



"Whatever you do, do it heartily as
to the Lord and not to men"

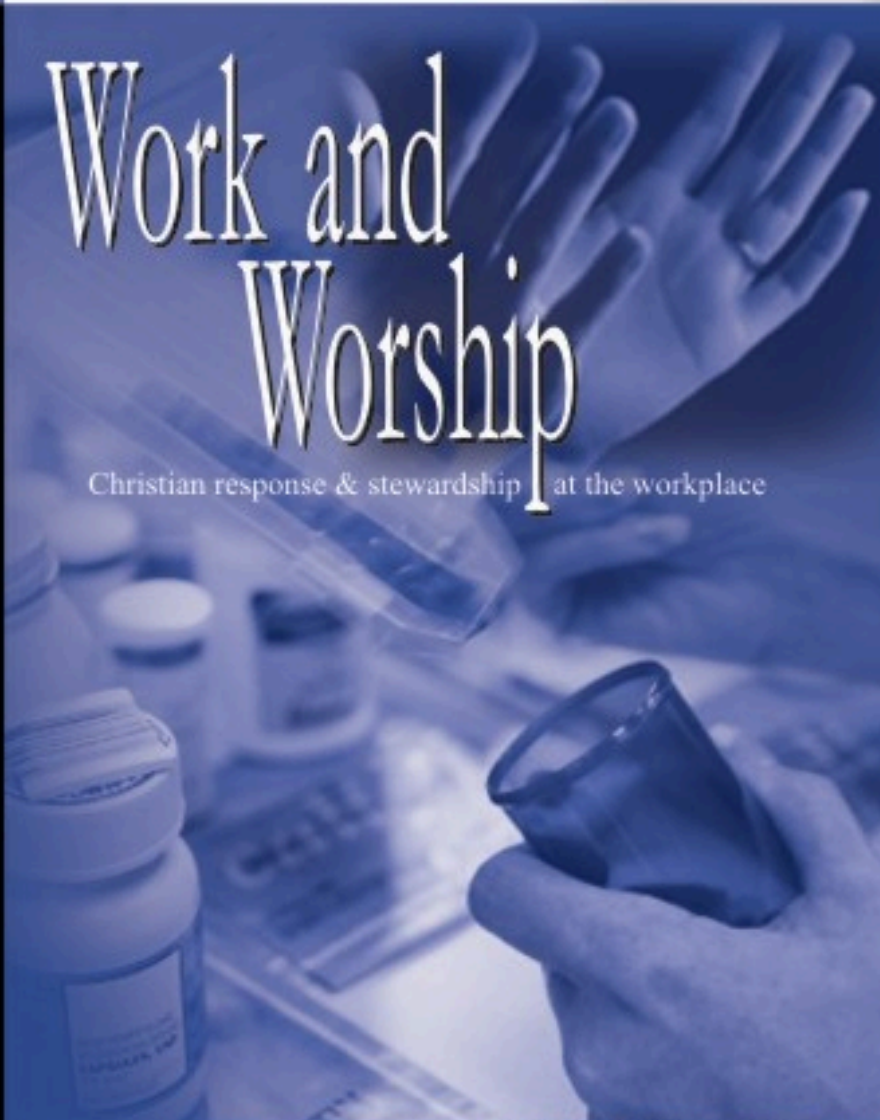


HEALTHCARE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
INTERNATIONAL (SOUTH ASIA) MONOGRAPHS



Work and Worship

Christian response & stewardship at the workplace



Dr. Noel Somasunderam

For Healthcare Christian Fellowship International, South Asia

Work and Worship

Reclaiming Eden

Noel Somasunderam

© 2010 Healthcare Christian Fellowship International—South Asia

First edition 2010

Also available as an audiobook.

Healthcare Christian Fellowship International—South Asia

7 College Avenue, Mount Lavinia 10370, Sri Lanka

Discover God the Worker who is continually at work enabling the world to go on. Discover the mandate to mankind to be partners with God in the task of being stewards and managers of this world. Discover meaning to your work, in the knowledge that God will have the final say in history. Explore the thrill of being partners with the creator of this World!

Table of Contents

Preface	7
Chapter 1: Introduction: Common Thoughts on Work	11
Chapter 2: Work and the Creation Mandate	15
Chapter 3: Work in a fallen world	29
Chapter 4: Work in Redemption Perspective	40
Chapter 5: Work in Apocalypse Perspective	51
Chapter 6: People of God at work	57

Preface

There are many excellent books on this topic, some of which I have referred to in the process of writing this, and I don't take credit for the thoughts that are expressed in this booklet. What is striking is that critical of current Christian thinking and novel as they may sound, these concepts are fundamental evangelical truths that drove the scientific revolution, the protestant work ethic, universally acknowledged principles of religious freedom, liberty of conscience, the rule of law, separation of powers and constitutionally limited Republics, and the moral principles that underpin responsible governance and the demand for it. What I have tried to do is to express some of these truths in the South Asian context. Once again I have learnt all of this from the many Christian leaders around me and consider it a privilege.

I request that you approach this topic with humility, openness and willingness to learn lifelong from the Holy Spirit.

Noel Somasundaram



Could you take some time to answer these key questions before you start?

Why are you in your current job?

What are you doing in life now?

How much of wealth is enough?

Will you be judged differently to others?

Chapter 1

Introduction: Common thoughts on Work

Let's take Andy who is a doctor working in a pediatric neonatal unit. He spends 8 to 12 hours a day looking after new born babies who are sick. Andy enjoys his work and finds fulfillment in being the tool that brings healing to the newborns and joy to their parents. However, as has been pointed out, he cannot witness to his patients-the newborn babies! His church has suggested that he be involved in something Christian. He has had a chat with his pastor who feels that Andy should quit his job and wants him to commit himself to full-time ministry. Andy thinks that he should, as his secular work has no impact in the kingdom of God. What would you want him to do?

What would you tell Robert who works as a cleaner in the hospital and finds no meaning in the job that requires that corridors and table tops are kept tidy? What of Robert's cry that nothing good comes out of endless cleaning?

Countless Christians are burdened by work and would rather be doing something useful for the kingdom. Are these valid concerns? How would God look at the cleaning that Robert does in silence? How would God look at Andy's hands inserting a cannula or adjusting the dials of a ventila-

tor?

The notion that some people devote their lives to do sacred work for God while the others do secular work is an ancient one. From Indian Philosophers in 1000 BC to Confucius and Greek Philosophers in the 6th Century BC the thinking that religion and faith have no role in day to day living and philosophy has been popular. The Church has further refined this idea by dividing 'secular' work from specifically 'religious' work since the medieval times (*saecularis* in Latin means worldly). The monasteries and churches were the places where work pleasing to God was considered to be done. Tending the garden, cooking, etc would be considered secular. And now we have part-time as opposed to full-time workers in church. The Church has promoted to the world the idea that the work that pleases God is apparent religious work. Currently secularism is a very popular concept worldwide. Secularism views religious beliefs as superstition and dogma and argues that reason and science are superior. Therefore, it is argued that philosophical thinking, government and other entities including work should exist separately from faith and religious beliefs.

Many Christians would subscribe to this idea. They see work as God's punishment on humanity. Hence work is drudgery: meaningless labour that is a necessary evil. This creates two worlds for the Christian: the secular and the sacred. Work will be in the secular area- God has little or nothing to say on this. We could devote time and energy to the pursuit of wealth and success. On the other

hand the sacred (keeping away from 'earthly' things and involving in 'Christian' activities like praying, witnessing, worshipping) is what God is interested in. The paradox is that the largest measure of time, talent, and energy is spent in a part of life that we identify as God having no interest in. How relevant is Christianity if it has no concern with 90% of your life? How big is your 'God' if he can't have authority over your work place, your political life and has no say in most parts of your life?

How relevant is Christianity if it has no concern with 90% of your life?

Does the church fully understand work as a response and responsibility of a Christian? The answer is No! A major part of a person's life is spent in their major calling: which is to be engaged with the society as teachers, nurses, doctors, politicians and labourers. If a teacher is also involved as a Sunday school superintendent, which part of her life would be prayed about at church? The 2 hours a week 'sacred' work or the 42 hours a week part of life? Which part of life is God most interested in? Which part of her life would have the biggest impact in the Kingdom of God?

Dear reader, I invite you to explore God's perspective on work in this book. We will start by looking at God's role as creator of the world and what the intended role for humanity would be. Although sin has corrupted and disrupt-

ed this role of humans we do have hope through the cross. We can be involved in the restoration of the fallen world. Just like the saints of the past we will take our questions prayerfully to the presence of God and seek answers from His revealed word. The answers that you find will influence the principles that govern your choice of work or calling, place of work, how you work, and how you earn money. It will tear down boundaries in your life and probably make your discipleship complete.

Which part of your life would have the biggest impact in the Kingdom of God - the 'sacred' or the 'secular'?

Chapter 2.

Work & the Creation Mandate

God the Worker

The biblical model of God leaves no room for the secular-sacred divide and duality. God is introduced right from the first chapter of the bible as someone involved in the world: creating, bringing order, concerned about his creation! In the beginning...God worked! (Genesis 1:2). The picture painted is that of a work week. God works on six days and rests on the seventh. Just read the number of verbs in these chapters. God created, commanded, separated, named, appreciated, and blessed. Note the words that describe the earthly (secular) nature of his work. God formed, breathed, planted, placed, and surprisingly rested!

In his book, *God the Worker*, Robert J. Banks explores sixteen biblical comparisons drawn from the world of human work to depict God, including God as composer and performer, metalworker and potter, garment maker and dresser, gardener and orchardist, farmer and winemaker, shepherd and pastoralist, tentmaker and camper, builder

¹Robert J. Banks, *God the Worker: Journeys into the Mind, Heart, and Imagination of God* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1994)

and architect¹. Don't forget Jesus the carpenter.

Man the Worker

Man and Woman were created in God's Image. Together the man and woman would be fruitful and create a community that would reflect God's systematic, methodical and creative approach to work and leisure. Humans were created as steward, caretaker, and manager. God's command was to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it (Genesis 1:26-30). When LORD God put humans in the Garden of Eden they were to work in it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). The most amazing sentence perhaps is, when God had formed the animals. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them (Gen 2:19). God and man at work side by side! Partners at work! Naming involves intimate knowledge and study of the creature. God is curious and would take pleasure in man's ex-

"Man and woman were to be the lords and stewards of God's world. They were partners with God in this role. Earth is given to man in leasehold not freehold"

ploration and involvement in nature. All that God had created is under the humanity, and they would manage God's world for Him. God would find pleasure in this partnership.

The Cosmos is the temple of God

What was the message to its original hearers or readers

when it was first compiled? This important exegetical question is important when reading the bible. What did the original readers of Genesis understand when they heard its message? For the Jews the cosmos had an important function. Indeed function –the question of why does it exist, rather than how- would be their prime concern when the original readers of the bible viewed the world. It was the temple of God². The creation account in the bible would be understood by the original hearers as inauguration of the grand temple of God. This is a consistent theme in the bible. In Isaiah 66:1 the Lord indicates: *"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool, where is the house you will build for me, where will my resting place be?"* The tabernacle and the temple were only a micro-scale representation of the cosmic temple. This concept of modeling is consistently seen in the worldview of the Israelites. The psalmist concludes,

"He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever" (Psalms 78:69),

Later Solomon acknowledges at the inauguration of the grand temple:

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).

The role of humanity in this world would therefore be understood with this in the background. Humanity exists as leaseholders in the temple of God and would live a life of worship in their stewardship of this world. For Israelites

²John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis one: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins debate*. Inter Varsity Press, Illinois, 2009

this worldview was the lens through which the world around them would be viewed. For the Israelites therefore there was no division between secular and religious. The whole world was viewed as created to glorify God, and naturally every part of their lives was to be an expression of this worship. Rather than undermining the ‘secular’ life the Bible shows how they had to examine each action under the yardstick of whether it glorified God?

The Transcendent Creator

The Mesopotamian religions had many written creation stories. The most popular ones like the Enuma Elish, and the Gilgamesh Epic were recited during festivals and were widely known. The Genesis creation account paints a contrasting picture that would shock its hearers and readers.

Some of the concepts that would have been a shock to its Mesopotamian readers would have been the transcendent nature of God (God is separate and well beyond the created order). He is not part of creation but stands supreme and above it. He would speak and create merely with his word. The Sun, the Moon and stars and nature were worshipped as controllers of the Babylonian way of life. In Genesis account they are intentionally handled as if they are un-important. The Sun and the moon are merely ‘lights in the sky to govern the day and night’ and

‘He also made the stars’ (Gen 1:16).

God’s perspective on work would have been another shocking concept to the Hebrew and Babylonian reader

alike. In the Enuma Elish man was created to toil hard so that the god's could be at ease! Man was an afterthought and is to labour so that the god's could get on with their infighting and killing of each other. If the creation of humanity in God's own image and breathing his life giving breath to create humans were not shocking enough, God seeking partnership with humanity and entrusting the world to them would have been extremely shocking indeed.

In the Babylonian accounts God's themselves are murderous, and vicious. Earth was created out of a murder. According to Enuma Elish, Marduk defeated Tiamat, cut her up and with one part of her body made the earth and with the other the sky. Man was "made immoral by gods who have presented to humans perverse speech, lies and untruth". To the reader of Genesis the strong ethical and moral element is apparent from the beginning³. "God saw that it was good" is repeated seven times! Nature is good

"Creation was good and has divine approval. The earth from which man is formed is good and man and woman found divine approval"

and has divine approval. The earth from which man is formed is good, and soon divine approval of man and woman is described (v31). Humanity is made in the image of God reflecting his moral character and they have a choice of good and evil.

³Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: science and Faith in the 21st Century*. Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, 2001

God is immanent in His creation

One may think that as God is transcendent, the natural order continues to sustain itself and can exist without God. However, God is not only transcendent but is immanent (exists in and extends into all parts of the cosmos) in his creation⁴. He is deeply involved in continued creative activity in relation to his universe. He is the sustainer of the universe; the universe exists, life forms breathe and walk about because of His continued say-so. *And the Spirit of God m'rahaphet* (brooded like a mother bird taking care of her young) *upon the face of the waters* Gen1:2. He was and is like a mother eagle brooding over her nest: warming, feeding and continuing to care. The exact concept is best illustrated in Deuteronomy 32: 10, 11.

In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; He guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up (m'rahaphet) its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.

This amazing involvement of God not only in societies but in the whole of the universe is beautifully illustrated in Psalm 104⁵. He makes springs pour water (v10) all the beasts quench their thirst (v11) the birds nest by the waters and sing among the branches (v12) the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work (v13). He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate for food and

⁴Denis Alexander, *Rebuilding the Matrix: science and Faith in the 21st Century*. Lion Publishing plc, Oxford, 2001

⁵Denis Alexander p 320-329

wine (v14). Even the seasonal changes and day and night cycles are God's work (v19, 20). The lions and (v21) even creatures of the sea look to God to give them their food at the proper time (v27.) When God sends His Spirit, they are created, and He renews the face of the earth (v30). May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works (v31)

God is not like the ones described in the Babylonian stories, creating and then minding their own concerns. He is continuously involved in order to sustain and give life.

You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.

You give life to everything (Nehemiah 9:6).

This was the teaching even in the New Testament. As Paul would say,

yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17).

Your Work is God's Work

Humans, as partners of God, derive their mandate from this perspective. They would be involved in the world because it belongs to God. They have been given leasehold of it to nurture it, just as God is continuing to be involved in it. Their stewardship would ensure that through their intimate involvement, it remains sustainable. Every conceivable creative activity in the world derives its meaning from this understanding of God. Scientific exploration is investigating

physical laws and principles that God has ordained. Smelling a flower and appreciating it is in the sense of amazement at God's creation and his sustenance of it.

Therefore, Work is Worship! God the creator as a worker is a model given to humanity. The image of God the worker reminds us that work of all kinds has intrinsic value (it is good in itself, not merely for what it produces) in that it sustains and develops God's creation and is part of the dignity of being God-imaging creatures. All aspects of life are God ordained and are under the control of God. He does care how you manage your work whether it is cleaning, washing, gardening, caring, accounting, inventing. The world and the natural order (everything secular) belong to God and he deeply cares for it. We are called to be stewards of His world. Therefore everything secular is as important as the sacred.

We tend to prize and value the work of evangelists, pastors, and apologists for the faith because what they do connects so readily to God's own work as Redeemer. But this is an incomplete vision of God. God's redeeming and transforming work is central to his plan for humankind. But God is also Creator, Sustainer, Preserver, Healer, Provider, Revealer, and Lawgiver—to mention only a few of his many other occupational hats. All of this means that everyone who does legitimate work should be able to say, "My work is God's work." For example, the work of a teacher could be said to reflect something of God's desire to reveal truth to people. The work of a doctor reflects something of God's healing power and gift. The

work of a musician reflects something of God's creative

The work of a teacher could be said to reflect something of God's desire to reveal truth to people. The work of a doctor reflects something of God's healing power and gift. The work of a musician reflects something of God's creative ability. The work of a secretary involved in scheduling appointments reflects something of God's own love of order

ability. The work of a secretary involved in scheduling appointments reflects something of God's own love of order. In other words, we should all be able to say, "My work is God's work."⁶

The Christian is called to be a partner reflecting God's image in his secular environment, whether it is in the lonely corridors that Robert silently cleans or in the corridors of power. This integrated outlook to work and all 24 hours of life can revolutionize your life. Whether you sing, "then sings my soul how great thou art" or are examining the tiny cells of a plant under a microscope or are writing a formula that helps understand time warp in universe, or are planting flower plants, you are in worship. Whether you are on the road protesting about injustice to fellow humans created in the image of God or working to conserve the nature that God so lovingly created or are looking after infants who are made in the image of God, you are in worship.

Can we then say that all work is intrinsically good and reflects the nature of God? What about the work that could distort God's image and creation? What would you say

⁶Banks God the Worker p274

about abortion that takes away life that God so lovingly created? What of the demeaning treatment or exploitation of fellow humans who are in the image of God? What of the continued plunder of natural resources for mindless greed? What of corruption, bribery and inconsiderate plunder of the resources of country by leaders and civil servants of most developing nations? What of cruel regimes that kill and distort image of God in humans by the twist of truth and suppression of justice? What of the churches- the custodians of God's kingdom- that silently watch while all this distortion goes on?

The LORD of time

God as the creator of time and transcendent beyond it is important to grasp! You could say that time began when God said so! The humanity and its history continue to exist because of God's continued say so. Because God created time and continues to work within time, He wishes for us to use every minute of it to glorify Him as His partners in History. God is also in control of the future. However difficult and bitter the current situation looks like, the end will be exactly as God wants it to be! For the Buddhist and the Hindu, time goes round in a meaningless circle. For the Christian who works with the creator of time, the end of time will be exactly as his God has willed it to be. And he/she knows that the future will be glorious. We will expand on this theme of Christian's hope further in chapter 5.

Sabbath Lifestyle

What about leisure? Does God have something to say about it? The Lord of the Sabbath who has intended man to be completely off work every seventh day has done it for a purpose. Sabbath lifestyle is a God ordained pattern. "You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work" (Exodus 20:8-10). Not only is rest and leisure important but they are therapeutic, bringing healing to the body and refreshment to the soul. In the busy new world order leisure is an important counter statement. Sabbath is reflection of God's image. "For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested" (Exodus 20:11).

The work addicted modern worker should learn to find healing to himself/ herself in leisure. The reasons why people overwork are to earn more, to find job security, or get promotions. It is not uncommon to find families under strain and breaking apart, people not having time for other people because they are so busy-paying off for the added luxury and hurting in that process.

Do you know what the most common command in the Bible is? The phrase 'Don't be afraid' occurs more times than any other command. Consider Jesus' prescription of a Sabbath Lifestyle:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth. But store up for

yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 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. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Mathew 6: 19-34)

Sabbath lifestyle is an attitude prescribed for humans. We are challenged to acknowledge that God is in control of the world and our future. Worrying about our food, future or clothing is left to God! The passage talks about the way God cares for the least valuable creatures of nature. The Raven, the lily and the grass were very common in Palestine and had a fleetingly short life span. If God cares even for the lowliest of creatures how much more would He care for you? You are supposed to enjoy and take pleasure in the world around you and your

stewardship of the God given world.

In conclusion, we all labor in the context of a world created by God, a world God has declared good! As I have shown earlier, in some traditions, the material world has been regarded as evil, generating a negative view both of the physical creation and of earthly work. However, if this is God's good world, there is no dichotomy between the earthly and the sacred. Wendell Berry puts the issue clearly when he says that "by our work we reveal what we think of the works of God."⁷

This deeper yet fundamental understanding of the created world order and human stewardship in it are not new. These have been fundamental teachings for centuries. This understanding has been well recognized, formulated and taught since the reformation- ever since the authority of Bible as the inspired word of God was asserted. Over a period of a century this worldview revolutionized the human race.

Science today is dominated by pessimism and atheism. However the foundational work for science was done by Christian scholars rooted in scriptures. Johannes Kepler the great astronomer best illustrated by defining the principle that "Truth in religion is based on the Word of God in Scripture, while truth in natural science is based on evidence and reason." Kepler viewed all of science as man attempting to "think God's thoughts after Him." Sir Isaac

⁷Leland Ryken, "What Does God Do All Day? God at Work and Play," in *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 159-71

Newton taught that "in order to truly know the Creator, one must study the natural order of things."

It was not just in science that the reformation brought about a change. As much as asserting the authority of the Bible to all parts of life and calling for repentance of people from sin towards a life of obedience to Christ, the reformation also provided a phase of history that saw major political, moral, scientific and economic restructuring that had enriched the world. The redeemed transformed the world by being out there in the world, changing it. In the words of Schaff "the Reformation was neither a revolution nor a restoration, though including elements of both. It was negative and destructive towards error, positive and constructive towards truth; it was conservative as well as progressive; it built up new institutions in the place of those which it pulled down and to this extent it has succeeded"

Chapter 3

Work in a fallen world

From the glorious statements about the good world order in which humans in the image of God are placed, with the choice of fulfilling their role in that capacity as partners, or in disobedience and rebellion against the mandate, we come crashing down to the act of rebellion by humans.

The fall

The darkest passage of the history, *“Wattiqqah mippiriyo wattokal wattitten gam-leisah immah wayyokal* “intentionally written with difficult pronunciation, mercilessly forcing concentration on each of the eight Hebrew words describes the first sin (*‘and she took of its fruit and she ate and she gave’* Gen3: 6)⁸. Eating of the forbidden fruit itself is not the sin. The use of the common word ‘nahas’ to describe the serpent, the picture of a forbidden tree, and the picture of eating a fruit are used to make it apparent that the writer is using figurative language here to describe a complex concept (Just like in the first two chapters). It is not trying to apportion blame on the woman either, as she is speaking in the plural ‘we’ (Gen 3:2) and man *‘was with her and he ate it’* (Gen 3:6).

The scripture in general describes sin in two contexts.

⁸Victor Hamilton, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Wm B Eardmans Publishing co) p 186-191

Firstly, sin is rebellion against the design and disobedience to the mandate of the personal lawgiver. Secondly, sin is lack of conformity or missing the mark to the law of God. In eating of the fruit, a rebellion against God is demonstrated by humans.

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Gen 3:4-6

Being like God (deification) was the ultimate fantasy here. Their commitment shifts from doing God's will to their will. They even read into God's thoughts and started guessing theological facts to support their intentions. In Von Rad's words⁹ "Serpent's insinuation is the possibility of an extension of human existence beyond the limits set for it by God at creation, an increase of life not only in the sense of pure intellectual enrichment but also familiarity with and power over, mysteries that lie beyond man'

The freedom of choice of humans

Man and woman were created with autonomy and free will to choose. God took a great risk by choosing to create humans with free will, able to choose between living in partnership with God and disobeying him by trying to become equal to God. God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, calling, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:8, 9) desires humans to reciprocate the love. But this would

⁹Victor Hamilton p 190

have to be of their own choice. He would not have it any other way. If humans chose to live in partnership with him they would do it of their free will. He would not impress or dazzle them with flattery or crafty talk like the serpent. He would neither guard them against choosing to have a conversation with the serpent about himself or from the haughty 'nilbena libenum' (brick bricks) to reach up to heavens. Even at the risk of losing humans, He would not have it any other way.

Paying the penalty

Sin does not go unchallenged and unpunished. As a result of sin, the work and the earth are cursed¹⁰. They were promised bliss, power, and knowledge and were aiming to reach to God. Not only did they fail to get any of this but lose out everything they have. Instead of becoming God-like, they are thrown out of His presence. The irony of sin is that *"they found nothing and lost everything"*¹¹

Table 1: Description of the literary pattern that Genesis employs in the penalty for sin.

(On next page please)

Transgres- sor	Transgres- sion	Type of Punishment	Curse on Life Function	Curse on Relation- ship
Serpent	Tempted them to eat	Banned and cursed	Eat dust	Hostility with woman's offspring
Woman	Was deceived	On capacity as mother and wife	Painful repro- duction	Dominated by man
Man	Ate of the tree	On capacity as bread winner	Work is curs- ed	estranged with nature
People in Noah's time	Filled earth with violence	Wipe them off the earth	End	nature will be destroyed
Babel build- ers	Brick bricks to reach heaven	Unhinge plans	Language in disarray	Dispersal

Sin has now entered the fabric of the humans; although every human carries the image of God he is also at the same time a sinner. From the time sin permeated human society, the utter sinfulness has surprised even the humans.

Proliferation of sin

As we move on in the book of Genesis, we read a sad story of sin sleeping at the doorstep of every human,

¹⁰The sin itself determines the punishment. Note the punishments being related to their transgression, and involving a life function and a relationship

¹¹Victor Hamilton p208

starting with the first recorded murder. How important was the vocation of Cain and Abel? They would literally worship God by the fruit of their work. But not all work is worship, although we do not know why God chose Abel's offering and not Cain's, it is apparent that you could please and equally displease God by the fruit of your labour! God's saving grace is shown in action when he has to work not through Abel, but through the murderer.

Not all work is worship: you could please and equally displease God by the fruit of your labour!

At the story of the flood we find that humans are now dispersed around the world as God had wanted them to. But there is nothing else to be pleased about. They are wicked and every imagination of their thoughts are evil all the time (Gen 6:5, 6). The earth that was declared good (Gen1:31) is now corrupt and full of violence (Gen6:11).

"The cause of the flood is the wickedness which like the blood of Abel (Gen 4:10), cries out to the divine for judgment. Sin has now become the reversal of creation order. God allows the results of sin and wickedness to be their own judgment. Men who abandon God find themselves abandoned by God. In an appropriate form of destruction creation is 'unmade' returning to the primordial chaos. Humankind's moral chaos results in physical chaos which will sweep mankind away. The picture of flood is not the picture of a capricious God. It is the picture of what happens when humans abdicate God-given responsibility for each other and for the earth"¹²

The ship builder (Noah) epitomizes another Adam. Noah with his manual labour and obedience will enact man's stewardship to nature. The preservation of humanity, ani-

¹²Vinoth Ramachandra, God's that fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission. (Paternoster Press, Cumbria,1996) p125,6

mals, birds and creatures is dependent on this man. Noah is also a model of the coming Messiah through his obedience and his saving passage through watery grave. Through him the earth and all clans of humanity will be saved! Noah is also a model of the continued struggle of Christian against sin for *every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood* (Gen 8:21). Even this Adam ends up 'naked' and a curse to his descendants (Gen 9:22-28).

The second Eden

The second Eden has the same theme as the first. People move back to the site of the geographic area of Mesopotamia (the Eden) and are busy re-enacting what the original couple did. With their new-found technology they would undertake the grandest project ever up to that date. The construction of the city and the tower of Babel or Babylon (Gate of God) had great promises. The aim of the project is 'to build a *migdol* (a grand fortified tower) with its peak in the heavens'. They would reach God with their architectural marvel. The project would bring fame and immortality to its builders. The fortified city would provide security and they would 'not be scattered'. The similarity to Eden is not just in the geographical location but in trying to reach beyond their human limits to 'get into heaven'.

God views the actions of both the original couples' and the refined industrial society at Babel seriously. God's contempt at the builders' attitude is clear from the con-

trasts between human deeds (Gen 11:3-4) and divine deeds (Gen 11:6-9). They said '*come let us build*' a tower that would reach heavens i.e. towards God but the irony is that even though they build a marvelous tower, it is so short that God mocks by saying '*come let us go down*' from heaven. A divine council is followed by judgment. Their own actions become their judge again. God would 'unbrick' what they brick. The word '*nabela*' (let us confuse) is the opposite of '*lebenim*' (bricks). God would undo their intentions and plans.

God's Grace in action

Man is evil, he rebels and transgresses; God seeks out and reconciles him from the darkest depths. God's original plan for the earth is disturbed by entry of sin into every man. Even as sin proliferated, God's grace increased even more. Despite humanity's extreme sinfulness God would begin the biggest rescue act of human history. He would call a childless man from the very epicenter of human rebellion (Babel), make him a nation and through the model nation reveal himself to this world. He would send his son into these people, and He would live as a man and pay the price for the atonement of everyone's sins. When His son comes to the world he would start a new project of choosing a worldwide group of people who will live as the new model nation bringing His kingdom into being. When He unraveled the grand plan you could imagine the pin drop silence and hushed intake of breath among the hosts of

heaven. Unraveling of this plan is the scarlet thread running through every biblical story that we read. The book of Genesis and the following Old Testament scriptures are filled with descriptions of God seeking out, calling ordinary people who become a family and a nation into a partnership or a covenant relationship.

Get up and Go!

Having agonized and grieved of man's failures in the accounts of fall, wickedness and the watery grave, and finally of arrogance and the scattering in Mesopotamia, we find God's new partner – a man quite different. Abram a livestock herder from Mesopotamia is asked to *lech Lekha* 'Get up and Go'! What was lost in Adam/s would be restored, and a nation would be built through the lifelong obedience and wandering of this couple. Ironically the father and mother of a great nation are subfertile! Abram was called to be in a life of unstinting obedience. Believing and seeking the impossible. Making major moves in life without question, risking all he had on the altar. "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you (Gen 11:1), see the similar pattern unfolding in "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go..Sacrifice him there..on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Gen 22:2).

Abraham was able to risk even the one that would be the key to fulfilling God's promises. Contrast this with Lot's choices (Genesis 13:10-11). He chose the most fertile area and decided to move eastwards. An eastward move-

ment in the Bible was a move away from God. You could recall eastwards banishing of Adam and Eve (Gen3; 24), and Cain (Gen 4:16) and the eastward movement of people as a prelude to building of Babel (Gen 11:2). Lots choice of where he lived was similar to the current migration of many Christians towards the wealthier parts of the World. How many are moving to difficult parts where there is war and famine? How many would get up and go without question when it comes to choice of place of work or chose a profession? Work is worship but beware which God you worship. A good yardstick to measure your worship is the fruit of your labour. Is the fruit pleasing to God? Are your choices governed by gathering of money or easier life? Is it the god of mammon and self pride that you worship?

As a kid I once missed the one way sign and was caught riding my bicycle on the wrong direction by the Policeman on duty: he proceeded to make me deflate my tires- thus teaching me a lesson! In USA I noted not one but three signs to mark a one way: the first is the standard one way sign, the second is "one way" written in red letters, for those who miss both of these there is a third sign few yards away that announces "Wrong Way!". Many Christians live their lives thinking that life is about not entering the forbidden way and expect "wrong way" written in bold to appear in front of their eyes. For many God is like a policeman or even worse is a signpost. Are the following quotes familiar? "I am going to apply for Visa to Australia; if it is not God's will He will make sure that the visa is rejected!" , or "Since God allowed the request to go through

I presume he wanted me to be in that place!”

The biblical narrative follows individuals who are called to work in covenant partnership with God. A queen (Esther), kings (Solomon, Josiah), princes (Joseph, Moses), governors (Nehemiah, Daniel), shepherds (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David), fishermen (Peter, John), tent makers (Paul), tax collectors (Zacchaeus), doctors (Luke), and even slaves (Philemon). God chooses to work in partnership with people in whichever occupation they were involved in.

Work in a fallen world

Coming from a country like mine it is easy to see the challenges of working in a fallen world. The systems that you work in are ungodly. Most workers work for their own interests and money. Work in Hindu or Buddhist philosophy is for your own merit so that you could advance in the ‘circle of life’. Why would you then look at other’s interests, since it is about you and your interests? Surveys demonstrate that the citizens of most Asian countries will tolerate sinfulness in the interest of economic prosperity. They will vote for a corrupt or utterly oppressive government as long as that regime offers the best prospects in material prosperity. They will forgo other concerns in the interest of material stability. Even the Church is like that material interests drive and precede other concerns.

Punctuality is not something that is good in most developing countries. Workers try to get the most out of the

system but would not think about their role in the institution. After all what good can come out of meaningless repetitive work? Corruption and dishonesty are extremely common and cost billions in systems that are already resource poor.

Here is the crunch question? Can someone who looks at your work see the image of God? Does your desk and your approach to work reflect God's orderly and creative nature? Can people find concern and caring attitude in your relationships at workplace? How are your subordinates viewing you- As someone with the attitude that you are God's partner? In the midst of self interest, corruption and greed fostered by the worldviews of people around you, do you reflect Kingdom values? Do you live out and speak out Kingdom values?

What do people see when they see you? Can someone who looks at your work see the image of God?

Work as Idol

Sadly most Christians worship their work and not God. For most Christians God is used as their lifeline to get out of the world into heaven. He is accepted as their savior from the endless suffering and sin. Jesus is the mediator as an emergency call line that serves their self interests. God is not the LORD of the rest of their life-particularly when it comes to choosing their profession, choosing the workplace, choosing the salary, choosing the perks that come out of the job, and in numerous moral choices they need to make at work in a fallen world. In effect work determines their life, and they in turn worship work!

Chapter 4.

Work in Redemption Perspective

Redemption

Scriptures make it clear that sin has corrupted the whole world:

just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned (Romans 5:12).

Not just humanity but its depravity has resulted in curse to the whole creation:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:22).

Divine justice, would mean that payment be made as an expiation (atonement) for sin in order to reconcile humanity and the created world order to God. The next step in the grand plan for redemption of the world required God himself to live as a man and pay for the price of the sin of the humanity once and for all.

In the incarnation of God into the suffering world in a vulnerable position (as a minority Jew, born in times of bondage under a foreign power) voluntarily suffering and in his death on the cursed tree we get a glimpse of the love of God. The cross is not failure of God. The creator voluntarily suffering for and

bearing all the suffering and humiliation of his created world order is the grandest proclamation. It is the picture of the Creator being part of the drama of creation, suffering along with the suffering creatures within it. It is not unintentional then that the key to understanding God is the cross.

Jesus as the model man would walk this earth and show us that God loves us and is keen to restore the world. Jesus redefines humanity and revelation of God to mankind. Jesus' obedience and attitude was the exact opposite act to the scene at Eden. Consider the humans (Adam, Eve, Babel builders) who wanted to be exalted and tried to reach up to become the nature of God and then contrast that with the Son of God in the garden of Gethsemane deep in agony, bearing all the burden, shame and horror that sin brings. As Paul writes,

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-11).

The image of Cross is a self chosen message of love, that of paying the ultimate price even death on the cursed tree! As John Polkinghorne writes¹³, "In the lonely figure hanging in the darkness and dereliction of Calvary we see God opening his arms to embrace the bitterness of the strange world he has made. The God revealed in the vulnerability of the incarnation and the vulnerability of creation are one. He is the crucified God, whose paradoxical

¹³John Polkinghorne 1989 Science and Providence of God

power is perfected in weakness, whose self chosen symbol is the king reigning from the gallows”

Jesus therefore redefines human efforts and attempts at understanding God. Jesus the suffering savior also forces humans to make a choice. It is no longer possible to stay neutral and declare that God had not revealed Himself: In the life of Jesus and his claims and his teachings people will need to make a decision between redemption and judgment. Each individual will need to acknowledge Jesus as the LORD of the universe and seek his grace at the cross to receive freedom from sin.

Jesus the Messiah saves by paying the ransom for reclaiming back humanity and the created world order from the curse and authority of the law. The redemption and salvation are not mere personal acts but are universal. In the mandate to the first couple and the calling of Abraham we find this the personal calling is in order to be a blessing to the nations. In the nation of Israel this calling is lived out. Not only in their spiritual domain but in moral, ethical and socio-political life the people of God were called to live as a blessing to others: God’s purposes were universal not merely personal. In the ministry and sacrifice of Christ and in the calling of the Church this is reiterated. In the lives of the redeemed the whole creation would be redeemed.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration.... In the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God (Romans 8:19-21)

Jesus the Messiah

The scriptures had outlined the ministry of Jesus the Messiah quite clearly. Following are some key themes in the Old Testament. His ancestors: He will come from the house of Judah (Isaiah 37:31) as a descendent of David (Isaiah 16:5). Nature of the Messiah: The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him giving knowledge, wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, and fear of the LORD. He will bring righteousness and justice to the poor and needy. He will punish the wicked (Isaiah 11:2-5). He will judge and seek justice and speed the cause of righteousness (Isaiah 16:5). Miracles of Messiah: deaf will hear and blind will see (Isaiah 29:18), and the lame leap, and mute shout for joy (Isaiah 35:5-6a). Messiah will establish a new reign under God and judge the nations. He will preach good news to the poor, He will bind up the brokenhearted, free captives and release prisoners, and proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, and comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2). He will also restore the nation of Israel and make Israel a light for the Gentiles, bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6).

If the scriptures particularly the prophets clearly had foretold of the Messiah, why then did the Jews of Jesus' time who had longed for the arrival and delivery of Messiah miss His arrival? In the Messianic prophecies the arrival of Messiah heralds the ushering in of the kingdom of God, where a new world order is established. In the Kingdom, God would rule supreme and bring about his rule, judging

the oppressors, bringing justice to the poor and needy. Jews expected that a visible physical rule will be established and overlooked two crucial truths in the bible. They were not ready for a dead savior! The sacrificial lamb was not their idea of Messiah as they had (mis) interpreted the prophecies that foretold of the Kingdom of God. Cross therefore was failure to the Jews and proof that Jesus could not have been the Messiah.



For the God of Time the arrival of Messiah is the last act in the redemption narrative. The last days that lead to judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In prophecies therefore the ministry of Jesus (ushering in of the Kingdom of God) and the establishment of God's kingdom on this earth (Consummation) and the final judgment are juxtaposed together. This is because the bible sees God's acts in temporal history in light of his overall plan for all of human history¹⁴. It is like viewing two discs that are related to each other. When seen head on they appear juxtaposed, however on the temporal view they appear separated from each other.

Just like the Jews, it is easy to misread the scriptures. In

¹⁴Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All it's Worth*. (Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan 2005) p201

fact the nature of the Kingdom of God which was the predominant teaching by Jesus is the area where modern church struggles. Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God had arrived with his ministry. At the beginning of His ministry He read Isaiah 61:1, 2 and declared that

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:16-20.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God will come He replied

"The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'there it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17: 20-21.

The early church and the church for the past two millennia have (quite correctly) lived as if in the end of times trusting that it is only a matter of time before the end of times is brought on by God. Therefore, the Key question is, if the Kingdom of God is already inaugurated but yet to be consummated, what is the nature of the Kingdom?

Some would live as if the Kingdom of God is a personal one that is only in the hearts of people or in the church. This of course is an easy option that appeals to the selfish nature of fallen humans, hence the popularity for the concept. However the belief is un-biblical. It ignores the redemption history and the fact that God is the God of the universe, is immanent and active, calling His people to live and work as His partners in this world.

A serious look at the biblical principles will tell us that the only way to live as people of God is to live as under the Kingship of Christ in every sphere of life, subjecting not only the spiritual but the work, leisure, money, sex, and everything 'secular' to His Lordship.

Lordship of Christ

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

Unlike the popular form of selfish gospel that is preached and practiced, following Jesus means making radical choices. Come follow me! The call is the same as to Abraham. Come, leave everything! If anything is left for you that is because God wants you to be steward of what you are entrusted with: Treating patients, earning money, choosing your partner, choosing a place to work/live are in an act of stewardship. Work is not your god; instead all of life and all aspects of decisions are brought under the Lordship of Jesus.

An obvious illustration will be the question of can you work in a brothel or in the Tobacco Company? A narrow minded answer will be yes, as long as you witness to the clients and workers there! A complete world view that takes into account that God is just and holy and abhors exploitation and disregard to the ethical and moral codes will give us God's perspective on the establishments in question. This worldview may urge us then not to be hand in glove and tolerate unjust and abhorrent practic-

es but to be prophetic against them!

The Cross brings hope and meaning to the secular world

For the Buddhist and Hindu alike, what happens to you has been the result of Karma; the reward or punishment for what you have done in previous lives. What you do in this life has no meaning in this world; you do things or good deeds for your own credit. For most Christians, cross and Jesus' sacrifice are a ticket to heaven; therefore they often live to earn good credits to be shown at pearly gates. No wonder that the lives of most people are not unlike that of their Buddhist and Hindu counterparts.

The Duke of Wellington said that "there was but one thing worse than a victory, and that was a defeat." From history we know precisely what he meant. To achieve a great victory is great, of course. It is what you do battle for. But victories are usually won at great cost. You have defeated the enemy, but many of your men and women died in the effort, many of your friends are no more, many others are seriously wounded. Usually the victors look virtually as exhausted and as desolate and as dispirited as the vanquished.

It is central to the Christian message, that at the end of time, at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the victory will be utterly complete, not one soldier among the hosts of the Lord will fail to answer to his name when

the roll is called. It does not appear to be the case now, believers and unbelievers die alike. The good and the wicked get the same fate. But on that day it will not be so, the day when the dead rise and the immense company of the saints is gathered together and begins eternal life in the presence of the Lord Christ. Only then will anyone be able fully to measure the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“At the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the victory will be utterly complete, not one soldier among the hosts of the Lord will fail to answer to his name when the roll is called”

For the Greek, the natural (secular) world was independent and had no relationship to the spiritual. Greek civilization thought only of soul survival. It had no future for the body. They thought the body unworthy of eternal life. Only the realm of the spirit could be eternal. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Paul is addressing the question of the secular world and its spiritual meaning. The Corinthians, or at least some of them, thought either that they already had what they were going to get from Christ or that what they would get later would be all spirit and no body. For Paul, as in the case of the Lord Jesus, it will be the self-same body that will rise to eternal life, but he also makes clear that it will rise in a far more glorious form and condition than it had in this world. He uses five metaphors commonly known to prove this point. (V36-58)

What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow,

you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined... So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit... And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable... we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. ..When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death is your victory?

Where, O death is your sting?"

Paul uses the metaphors of

- ◆ The seed: when it dies it turns into something more glorious giving plant with fruits
- ◆ Adam brought death but Jesus brought life and hope by defeating death
- ◆ Sleep: death is like sleep. You go to sleep knowing that you will wake up to see another beautiful day
- ◆ Wearing a new garment: resurrection is like shedding your perishable self and putting on a new self

Paul asserts that salvation in Christ, embraces man in his totality, in his divinely created nature as a psycho-physical being. It is not only the soul that is made sinless and per-

fect, but the body as well. And it is not only as souls that men and women who have trusted in Christ in this world will live and love and serve the Lord forever in heaven, but as fully authentic human beings. This is central Christian teaching from creation to revelation. You are a body and your body is you. And if Christ saves you, then he saves your body; if he transforms you and perfects you, he transforms and perfects your body.

**What you do may not be known outside or be written in gold letters,
but one thing is for sure, it counts in the Kingdom of God**

What you do here in this material world has far reaching eternal consequences. You are the Adam and Eve back in the fallen Eden working it to perfect it and present it to God. What you do may not be known outside or be written in gold letters, but one thing is for sure, it counts in the Kingdom of God. You may say you are the heir of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Esther, John the Baptist, and Paul. None of what you do is to be discounted. It all has eternal consequences. And that is why Paul exhorts the Corinthians in v 58:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

I do hope though that you don't equate 'work of the Lord' to work that appears religious. As we have been discussing to the original listeners of Paul this would have meant their entire life that included worship together at church and proclamation of the gospel but also work in their vocation, considerations like where and how they lived, and sociopolitical decisions like whether they could worship the emperor or be killed.

Chapter 5

Work in the Apocalypse Perspective

Apocalypse, Judgment or the time of reckoning is the hope of vindication by God. The Book of Revelations -the major apocalypse literature is appropriately the last of the inspired word of God. Just as the first book of the Bible is of the beginning, the last book is of its end. It wraps up the Bible by giving a glimpse of the end: the grand redemption narrative coming to an end ushering in a glorious new beginning.

One again you will begin by asking what the Revelations meant to the original recipients. Between AD 64 and AD 311 Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire and thousands died for their faith: persecution increasingly turning more vicious. Even the author of the book -John was in exile in the island of Patmos. The book of Revelation was written in the late first century to a church that was going through endless persecution for its faith, entering into a period of even worse times: two centuries of suffering and death! What a prelude to the most difficult times in church's history. What were the key messages that God wanted to give the church as it entered these times?

Firstly, God has a definite purpose for mankind which is depicted in the course of history. Human history is more than a simple record of political dominance, economic upheavals and social changes. We live in the midst of a colossal battle of God against the supernatural armies led by Satan. History may show extremely difficult and dark

passages of time in which the satanic forces employ unprecedented degree of cruelty on people of God, and this has to be viewed by the church as part of the epic warfare.

Secondly, the apocalypse is an encouragement for people of God to stand firm in their faith, continuing to strive in this world. It is also a warning against lukewarm attitude and unfaithfulness.

Finally, no matter how powerful evil may appear to be in present times, and in spite of all the trials that come upon the people of God, the future will see the dawn of God's full reign over creation. God will not abandon the created order. He will intervene dramatically in history to free man from Satan and usher in an age of messianic glory. If everything looks black that may be the prelude to an age of light and hope!

The Revelations (and the Bible) conclude by painting a contrasting picture of the fate of the two cities. The first city- Babylon represents Rome (Rev 17:18) and the civilizations of the world. Babylon is very popular, riding on a wave of popularity with almost the entire civilization, culture, and the people of the world (so numerous that they resemble the sea) as her following (17:13). Despite their popular appeal, the ungodly civilizations, governments and commerce have one fate: judgment and destruction (18:1-24)! The second city is the one inaugurated by God, coming down from God Himself (Rev 21:9-22:18). It is a city, restored Eden and the temple of God all put together!

You don't find meaning to life and physical work unless you have this context in the background. We have hope in the future because everything we do is working towards a restored Eden! God being at the centre at our workplaces not just in the spiritual domain but as the LORD of our world which is His World and His Temple! Our work and toil and suffering as faithful of God, receives meaning and hope because he is able to restore governments, civilizations, and the fallen Eden itself!

Can someone say that since the earth is passing away and since God will recreate the earth what we do in the world does not matter? If you don't take into account the nature of God's redemptive plan as has unfolded throughout history it is easy to say yes. This option is not spiritual but s a cop out. The Revelations warns repeatedly about being the adorer of the great beast, being stamped with his sign! There is no room for neutrality. If you say I don't care what is going on in this world you are actually worshipping the beast standing by powerless while sinfulness, fallen worldviews, corruption, exploitation, deception, plunder and murder by the beast is going on around you! The saints of the Lord will stand up and be counted. They may be ridiculed, punished, tortured, or killed but they will not bow down to the beast!

God will Judge our actions

Perhaps it is not surprising then that God takes into account your actions. You are expected to give account of

your stewardship for you are heir of Adam and Eve; called in partnership. If the creation mandate was to be stewards of the created world, the redemption mandate is to work in stewardship in restoration of the fallen Eden!

Judgment on the use of talents

The popular demand and expectation for establishing of the Kingdom of God were reaching to a crescendo; people thought that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to usher in his Kingdom! Jesus tells this shocking story, to warn of His departure, the return and the judgment.

(He went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. Luke 19:11)

Consider first the story about the King who entrust three of his men with equivalents of 5000, 3000, and 1000 US Dollars (Luke 19: 11-27, Mathew 25). The third man who was given the least amount returns it exactly as it was. He didn't steal, lose or cheat. Why was he judged harshly? Judgment of God is based on your stewardship of what you are entrusted with! Burying it and not using it is considered extremely poor stewardship. Being fruitful is considered a responsibility. Have you ever considered that you are accountable for your university education, the salary paid from tax payer's money, the work that you do or don't do?

In other words God is not going to judge you based on

your achievement in the 'sacred world' but by the fruit you bear.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers'"¹⁵

The Rich Fool being judged

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-34)

Why was the hardworking and 'prudent' rich man called a fool? The passage talks about greed. Jesus was warning against "possessionitis" It is about your greed and wants taking priority over the needs of others. It's about a bigger house or richer life at the expense of helping or sharing wealth with those less privileged. Jesus goes on to exhort them to "*Sell their possessions and give to the poor. Thus collecting treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is,*

¹⁵ Mathew 7: 15-22

there your heart will be also” (v33, 34).

The Preacher and his quest for meaning

Is life meaningless? The theme is explored in the book of Ecclesiastes. Just like the theme “meaningless” the book waxes and wanes and makes you feel lost about what it is trying to say. However this is just as intended by the author to make the reader feel lost in a meaningless wandering through the book. The preacher tried to find meaning and contentment in power, wealth, pleasure, knowledge, projects and exploration. However it was all meaningless. Life seems unfair and unjust. Even what God appears to apportion to people seems unfair. Despair popped up everywhere in life. The Preacher then concludes:

Now all has been heard;
 here is the conclusion of the matter:
 Fear God and keep his commandments,
 for this is the whole duty of man.
 For God will bring every deed into judgment,
 including every hidden thing,
 whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

The secular world unsurprisingly may not seem fair, but remember that God will judge everything you have done here.

Chapter 6

People of God at work

True discipleship is different from this selfish and childish attitude. Most Christians not even ordinary they are below ordinary! Living in their own interests and trying hard to be as holy as possible so that they have the best chance for entry to heaven. Jesus' rebuke to false religious service and self centered life is clear¹⁵. Discipleship in contrast is bold and unassuming. It is often non-confirmatory to the world's values and hence is extraordinary and is often un-popular. If not for the non-confirmatory we will not have had any inventions- still living in the Stone Age. If Martin Luther had not been non-confirmatory we would not have had reformation-still living in the dark era. If the Lord's apostles had not been non-confirmatory we would not have known Christ today! It is sobering to study what happened to the Apostles. Most of the Apostles ministries are not noted in scripture, however it is very apparent that they took the command of preaching to the ends of the earth literally and did exactly that. Preaching and travelling usually on foot (as they could not afford a camel or donkey). For example Paul travelled at least 22,000 Kilometers: most of it by foot, carrying his clothes with him, earning to support himself by working as a tentmaker at nights and preaching, strategizing for his missionary enterprise and writing long letters during the day! What a difference one man can make! Note below a summary of how the Apostles' lives came to an end.

Table 2: A description of the key ministry and their end according to biblical record or tradition.

Apostles	Their end according to tradition/Biblical record
Peter	Lead apostle, wide spread missionary work. Crucified by emperor Nero AD 64
Paul	Missionary to Asia, northern Africa and most of Europe. Killed by emperor Nero AD 64
Andrew	Missionary to Scythia (then northern end of the world), Crucified
James	Was the Bishop of Jerusalem after Peter. Beheaded in Jerusalem AD 44
John	Banished to Patmos and died in AD 100
Philip	Missionary to Turkey (Phrygia) martyred there
Bartholomew	Missionary to Armenia. Was skinned alive
Thomas	Missionary to India (then the Eastern end of the world). Speared to death
Mathew	Missionary to Ethiopia (then southern end of the Word), Possibly martyred
James son of Alphaeus	Missionary to Egypt. Martyred
Thaddeus	Killed in Persia. Martyred
Simon the Zealot	Crucified or hacked to death

Christians who wish to claim every promise in the bible and every blessing possible therefore miss the whole point. For the modern day Christian who picks and chooses claiming all the blessings in the Bible but not the cross or the cost of discipleship, the cross will remain an ornament that is hung round the neck, a ticket to bliss! It is not unintentional that the Apostles lived it out and

demonstrated the cost along with the early church.

What follows is a brief description of people around me who have been faithful in their work. Just like the list of heroes in the Bible they are ordinary human beings who have chosen to risk what is dear to them and therefore are in the list of heroes. Some have been killed by those in power; for what they did at work was extremely disturbing to the rulers. They challenge us from their graves- having paid the ultimate price. Sri Lanka has gone through extra ordinary levels of trauma and violence has been like a refiners fire bringing out the best in 'God's people.' Most in the list are alive and are described by initials so as not to embarrass them.

Dr Rajini Thiranagama

Dr Rajini Thiranagama was shot and killed by the cadres of the militant group LTTE on the evening of 21st September 1989 as she was returning home from the university. She was only 35. A few days before her assassination she wrote

"One day some gun will silence me and it will not be held by an outsider but by the son born in the womb of this very society, from a woman with whom my history is shared"

In 1980's Jaffna was caught in the violence of the early stages of the ethnic war that would rage on till the end of the next decade. Over the three decades of war close to 100,000 civilians mostly innocent women and children would die. The period saw many military operations in-

cluding military offensive by a foreign military force (the Indian Peace Keeping Force). Towards the last stages of war close to 250,000 civilians were held hostage as human shields by the LTTE and women, men and children found themselves caught in an intense battle that would maim and kill many of them. Although a supporter of the arms struggle for freedom at the beginning, she soon became a critique of the LTTE and criticizing narrow nationalism and atrocities. While the Christian church sought refuge in its 'sacred' world blind to the raging war and murder, shamelessly thanking God for saving their own lives, Rajini was quick to point this out to the church including her students. Worshipping at the university Chapel she saw the weaknesses in the church. Those who wish to meet her would find her either in the dissection room exploring the human body wondrously created or in the debating rooms. For her Christian faith would mean being a good mother, a good teacher and researcher and exposing the exploitation of vulnerabilities of the deprived. She believed that women were the primary casualties of war.

“Men in battle garb, whether they come with swords or guns, on a horse or in armored cars, the price of conquest seems heightened by the violation of women”.

The society around Rajini was polarized and traumatized by violence. The idealism and debates had been replaced by violent struggles for domination among the many Tamil groups and by the attempts at domination made by the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. Rajini believed that it was not merely shameful negligence for a

university to be indifferent under such circumstances, but also that a university could not survive as a university if it is to be indifferent. She wanted to 'create a space' to describe and discuss the violence and its tragedy in the society. 'A life is a life' is one of her famous quotes. 'Whoever takes life must be exposed independently of party feeling'. Value for life would be her primary motif.

"Objectivity, the pursuit of truth and the propagation of critical and honest positions, were not only crucial for the community, but could also cost many of us our lives. They were only undertaken as a survival task" were the words she wrote in the post script for her book "Broken Palmyra". Few weeks later she was killed for what she stood for.

Lasantha Wickramatunge

Lasantha Wikramatunge was shot while he was on his way to work on 8th January, 2009. Four gunmen riding motor-cycles blocked Wickramatunge's vehicle before breaking open his window and shooting him. Lasantha who was 51 years at the time he was assassinated was the editor of the Sunday Leader newspaper in Sri Lanka. The editorial style was to take government of all hues to task by investigative and critical journalism. The assassination became even more notable because of a chilling editorial he had written in anticipation of being killed, in which he blames the Sri Lanka government for using assassination to stifle the media. I need not say anything more than to give excerpts from his last editorial "And they came for me"

“We find ourselves in the midst of a civil war ruthlessly prosecuted by protagonists whose bloodlust knows no bounds. Terror, whether perpetrated by terrorists or the state, has become the order of the day. Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty”.

“Why then do we do it? After all, I too am a husband, and the father of three wonderful children. I too have responsibilities and obligations that transcend my profession... Is it worth the risk? Many people tell me it is not. Friends tell me to revert to the bar...Diplomats, have offered me safe passage and the right of residence in their countries. Whatever else I may have been stuck for; I have not been stuck for choice”.

“But there is a calling that is yet above high office, fame, lucre and security. It is the call of conscience”

“As for me, it is with a clear conscience that I go to meet my Maker. I wish, when your time finally comes, you could do the same.”
“As for the readers...you were allowed to hear a contrary view. For this I - and my family - have now paid the price that I have long known I will one day have to pay. I am - and have always been - ready for that. I have done nothing to prevent this outcome: no security, no precautions. I want my murderer to know that I am not a coward like he is.”

“People often ask me why I take such risks and tell me it is a matter of time before I am bumped off. Of course I know that: it is inevitable. But if we do not speak out now, there will be no one left to speak for those who cannot, whether they be ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged or the persecuted...”

Lasantha may not have been a Christian for long. However, he could stare at death and confidently say “I have run my race I will meet my creator with pleasure”. He shakes our Christianity and makes us ask serious questions about the way we see fellow humans, or the desk

where we work from. He challenges our sacred-secular worlds where we worship God from one and various other gods from the comfort of secular work. He did not evangelize millions but his testimony of being faithful to death has been witnessed by millions from his country and by many more from around the world. If every Christian were to be like Lasantha we need not much, but our lives would be a living proclamation of the gospel.

Dr GA: A few years ago, a young male nurse in Sri Lanka was asked as to how he turned to Christ. He said, that the turning point of his faith was when he saw the courage, compassion and Christ-likeness of a precious Christian Doctor. The army was advancing on a certain city and many were killed. People were being brought to the hospital, terribly wounded some even with open wounds in abdomen and intestines falling out. Most of the staff and patients ran away to homes to seek shelter as the rumor was they would attack the hospital and the staff. This young man was also going out when he saw a light burning in the operating theatre. Almost all had fled. And to his amazement he saw this young lady doctor, risking her life and operating on the desperately injured patients. She was not trained as a surgeon. Each patient was operated and then taken to a safe place by some sisters. Many lives were saved. This young nurse was amazed. And he said that this moment was the moment he said to himself, "God is real, Christ is real. If this is what Jesus can do to this young doctor, then I want that same Jesus." "This doctor is a simple, timid lady but yet took her work in the hospital as a call and solemn vocation from God.

A Missionary Doctor— In 2009, a forty plus years old Missionary doctor from Germany in Pakistan died in the hospital where she was working. She worked tirelessly and was both Medical Superintendent and President of the local HCF group in the hospital. When an HCF South Asia team visited there for three days, she arranged a programme but requested that the team has breakfast with her before leaving. During the breakfast she confided with the team that she

was very very tired. It was a relentless load of work on her, wave after wave. They were lacking in medical staff, as is often the case in remote mission hospitals. She asked for prayer. As the team was about to pray, God gave one of the team members a thought and he said to her, "Ulla, your tiredness is also a sweet smelling offering to God." Subsequently she wrote to this person to say that she had never thought of it this way, but that those words greatly encouraged her. She was a true servant in that noble line of Physicians, Jesus Christ, Dr. Luke and then people like Dr. Burkitt, Dr. Ida Scudder and a host of unsung heroes.

Once a beloved Indian doctor explained to us that servant-hood is going to the back of the queue. A queer definition! He explained what he meant. He said, that generally in the front of the queue there is a rush. However at the back of a queue there is no rush. And then he added, "Perhaps you will meet Jesus at the back of the queue". He was talking to doctors and told them how there is always a rush for the top jobs in the big cities. But no rush for the vacancies in Mission hospitals in difficult places. We do not imply that Christians should not be in top jobs in big cities. They are needed there. But the disparity is striking and we believe many more should, like Dr. Ulla, consider this call to working as servants of our Servant Lord.

A Christian Doctor — Some years ago God spoke to a Christian doctor while he was in the West, "Go back to your land. I've called you and your wife to something greater." They obeyed and returned to their land in South Asia. He was sent to a number of difficult areas in the land. And yet he went to all those places and worked as a true witness for Jesus by life and by witness. When he was leaving a city where he had worked on transfer, a large crowd including many prominent people came to plead with him to stay. Some wept. Years later people in that district still talk of him and remember him. It was the influence of a godly life. He still continues to shed abroad the fragrance of Christ through his work ethics and Christian character and of course the living Christ who dwells in him. People all over this country are grateful to

him. Of course he had to pay a price for this. But not once have we heard him speak of this as a sacrifice.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

Dr. Dennis Burkitt - Dr. Dennis Burkitt was a missionary doctor from UK who worked in Africa. He is known in medical circles for the lymphoma named after him. “Burkitt’s lymphoma”. His achievements in research are astounding. And he did this partly while he was working in a mission hospital. He made two landmark discoveries. He showed that viruses can cause malignancy (Burkitt’s lymphoma) and that fiber in the diet reduces the incidence of carcinoma of colon. Some say, “he changed the breakfast tables of the English speaking people”. For this he was made a Fellow of the prestigious Royal Society of Science. When he was awarded this a friend had visited him and congratulated him. His reply is a classic. He said, “I value the fellowship of the saints far more than the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Science.” What a humble, self effacing servant! Yet doing brilliant cutting edge research! When he expired there was a most moving obituary on the well known British Medical Journal. The writer of the obituary clearly wrote about his Christian faith. What a witness he is to the Medical profession.

The unsung heroes

What of the countless Christians who toil everyday around me? Some of them quietly going on with their day to day work glorifying God and hoping and having their eyes set on things to come: Slowly transforming the community around them. There are teachers who deal with generation after generation of students despite the moral

and ethical decline around them: teaching and instructing, living by example what it means to be a citizen in this country. I see lawyers who empower the exploited and the desperate, often at great risk to their lives. There are some doctors who work tirelessly with the needy: some of them have taken risky stands for the sake of those that are impoverished and without rights. I see engineers who try to make it a better place to live or walk or drive. There are cleaners and labourers, the unsung heroes who are exploited by us all, poorly paid yet going on with their lives. And perhaps the best of them all, there are some who give up their lucrative careers to be in selfless service.

And what of you reader? I would like to exhort you with the words

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1)

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28, 29)

We may be living and toiling in an incomplete world, but a new City will be replacing this Babel. God is making everything new and what you toil here for has eternal consequences. Remember and always look up to the end scenario.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21: 1-4)

A Future Not Our Own

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No programme accomplishes the church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own



Healthcare Christian Fellowship International

South Asia

7 College Avenue

Mount Lavinia

10370

Sri Lanka

Telephone: +94 11 2718503

Email: hcfasia@gmail.com



HCFI
South Asia

"This booklet penetratingly examines the Biblical teaching on 'Work' from four perspectives; creation, the fall, redemption, and the final consummation or the eternal perspective. It then ends with examples of people at work and how they have influenced others through their work. It is a teaching that is greatly needed among Christian health professionals. It was written by Dr. Noel Somasunderam, a dedicated Endocrinologist, working at the National Hospital, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The writer acknowledges that he is indebted to many different sources for the material in this book. He is also Chairman of Graduate Christian Fellowship of Sri Lanka."

**In whom (Christ) are hidden all the treasures
of wisdom & knowledge -Colossians 2:3 (NKJV)**

Then the Lord replied:

**Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so
that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an
appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove
false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come
and will not delay. -Habakkuk 2:2,3 (NIV)**