



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

- 1) **What did you see on this tour? Which of these were particularly striking to you? Why?**
- 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?**
- 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”?**
- 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?**
- 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”?**
- 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?**



Tour Guide Notes: Why is Labor a Social Sphere?

Lesson 11- Labor: Created to Create

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 is 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.



LABOR

created to **Create**

1



LABOR


divine **creativity** and
God's **design** for **labor** and the
marketplace

2

the **labor** command...

Exodus 20:9-11 the **4th** commandment

"...YOU SHALL LABOR..."
"...AND DO ALL YOUR
WORK."

who is God? who am I?  what is Truth?

3

the **labor** command...

"SIX DAYS YOU SHALL
LABOR AND DO ALL
YOUR WORK."

is this **evil?** **bad?**
cruel?
mean? **oppressive?**


4

the **labor** command...

...what is this
command **for?**

Mark 2:27

EXODUS 20:9-11



5

Exodus 20:9-10 (NAS)

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

6

Exodus 20:8 (NAS)

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy



7

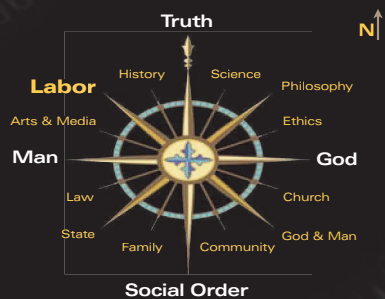
THE WHOLE COMMAND

Exodus 20:8-11

God worked...
God rested...

BACK TO THE
NATURE OF GOD

8



9

the World's View of Work

what is it?

"a four-letter word"

"the pits"

"if I didn't need the money..."

"it's what I have to do
to get to Friday"

What about "Corporations"? Profit?

10

Is God concerned with **'economics'**?
has He **spoken** in this area?

James 5:4

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

11

Is God concerned with **'economics'**?
has He **spoken** in this area?

Proverbs 22:29

Do you see a man skilled in his work?
He will serve before kings...

12

Many listed Gutenberg the **"Man of the Millennium"**

Life listed his invention as the **most significant event** of the millennium

Johannes Gutenberg **worked...**
...and his work changed the world

13

1455, Gutenberg invented the printing press
Within 10 years, total number of books went from 50,000 to over 10 million

1st book off the Gutenberg press: the Bible
Copies had taken a **year** to be produced, by **hand**


God providentially gave this Kingdom Tool for the **spread of the Gospel through the work of Johannes Gutenberg**

14

"...religious truth is imprisoned in a small number of manuscripts, which confine instead of spread this public treasure. Let us break the seal which binds these holy things; let us give wings to Truth in order that she may win every soul that comes into the world by her word, no longer written at vast expense, but multiplied everlastingly by a machine which never wearies."

15

Johannes Gutenberg, cited by Federer, William. *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations*. St Louis, MO: Amerisearch, 2000, p. 270.



"Yes, it is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall flow in inexhaustible streams of 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 pure truth shall flow from it; like a new star it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance, and a cause a light hitherto unknown to shine among men."

Johannes Gutenberg, cited by Federer, William. *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations*. St Louis, MO: Amerisearch, 2000, p. 270.

16



17



Gazing Upon the face of God

18

THE ORIGINAL WORKER

By the seventh day God had finished the **work** he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his **work**.


Genesis 2:2

19

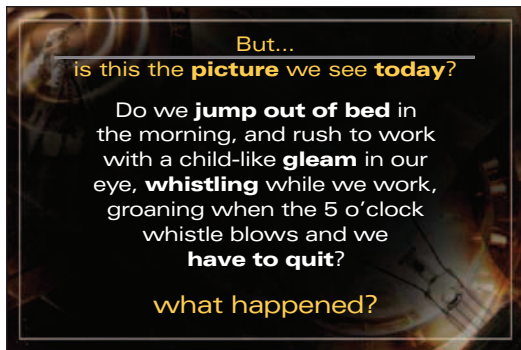
the **divine** attribute stamped upon **man**

Genesis 2:15

The LORD God took the **man** and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work** it and take care of it.



20

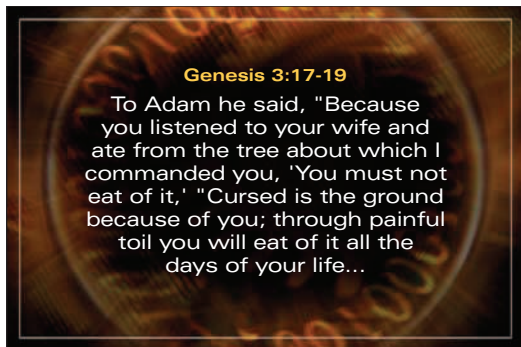


But...
is this the **picture** we see **today**?

Do we **jump out of bed** in the morning, and rush to work with a child-like **gleam** in our eye, **whistling** while we work, groaning when the 5 o'clock whistle blows and we **have to quit**?

what happened?

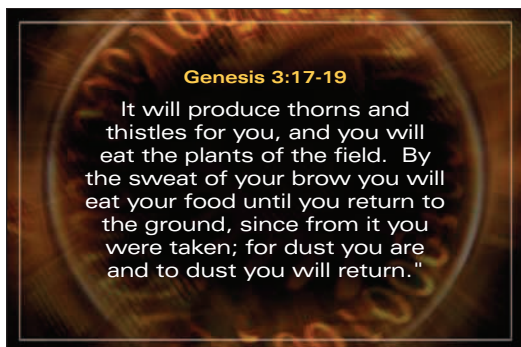
21



Genesis 3:17-19

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life...

22



Genesis 3:17-19

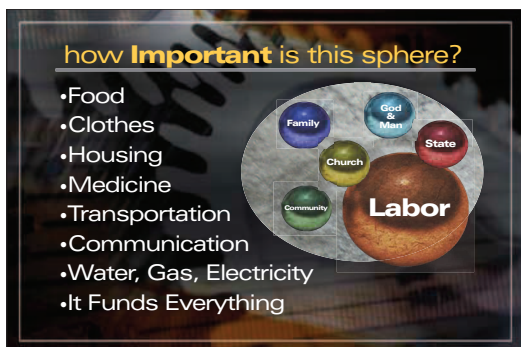
It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

23




Sphere stuff

24



how **Important** is this sphere?

- Food
- Clothes
- Housing
- Medicine
- Transportation
- Communication
- Water, Gas, Electricity
- It Funds Everything



25

how **Important** is this sphere?

- Drugs
- Abortion
- Gambling
- Pornography
- Movies & Music
- Genetic Engineering
- Enron
- It Funds Everything

26

GENERAL ECONOMIC MODEL

Lev 25:23
Psa 50:7-12

God

Steward

Material Things

Gen 1:26-30
1 Chr 29:10-14

Ex 20:8-11
Ex 20:15,17
Prov 10:4,14:23
Matt 6:20
Matt 25:14-30

27

seven economic **Principles**

28

economic principles

#1

ALL THINGS
BELONG TO GOD

29

Psalms 50:7-12

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens..."

30

Psalm 50:7-12

...for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it."

31

economic principles

#2

GOD APPOINTED MAN TO BE A CREATIVE STEWARD OF HIS GOODS WITH "OWNERSHIP" RIGHTS

32

Genesis 1:28

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

33

DEFINITIONS

Steward:

a person (or group of persons) placed in a position of management authority over someone else's property

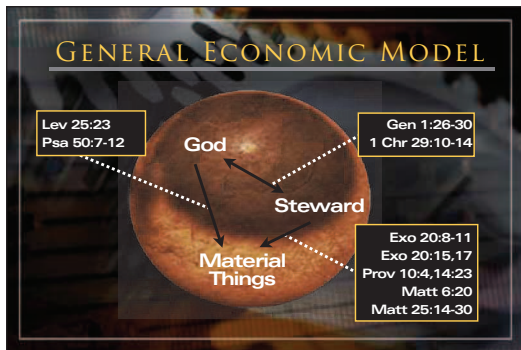
34

DEFINITIONS

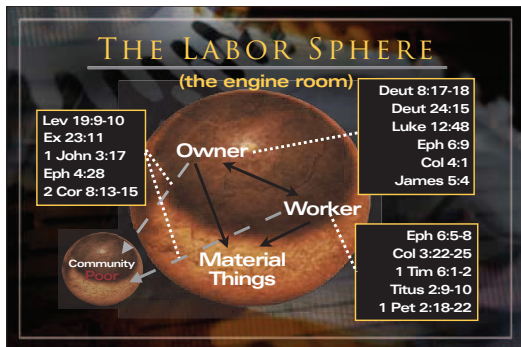
Economics:

Management of the property that ultimately belongs to God over which He has placed a steward and over which that steward will be held accountable.

35



36



37

RADICAL STUFF

Ephesians 6:5-8

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

38

RADICAL STUFF

Ephesians 6:5-8

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

39

MORE RADICAL STUFF

Ephesians 6:9

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that **he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.**

40

economic principles
#3

THEFT OF ANOTHER'S GOODS IS WRONG...

41

Exodus 20:15
"You shall not steal."

Economic forms of theft:

- Taking another's intangible property
- Devaluing another's goods or money
- Destroying another's goods or means of production
- Excessive/oppressive/improper taxation
- Forced "redistribution" of wealth
- Others?

42

economic principles
#3

...AND COVETING ANOTHER'S GOODS IS WRONG.

43

Exodus 20:17
"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that **belongs** to your neighbor."

Economic forms of coveteousness:

- Class envy
- Demand for "redistribution" rights
- Others?

44

economic principles
#4

SKILLS AND ABILITIES TO WORK COME FROM GOD

45

Exodus 35:30-33

Then Moses said to the Israelites,
"See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel
son of Uri...and he has filled him
with the Spirit of God, with skill,
ability and knowledge in all kinds of
crafts—to make artistic designs for
work in gold, silver and bronze, to
cut and set stones, to work in
wood and to engage in all kinds
of artistic craftsmanship..."

46

Exodus 35:35

...He has filled them
with skill to do all kinds of
work as craftsmen, designers,
embroiderers in blue, purple and
scarlet yarn and fine linen, and
weavers—all of them master
craftsmen and designers.



47

economic principles

5

WORK IS
PROFITABLE, GOOD,
AND TO BE PURSUED;
LAZINESS IS NOT

48

Work is **not** a result of the **Fall**
(God works, man works)

Proverbs 14:23

All hard work brings a profit, but
mere talk leads only to poverty.

Proverbs 10:4

Lazy hands make a man poor, but
diligent hands bring wealth.

49

Work is **not** a result of the **Fall**
(God works, man works)

Proverbs 28:19

He who works his land will have
abundant food, but the one
who chases fantasies will
have his fill of poverty.

50

LABOR

2 Thessalonians 3:10

For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule:
"If a man will not work,
he shall not eat."

Matthew 25:14-30

Parable of the Talents

51

economic principles

#6

LOVE GOD AND
NOT YOUR GOODS

52

Matthew 6:19-20

Do not store up for yourselves
treasures on earth, where moth
and rust destroy, and where thieves
break in and steal. But store up for
yourselves treasures in heaven,
where moth and rust do not
destroy, and where thieves
do not break in and steal...

53

Matthew 6:21, 24

For where your treasure
is, there your heart will be
also...No one can serve two
masters. 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 both God
and Money.

54

economic principles

#7

BE COMPASSIONATE
AND GENEROUS WITH
YOUR GOODS TO
THOSE IN NEED


55

Leviticus 19:10
Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

Ephesians 4:28
He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

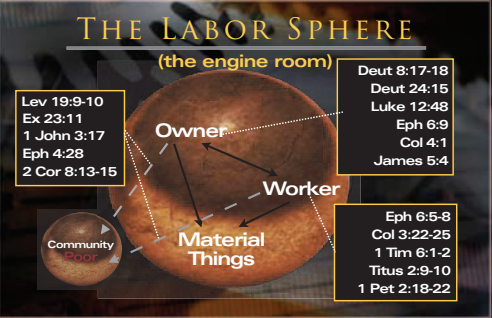
56

1 John 3:17
If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?



57

THE LABOR SPHERE
(the engine room)



58

COMPASSION

Proverbs 28:27
He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.

Proverbs 29:7
The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.

59

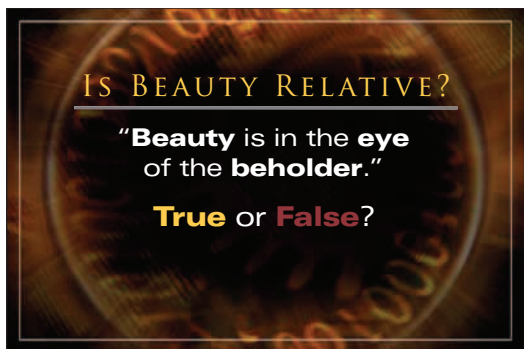
SUMMARY

God, having stamped his creative image upon man, graciously grants His stewards the privilege to be creative and manage some of His property, which they may lose (often because of sin) or multiply (often because of hard labor) and out of which they are responsible to be generous to the poor.

60



61



62



63



64

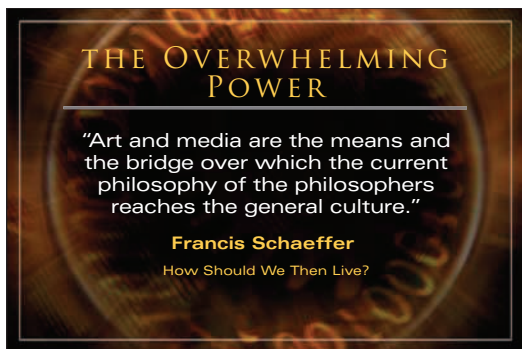


65



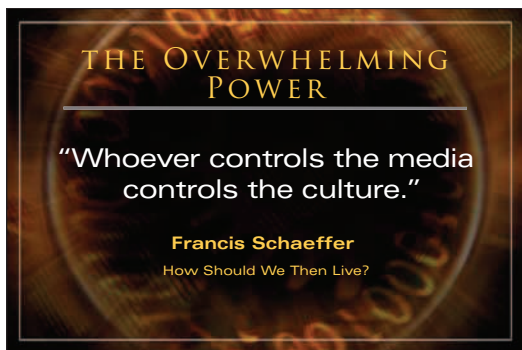
Temech, Marisol. "Former Hilfiger Director Talks Ads." *Yale Daily News* (yaledailynews.com), 10/22/04. <http://www.yaledailynews.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=26903>

66



Schaeffer, Francis. *How Should We Then Live?*

67



Schaeffer, Francis. *How Should We Then Live?*

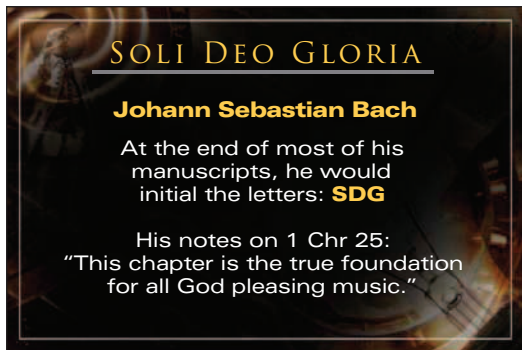
68



69



70



SOLI DEO GLORIA

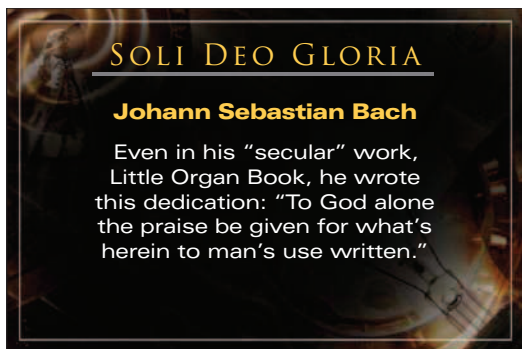
Johann Sebastian Bach

At the end of most of his manuscripts, he would initial the letters: **SDG**

His notes on 1 Chr 25:
 "This chapter is the true foundation for all God pleasing music."

Kavanaugh, Patrick. *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.20.

71



SOLI DEO GLORIA

Johann Sebastian Bach

Even in his "secular" work, Little Organ Book, he wrote this dedication: "To God alone the praise be given for what's herein to man's use written."

Terry, Charles Sanford. *The Music of Bach, an Introduction*. (NY, NY: Dover Publishing), p. 17.

72



LABOR
 created to **Create**

73



Outline

Lesson 11 - Labor: Created to Create

- I. Introduction – The "Labor" Command
- II. God's design for this sphere
 - A. Culture's view of work – generally negative and considered a curse
 - B. Importance of this sphere, though we generally don't address it
 - 1. It funds everything – all material goods are produced in this sphere
 - 2. Yet it also produces pornography, illegal drugs, abortion, etc.
 - C. Reflection of God's nature – God worked and saw that it was good – God stamped us with his divine image and has given us the privilege of being his creative stewards
- III. General Economic Model and Seven Economic Principles
 - A. All things belong to God
 - 1. Our materialistic drive is a reflection of Satan's lie that more "stuff" will satisfy us
 - B. God appointed man to be a creative steward of his goods with ownership rights
 - 1. Definition of steward and economics: management authority of God's goods
 - 2. Proper, Biblical attitude of employees and employers
 - C. Theft and coveting of another's goods is wrong
 - D. Skills and abilities to work come from God
 - E. Work is profitable, good, and to be pursued; laziness is not
 - F. Love God and not your goods
 - G. Be compassionate and generous with your good to those in need
- IV. Responsibility to the poor
 - A. Scriptural mandate to show compassion to the poor

- B. The poor need work and the sphere of labor has the primary responsibility to provide those work opportunities
- V. Arts and Media - Is beauty relative?
 - A. God's standard – Psalm 101:3 – "I will set before my eyes no vile thing"
 - B. Overwhelming power and presence of media – "Whoever controls the media, controls the culture"
 - C. Soli Deo Gloria – For God's glory alone – We need to have this same perspective, that God would be glorified in all we do



Key Terms

Lesson 11 – Labor: Created to Create

Creative Steward: God has stamped His divine image of creativity upon us, giving us the privilege to be creative agents within this physical realm.

Economics: Management of the property that ultimately belongs to God over which He has placed a steward and over which that steward will be held accountable.

General Economic Model: God is the owner of everything, and we are given stewardship rights and responsibilities over His material goods.

Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1397-1468): Named "Man of the Millennium" as a result of his 1455 invention of the printing press. The first book of the press was the Bible and God used Gutenberg's work to providential spread the gospel to the entire earth.

Seven Economic Principles: 1 - All things belong to God. 2 - God appointed man to be a creative steward of His goods with ownership rights. 3 – Theft and coveting of another's goods 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 goods to those in need.

Steward: A person (or a group of persons) placed in a position of management authority over someone else's property.

The Labor Command: Usually referred to as "the Sabbath Command"; Exodus 20:9, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work ..."



Scripture References

Lesson 11 – Labor: Created to Create

Ex 20:8-11	Mark 2:27	James 5:4	Prov 22:29
Gen 2:2	Psa 19:1	Psa 102:25	Heb 11:3
Gen 2:15	Gen 3:17-19	Ex 20:8-11	Ex 20:15, 17
Prov 10:4	Prov 14:23	Matt 6:20	Matt 25:14-30
Psa 50:7-12	Gen 1:28	Lev 25:23	Psa 50:7-12
Gen 1:26-30	1 Chron 29:10-14	Lev 19:9-10	Ex 23:11
1 John 3:17	Eph 4:28	2 Cor 8:13-15	Deut 8:17-18
Deut 24:15	Luke 12:48	Eph 6:9	Col 4:1
James 5:4	Eph 6:5-8	Col 3: 22-25	1 Tim 6:1-2
Titus 2:9-10	1 Pet 2:18-22	Eph 6:5-9	Prov 6:6-11
2 Thess 3:10	Matt 6:20-24	Prov 28:27	Ex 23:11
Prov 29:7	Psa 101:3	1 Chron 25:1-8	



Recommended Reading

Lesson 11 – Labor: Created to Create

Please note that not everything in these suggested resources should be considered endorsed by Focus on the Family. Nevertheless, Dr. Tackett has found this material helpful. Scripture should be your first and primary resource.

- Coleson, Edward P. 1965. *The Scriptural Standard in Economics and Government*. Spring Arbor, MI: Edward P. Coleson.
- Colson, Chuck and Jack Eckerd. 1991. *Why America Doesn't Work*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing.
- Grudem, Wayne. 2003. *Business for the Glory of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Kavanaugh, P. 1996. *Spiritual Lives of the Great Composers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Richardson, John R. 1966. *Christian Economics: Studies in the Christian Message to the Market Place*. Houston, TX: St. Thomas Press.
- Sowell, Thomas. 1995. *The Vision of the Anointed*. New York, NY: Basic Books.



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 hitherto 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.