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Gleanings



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The Kingdom of God and the Workplace

Bernie Madoff's fate has been determined. He pled guilty to operating the biggest ponzi scheme in history and will spend the rest of his life in jail. The judge showed no mercy in sentencing him, which was appropriate given the egregious nature of his sins.

I think most would agree that what drove Madoff to live out the lie of his con game was avarice or greed. Greed is the unrestrained compulsion to accumulate more and more physical wealth, even to the point of compromising values such as truth, hard work, and fidelity – values that most of us would embrace, at least in theory. If Madoff valued truth, hard work, and fidelity, one would never know it. He lived a life of ease built on lies, deceit, and infidelity.

Another perspective on Madoff's sin is that he worshipped money, that is, he erected an idol to the almighty dollar and compromised everything to worship the idol. Though consistent practice of lies and deception, he became skilled at greed. The fact that one can become an expert in greed is confirmed by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 2:14). Furthermore, the apostle Paul wrote that greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Madoff's story is a warning to all of us about the fate of those who worship money. Most of us would never consider that we may be, like Madoff, infected with greed, but would we be correct? Does the worship of money exist in all of us—particularly in those who don't commit the egregious sins like Madoff?

My friend Dennis Peacocke says that what is in any of us is in all of us; the only question is to what degree. Given that we are all descendants of Adam and Eve and everything reproduces after its own kind, then it follows that what was in Adam and Eve is in us. Adam and Eve sinned; so we, as their descendants, have a sin nature. Hence, I think it is fair to say greed and therefore the worship of money that is Madoff is in all of us. The only question is to what degree?

To help us gain perspective, consider how the worship of money may be manifested. An easy analysis is to compare the common view of work with the biblical view of work.

The common view of work is what I call the "dualistic view." This view is a utilitarian view of work, that is, work is a means to an end; a necessary part of life to make money. This perspective holds that work is at best morally neutral and at worst evil; there is no inherent dignity in work, so we work as little as possible in order to spend as much time as possible doing important things elsewhere like leisure time, shopping, and vacations.

For a Christian, the dualistic view of work means that work has no redeeming value other than to make money and to offer opportunities for evangelism. For example, a friend of mine, Bob Payne, recently shared a story of a plumber who came to his house to replace Bob's water heater. The plumber was a professing Christian who had a heart to share Christ with others. Upon arriving at Bob's home, the plumber quickly commented that plumbing work was only a means to end; it gave him access to people in their homes so that he could pray for them. Bob responded that he didn't need the plumber to pray for him; what he needed was a new heater and he needed it to be installed properly.

Don't misunderstand Bob's comment. Bob was not minimizing the value of prayer, rather he was countering the dualistic perspective that the plumber displayed about work. Bob recognizes that work has dignity and value because God created man to work (see Genesis 1:26–28). Hence, Bob's view is that work



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has value and that man is charged to work with excellence. To do so, requires godly people doing what God created them to do (Ephesians 2:10). I call this view of work the “holistic view of work.”

The holistic view of work recognizes that both spiritual and physical activities are ways to glorify God. God made the physical universe and repeatedly declared it good in Genesis 1; then in the last verse of Genesis 1, God declared his physical universal “very good.” The appellation “good” is a divine attribute (Luke 18:18-19); hence to state that something is “good” is to say that it is consistent with the nature of God. God’s declaration over his physical universe was that it was consistent with his nature; hence, the physical universe is to be highly valued because the physical universe reflects God. Therefore, since God viewed the physical universe as good, so should we.

What gives work in the physical realm significance, meaning and value is that this it this purpose for which man was created (Genesis 1:26-28). Work is therefore divinely ordained and is a means for glorifying God.

The first occurrence of the word *work* is in Genesis 2:5. In this text, the Hebrew word *abad* refers to Adam’s divinely ordained work assignment. In other texts, the *abad* is translated *worship* (Psalms 100:2) and *serve* (Psalms 2:11). This suggests that physical work is then a way to worship and serve God. Furthermore, if work is a way to worship and serve God, then this suggests that work is spiritual activity. This gives physical work dignity, meaning, purpose, and significance.

Comparing the dualistic view of work and the holistic view of work, it is clear that since the dualistic view sees work only as a means to make money, then this view is a sign of the worship of money, which is idolatry. Those who hold to a dualistic view are, on some level, doing the same thing as Bernie Madoff, just not as extreme. Nevertheless, they can expect the same end results: judgment.

By contrast, the holistic view of work values work as a means not to worship money, but to worship God. When anyone performs their work with excellence, fidelity, honesty, and diligence they bring glory and honor to God, which serves both God and man. Hence, only a holistic view of work enables us to produce great results and simultaneously to worship our Creator. This is how the kingdom of God is advanced in the workplace. May the Lord grant us grace to do this well.

Want a good laugh and a great picture of reality?

To see the difference between dualistic workers and holistic workers, please click below to view a short (~10Minutes), but very amusing and powerful video.

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