
Practical Leadership at Work

Selected Passages

Mark Schindler

Introduction

Review

It is unfortunate today, that Christians have adopted many secular and unbiblical views of work. Work is often seen as a means of self-fulfillment. Such views lead to selfishness, materialism, a complaining spirit, and discontentment. To the world, the measure of a man is seen almost exclusively in light of his success at work. Even in the church it seems that we are quick to judge others by their profession, apparent wealth, clothes, home, car, or smoothness of speech. The world's view makes work and leisure the ultimate priorities of life. For many men (and some women too), everything and anything is sacrificed at the altar of career. But ultimately, work can never satisfy. And when it doesn't, work becomes a source of discouragement, depression, disappointment, and delusion.

It is ironic that the more our culture values leisure and play, the more we have become enslaved to our work. Parodying the dwarves of Disney's Snow White, our cars and tee shirts unashamedly proclaim to the world "I owe, I owe, so it's off to work I go." Thus work has become an unpleasant and unsatisfying means to an end. The promises of the industrial age have increased our standard of living but not the quality of our living. And though the technology or information age is now fully upon us, our intellectual prowess has not made us any wiser, has not made us any happier, nor has it stopped suicide, divorce, or depression. These days, conscientious, obedient, diligent workers are as rare as considerate, fair, and humble leaders.

This morning we looked at Biblical Leadership at work. Let's take a quick review. The kind of Biblical leadership we saw in Ephesians was one that seeks to serve those under its authority. It is a concerned and kind style of leadership that does not seek to abuse its position. It is fair and just, but is not harsh with those under its authority. And it understands that in Christ all are equal, humbling us to seek to serve others for the glory and praise of our Lord. Should we want for an example, we need only look to the leadership that was modeled by Jesus Christ as he worked among us and led His disciples.

Pattern of Leadership

One of the interesting revelations out of this series of messages is the pattern of leadership that emerges from scripture. There are several relationships of authority outside of work that we must live in for God's glory. In fact, in one or more ways, we are all under God-ordained, sovereignly-appointed authority. Everyone here this evening is under the authority of governments. God has provided us federal, state, and local governments and officials whose leadership we must respect and obey. Within the Church the body is to submit to the authority of the Elders, and all to the authority of Christ. Wives are under the authority of husbands and children under the authority of parents. Every day we move in and out of spheres of authority. Some where we are in authority and some where we are under the authority of others.

In all of these authority structures, there is a consistent pattern or model of Biblical leadership for both those under and in authority. I think there are at least four key principles in scripture that define our view of Biblical leadership whether at work or in any other relationship of authority. First, there is to be a sincere submission to all God-ordained authority. We are to obey and respect those who have leadership over us, knowing that God has placed them there for our good and His glory. Second, as leaders, we are to have consideration for those under our authority. There is to be an attitude of love and care for those under our leadership recognizing that God has placed them under our responsibility. Third, there is to be a selfless serving of those under our authority. Biblical leadership is giving and is willing to put the needs of others before our own. Lastly, it is humble toward others knowing that before God there is equality regardless of one's position of leadership. We are all sinners before God, saved by His grace, and not one of us is any better or worse because of our position of leadership in any sphere of authority. These four key principles play out in a pattern that defines our view of leadership along Biblical lines and points our hearts to Jesus, who is the perfect leader.

Approach

Unfortunately, many Christians live at work as though they were in a different world, far from the commands and wisdom of scripture. At work they feel isolated from spiritual realities and are either oblivious or calloused to their sinful choices. Far away from the accountability of Pastors, Elders, Christian friends, and spouses, they choose to live a life far from God's standards. It is worth noting, that Biblical leadership is just one of many areas that we could speak to regarding work. Our relationships with those in leadership over us and those under our leadership, is just one aspect of the character of a godly man in the workplace. We must allow scripture to not only shape our view of workplace leadership, but also practical areas such as career decisions, stewardship, integrity, contentment, purity, and diligence. In all of this there is also the interaction of work with other areas of lives such as marriage, ministry, and our walk with the Lord.

For the leading man, all of work matters to God. There is no distinction between secular and sacred vocations. Every career and vocation is sacred in the sense that it we live with spiritual responsibilities in the world and our work is done in Christ and for His glory. Ultimately, whether slave or master, employer or employee, it is our goal to please God in all that we do and to bring glory and honor to His name. Paul writes in Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." I truly believe that it is vitally important that as Christian workers we understand the importance of living out a Biblical view of leadership at work. Satan would have us continue to be deceived, discouraged, or apathetic regarding Biblical leadership in the workplace. We can defeat this by holding fast to Biblical truth and being willing to diligently apply these principals even in the face of opposition and difficulty.

With this in mind, our approach this evening is to focus on Biblical leadership in more practical terms. Rather than a particular scripture, we will look at leadership at work with support from selected passages. Similar to Paul's instructions to the Ephesians and Colossians, we will look at leadership from the perspective of both employees and those in who lead

employees; that is those who are either managers or employers. It is my hope that this message provides practical applications of what we heard this morning and addresses the real-life situations that we face everyday at work.

As an Employee

Respect for Authority

As we did this morning, let's start with a view of Biblical leadership as an employee. The first practical application to make is that of respect for authority. When we are under the authority of others in the workplace we are submit to their leadership with respect. True submission requires a respect for both the position of leadership and the person in leadership. Even in situations of both immoral and unethical leadership there is still to be a respect for the authority of the person. But for most of us, the typical situation at work is not so extreme and requires our recognition and respect for their leadership.

Turn to 1 Peter 2, and let's look at verses 18-19. Listen to what the Word says. "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." The standard for respect here is not just when those over us are gracious, easy to work for, have a similar personality, or see things our way. The standard here is to respect their leadership even when they are unjust and even cause us suffering.

Similar to the passage from Ephesians this morning, the context here in Peter is of household servants who worked in their master's homes. The implication of these verses is that some served under unjust and unbelieving masters who were harsh to the point of causing physical grief. Peter calls these servants to be subject and give honor and reverence to their masters. The word "all" indicates in every way in every circumstance this is to be their attitude. So here we have respect for those in authority over us commanded in one of the most difficult work relationships in the most difficult of circumstances. Why? Because it is praiseworthy in the eyes of our God when we patiently and humbly bear up under people and circumstances that cause us grief.

And yet, how easy it is for us at work, and in much less hostile circumstances, to make fun of, speak poorly of, and complain about those in authority over us. This thought convicted my own heart as I thought of the numerous times I have not respected those in authority over me. Whether out of pride, seeking the admiration of others, or spite, I have slipped into patterns of speech and thought that degraded my bosses, managers, and others in authority. It is so easy to forget that we are to be a living testimony for God in the workplace. It is so easy to forget that our disrespect for their leadership is disrespect for God who has placed them in authority over us. Paul writes in Romans 13:2, that "whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

So what are some specific situations that might challenge our respect for leadership? Let's start with something that has drastically changed over the last 50 years. What if you are a man working for a woman? Do you justify on Biblical grounds that since women are subject to men in marriage you do not have to respect their authority? What

if you are working for an unbeliever? Do you rationalize that since they are not a Christian you are not subject to them? How about something more common place? How many of us believe that we are working for someone who is not as competent as we are? Does our pride keep us from respecting their leadership because we believe we can do their job better than they can? In all of these situations, scripture calls us to give all respect regardless of their ability, or our perception of their ability, to lead.

Humility under Authority

So the first practical application of Biblical leadership for employees is respect for authority. The second practical application is humility under authority. When we are under the authority of others in the workplace we are to humbly accept their leadership. Humility requires a setting aside of our rights and interests and preferring the rights and interests of those in leadership. Humility requires a setting aside of our pride and considering those in leadership before ourselves. It is an absence of rivalry, conceit, or malice toward them. It rejoices at their success and accomplishments, regardless of the quality of their leadership.

Turn to 1 Peter 3, and let's look at verse 8. This verse follows a series of exhortations to submit to various forms of leadership including human institutions, workplace relationships, and marriage. At the end of this instruction he writes, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." I think the phrase "all of you", applies to both those in and under authority. Peter is saying that in all of these relationships, we are to have an attitude of humility toward one another. The sense of the word for humility here is a genuine concern for others that is marked by a conscious effort to place yourself beneath them.

To a certain extent, all of these attitudes toward leadership require contentment regarding those in positions of authority. But humility, perhaps more than any other quality of our attitudes toward leadership, requires an abiding contentment in God and His goodness toward us. Humility trusts God for the outcomes of both good and bad decisions made by leaders. Humility trusts God for recognition of our work when it seems ignored by those in leadership. Humility trusts that God has placed those in leadership over us for a purpose. Humility is content to pursue peace rather than pushing a point to prove we are right.

We can also define humility by what it is not. Humility is not false. By that I mean, humility is not pretense or put on as a charade. It is not making light of our work to manipulate others to sing our praise. It is not faking kindness and respect when our boss is around and then making jokes about them when their eye is not upon us. Humility has no capacity for bitterness toward leadership. Bitterness can well up and overflow in sinful anger, slander, and malice toward others. It will stifle forgiveness and kindness when they are the right thing to do. Humility does not insult or speak falsely of leadership. It does not seek to cause harm to those in leadership nor will it abide lies or assassination of character.

There are many situations where humility is difficult and may even feel impossible. What about when we have been wronged? Certainly in cases of being wronged we have the opportunity to follow appropriate paths for justice and restitution. But we must do so humbly, seeking justice for its own sake and not to take our own revenge. What

about when we are being taken advantage of? This is more difficult. There are times for the sake of God's glory, we may be called to suffer and endure difficulty with enabling grace. Romans 12 reminds us to "bless those who persecute you" and again that "vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." In some cases, the Lord may allow a circumstance where it is wise to leave a job because of the way we are being treated. But even then, we are still to be humble-minded in regard to those who are over us.

Obedience to Authority

There is one more practical application of Biblical leadership for employees that goes along with respect for authority and humility under authority. When we are under the authority of others in the workplace we are to obey their leadership. At first glance, obedience does not seem like an area that most people would struggle with. But submitting to leadership in the area of obedience is more than just giving lip service or doing the minimum that is asked of us. It is a whole-hearted effort that strives to do one's best not just for our employer, but as one working for the Lord.

Turn to Titus 2, verses 9 and 10. Paul encourages Titus to teach according to sound doctrine and provides examples that cover a variety of relationships where leadership is involved. Paul writes, "Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." There is so much we can learn from these two verses. First, those under authority at work are to be submissive, or in other words, are to yield to leadership in all things. Moreover, they are to be well-pleasing. The idea here is to work in a way that gives satisfaction or gains an employer's good will. Additionally, we see that they were not to be given to contradicting leadership or pilfering. The use of pilfering is an interesting choice because it conveys a keeping back in small amounts of what does not belong to us. Finally, Paul concludes by reminding them that they do this not to gain their freedom or for any self-serving reason, but so that they may adorn the doctrine of God. When we live Biblically under leadership, the goodwill and praise we receive we reflect back to God so that He receives honor and so that others are attracted to the Gospel.

I think everyone understands that obedience is submitting to the leadership of another. But the character or quality of our obedience is what is important. What is going on in our hearts and minds when we obey? There are several practical characteristics to sincere obedience. The first of these is diligence. Diligence and its opposite, laziness, are frequent topics in Proverbs. Proverbs 13:4 says that the "The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." The diligent worker consistently and generously brings his best efforts to the workplace. The diligent worker understands that laziness is just another form of pilfering; a keeping back of our efforts while still taking a wage that expects more than we are offering. Another characteristic is that of being trustworthy and faithful. The idea is that we obey with a high quality of work not only when our employer or manager is watching us, but also when they are not. Trustworthiness and reliability is best demonstrated when we are left on our own and are faithful to starting and completing the work we have been given.

So is there ever a time when we should disobey authority at work? Again, general principles of leadership can be applied to man-instituted authority at work. We are to obey leadership at work unless what is being done or what we are being asked to do would

violate God's laws. For example, we should not steal, lie, bring harm to others, or break the laws of government. This principle may spill over into the interaction of work with other areas of our lives when we believe what we are asked to do would cause us to neglect spiritual priorities regarding our spouse, family, or ministry. In these situations, we must do what is right and trust ourselves to God to provide another means of employment and the provisions for life.

As a Manager/Employer

Serving from Authority

Let's move to the other side of the authority coin. What practical applications can we make when we find ourselves in positions of leadership at work? The first application is that Biblical leadership is foremost a role of serving from a position of authority. Throughout scripture and in the ministry of Jesus on earth, we see a model of leadership that aims to serve others. Servant leadership runs against the bent of our sinful hearts that would rather be served by others. Nor is it the model of the world that seeks to use others as a means to success or to climb the corporate ladder.

There is a general principle of serving others as a model of leadership that is present throughout scripture. We see it in Luke 22:25-26 where Jesus speaks to his disciples when they argue about who is to be regarded as the greatest. He says, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves." This morning we saw this same principle applied to masters in Ephesians 6:9, where Biblical leadership is showing the same attention and care to doing God's will in their position of authority as the servant is to have in his position under authority.

The kind of leadership that we are naturally drawn to be is that of ruling those under our authority. It demands the obedience and submission of others rather than leading in a way that produces and encourages it. In practical terms, servant leadership requires getting to know those under you so that you may lead in an understanding way. It is considerate of their interests and kind in both words and deeds. Servant leadership is not concerned about its power or position knowing that Christ Himself came to serve and give His life for us. Servant leadership in the workplace will stand out as you demonstrate genuine care and interest in those under your authority. More importantly, it will demonstrate a gracious and humble model of leadership that will point people to Jesus Christ.

Responsibility of Authority

Another practical application is that Biblical leadership understands the responsibility of authority. This means that those in leadership recognize that they have been entrusted with a responsibility to use their position to benefit something greater. This may be as a manager entrusted with corporate resources in order to benefit the company. Or this may be as a business owner carrying the heavy weight of knowing that God has entrusted you as a steward of His resources to benefit both the people you lead and the Lord. In either case, there is a greater burden because your sphere of responsibility ex-

tends beyond yourself to those under your authority. You must not only do well, but you must ensure that those you lead must also do well.

This principle is seen in Colossians 4:1. Paul writes, “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.” Here we see the responsibility to first be fair and just to those under your authority. In practical terms, this is a responsibility to not play favorites, to be sure you fully understand situations so that you can render good judgment, and to assign work based on experience, skills, and ability. But the greater responsibility here is to remember that no matter what your position of leadership, we have a Master in heaven who watches over us. He sees when we are harsh and unkind to those under us. He sees when we withhold information, tell small lies, or take credit for the accomplishment of others. And he knows the attitude of our heart when it seeks to manipulate, to promote self, or blame others for our own faults.

The responsibility of leadership is probably the hardest for those who are both under authority and in authority. Managers in the lower levels of organizations often have a difficult responsibility to balance challenging and even unreasonable demands given them knowing the impact upon those that they lead. They may find themselves in positions of knowing confidential information that is not to be shared with those beneath them. They may even disagree with the decisions being made by their leadership, but know they must enforce those decisions upon those they lead and care about. These moments test our integrity, character, and wisdom where principles of leadership on both sides of our view of Biblical leadership come into play. Often our desire to be popular and well-liked comes into conflict with obeying and preferring the interests of our leaders. Biblical leadership is often not easy and carries a heavy load of responsibility.

Ministry in Authority

One of the most common phrases heard in the workplace is also the name of a popular restaurant chain. TIGF or “Thank God It’s Friday.” I wonder how many Christian workers arrive at work after the weekend and say to their co-workers TGIM, for “Thank God it’s Monday”. I would challenge everyone to think of their work as ministry; especially those in positions of leadership. Our work lives are not exempt from spiritual realities. All of our lives, including our work matter to God. When the substance of our work lives is reviewed in heaven, we will not be asked about the prestige or accomplishments of our positions. We will be shown how our work did or didn’t glorify God and minister to others.

Developing a ministry mindset means thinking about the spiritual realities of your leadership at work. When you consistently think about your work in spiritual terms, you focus on God’s plans and purposes rather than your own. Certainly, work as ministry means meeting physical needs and fairly providing for life and living. But work as a ministry means truly caring about the people who serve you. It is a care that goes deeper than just the physical condition; it sees their spiritual condition as well. Practically, this means praying for them and looking for opportunities to share the gospel with those who are willing to hear it. This is the kind of leadership that will truly make a difference both now and for eternity.

For a small number of you, God has given you the gift and responsibility of owning a business. In a real sense, when we consider Biblical leadership it has even greater im-

plications for you, because you have greater control over the course and decisions made. What is the purpose of your business? Is it to fill your storehouses with wealth by maximizing profits? What kind of steward of the business are you? Do you contribute profits to care for the less fortunate? Do you set aside money to further the kingdom of God? How do you minister to your employees? Do you provide fair wages and benefits in keeping with their needs? Do you regularly pray for them and look to help in times of need? How does your style of leadership reflect upon God and bring Him praise and glory? Running your business as a ministry for the glory and pleasure of God may require sacrifice and more work, but it will bring a satisfaction far beyond anything that money, fame, or power can supply.

Conclusion

Let me wrap it up tonight with a few introspective questions. I have woven as much application as I could throughout the course of the message. So let's bring it home together as we ask ourselves and pray over these questions. As I go through these, I will leave time for those of you who would like to write these down in your notes.

1. In what ways have I have been showing disrespect for those in leadership over me?
2. What wrong attitudes and thoughts do I have about those in leadership over me?
3. In what ways can I be more diligent in my work?
4. In what ways do I rule rather than lead those under my authority?
5. Are there areas of decisions and leadership at work that I should be praying about?
6. In what ways could I see my work as a ministry?
7. Is there anything in my response to Biblical leadership at work that is hindering my spiritual walk with the Lord?

C. H. Spurgeon once preached on work saying, "We begin with God in the morning, seeking help to do our work, and to do it well. At his hands we seek guidance and prosperity from hour to hour. We pray him to prevent our doing any wrong to others, or suffering any wrong from them; and we ask him to keep our temper and to preserve our spirit while we are with worldly men. We beg that we may not be infected by the evil example of others, and that our example may be such as may be safely followed." Let us not forget in all of this that we need Christ to be Godly followers and leaders at work. Let us desire to live out a Biblical model of leadership, admit our dependence upon Christ, and faithfully pray that God would help us not just to lead and be led; but to lead and be led well.