.

We now suspect that Gutenberg was not the first European to make trial of this method of printing. Some sources indicate that Laurens Coster of the Netherlands may have produced a book from movable type as early as 1430. The Chinese and Koreans, of course, had anticipated Europeans in this field by as much as two or three hundred years. But oriental scripts, which employ thousands of distinct characters, were not compatible with the technique; and Gutenberg’s Western precursors, whoever they may have been, failed somehow to impress their contemporaries with the significance of their mechanical tinkering. It would be up to Gutenberg to take the art of printing to the next level: commercial success and wide-scale cultural impact. This is precisely what he did; and to the extent that he succeeded we are justified in regarding him as “inventor of the printing press” and “Man of the Millennium.”

By 1448 Gutenberg was back in Mainz, recruiting investors and borrowing capital. In due course he set up a printing workshop and began taking on small jobs such as schoolbooks and Latin grammars. Eventually he succeeded in securing a partnership with Johannes Fust, a wealthy merchant and moneylender. Over the next three to four years Fust loaned Gutenberg more than 2,000 guilders for the production of books, thus enabling him to begin production on the most ambitious of all his printing projects: the famous *Gutenberg Bible* (also known as the *Mazarin Bible* or the *42-line Bible*, for the number of lines in each column). This two-volume work, completed in 1455 in an edition of about 180 copies, is the earliest extant Western book printed with movable type.

Though Gutenberg’s talents as an artist, technician, and innovator cannot be doubted, questions remain as to his competency as a businessman and money manager. Certainly he could not have launched his Mainz printing endeavor without careful planning and excellent organizational skills; and yet he conspicuously failed to turn the venture into a financial success. Before the Gutenberg Bible could be finished, there was a falling out between Gutenberg and Fust. The investor accused the printer of embezzling. He demanded his money back with interest. When Gutenberg was unable to pay, Fust sued, winning possession of the shop, the equipment, and half of the printed Bibles. Fust completed the printing of the Bible with the help of Gutenberg’s co-worker Peter Schoffer.

Somehow Gutenberg found a way to get back on his feet and re-establish his business interests. But the lawsuit had taken its toll. In the years that followed he sustained himself by accepting quick and easy commissions – leaflets, pamphlets, medical calendars, and inventories – but the quality of these items never measured up to the technical and aesthetic excellence of the Gutenberg Bible. Fortunately, his accomplishments did not go entirely unnoticed during his lifetime. In 1465, the Archbishop of Mainz honored Gutenberg with a letter of commendation, appointed him to the archiepiscopal court, and gave him a stipend: a suit of clothes, 2,180 liters of grain, and 2,000 liters of wine every year. Thus Gutenberg was enabled to live out his final years in a measure of material comfort and security. He died on February 3, 1468 and was buried in the church of St. Francis.

Whatever his skills as a practical businessman may have been, one thing is certain: Gutenberg was a man of great vision and foresight – a dedicated artisan who was driven by passionate convictions about the significance of his work. As he saw it, his invention was more than a machine: it was a veritable fountain of truth and spiritual nourishment:

Yes, it is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall flow in inexhaustible streams the most abundant and most marvelous liquor that has ever flowed to relieve the thirst of men. Through it, God will spread His Word; a spring of truth shall flow from it; like a new star it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance and become a cause of light hithertofore unknown to shine among men.

As glowing and ambitious as this prediction was, there is an important sense in which it falls short of the reality. For in perfecting the technique of printing by movable type Gutenberg bequeathed something to European culture above and beyond the gift of ready access to the words of God and man. In the process he also laid the foundation of a *mindset* that was to dominate the Western world for the next five centuries. As author Neil Postman explains,

*From Erasmus in the sixteenth century to Elizabeth Eisenstein in the twentieth, almost every scholar who has grappled with the question of what reading does to one's habits of mind has concluded that the process encourages rationality; that the sequential, propositional character of the written word fosters what Walter Ong calls the 'analytic management of knowledge.'*¹

To put it another way, by establishing a *culture of typography* (Postman's term), Gutenberg made possible the development of a psychological context in which questions about *logic, truth, and reality* became increasingly meaningful and relevant. The practical results in terms of philosophical inquiry and scientific endeavor are beyond calculation.

This mindset is, of course, rapidly dissipating in our day. And it is at least arguable that this breakdown is the direct result of yet another epoch-making cultural shift: the displacement of the *culture of typography* by the rising *culture of visual imagery*.

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 51.