

March 30th, 2011

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Theology of Work Project

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Theology of Work Project and Kirk, Alex, "The Pastoral Epistles and Work" (2011). *Theology of Work Project*. 12.
https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/tow_project/12

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ADOPTED ON:

March 30, 2011

The Pastoral Epistles and Work

Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles and Work

The Pastoral Epistles were written to leaders in the early church. Yet much of what they say applies to Christians in other workplaces as well. In applying them to non-church work, the critical task will be to reflect on the similarities and differences between churches and other workplace organizations. Both types are voluntary organizations (generally) with structures and goals. Both are ultimately governed by the same Lord. Both are composed of human beings made in God's image. Both face major challenges at times, yet are designed to endure and adapt in future generations. These similarities suggest that many of the same biblical principles will apply to each, as will be discussed in depth.

From ancient times, the letters 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus have been grouped together as the "Pastoral Epistles." These letters outline the qualification, development and promotion of leaders; organizational structures for the care, compensation and discipline of members; and the setting and execution of individual and organizational goals. They are concerned with the good governance, effectiveness and growth of an organization; in particular, the church. The major theme of all three letters is well expressed by 1 Tim. 3:14-15. "I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth."

But there are differences as well. The church has as its mission the calling and equipping of people to commit their lives to Christ, to serve his kingdom, and to worship God. It was instituted by God as the body of Christ, and he has promised it will remain a going concern until Christ's return. Other organizations have different missions, such as creating economic value (businesses), protecting members (labor unions), educating children and adults (schools and universities), and administering defense, justice and other civic needs (governments). They are instituted as bodies (corporations or states) by charters and constitutions, and may come in and out of existence. These differences do not mean that other organizations are inferior to the church, but rather that each kind must be respected for its particular mission. Nonetheless, the Pastoral Epistles provide fertile material for reflecting on how relationships within non-church workplaces ought to be created and maintained, while highlighting the special role of the church community. Although the Pastoral Epistles are concerned primarily with organizations, they do not necessarily exclude those who work in families, sole

proprietorships and other such workplaces.

For brevity, from here forward, the term “workplace” will be used to mean the non-church workplace only.

1 Timothy - Working for Order in God’s Household

Each of the three Pastoral Epistles takes the form of a letter from the Apostle Paul's counsel to Timothy. **[1]** 1 Timothy is Paul’s letter to his younger coworker, Timothy, in which he gives instructions about how to minister within the church and how to deal with false teachers. Yet the last word of the letter — “Grace be with you [plural]” (1 Tim. 6:21) — indicates that the letter is meant to be overheard by the whole church in Ephesus so that all may benefit from Paul’s counsel to Timothy.

Because the letters share some common themes, we will combine our discussion of related passages among the letters. The themes will be explored according to the order they first arise in the Pastoral Epistles.

True belief leads to a sound organization (1 Timothy 1:1-11, 18-20; 3:14-16)

One of the repeated and stressed themes in 1 Timothy is the tight connection between belief and behavior, or teaching and practice. Sound, or “healthy,” teaching leads to godliness while false teaching is unproductive at best and damning at worst. From the onset of the letter, Paul charges Timothy to “instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3) because this different doctrine, along with myths and genealogies, does not promote “the divine training that is known by faith” (1 Tim. 1:4).

Paul is speaking of the importance of sound doctrine in the church, but his words apply just as well to the workplace. W. Edwards Deming, one of the founders of continuous quality improvement, called his methods a “system of profound knowledge” (emphasis added). He said, “Once the individual understands the system of profound knowledge, he will apply its principles in every kind of relationship with other people. He will have a basis for judgment of his own decisions and for transformation of the organizations that he belongs to.” **[2]** Knowledge of the deepest truth is essential in any organization.

Luke Timothy Johnson has translated 1 Timothy 1:4 more transparently as “God’s way of ordering reality as it is apprehended by faith.” **[3]** The church is — or should be — ordered according to God’s way. Few would dispute that. But should other organizations also be ordered according to God’s way? The first-century Greco-Roman world believed that the society should be ordered according to “nature.” Thus, if nature is the creation of God, then God’s way of ordering creation should be reflected in the

way society is ordered as well. As Johnson observes, “There is no radical discontinuity between the will of God and the structures of society. The structures of the *oikos* (household) and the *ekklēsia* (church) are not only continuous with each other, but both are parts of the dispensation [administration] of God in the world.” [4] Workplaces, households and churches all reflect the one and only ordering of creation.

A true understanding of God’s ways is essential in all workplaces. For example, a prominent theme in Creation is that human beings were created good. Later we fell into sin, and a central Christian truth is that Jesus came to redeem sinners. Workers are therefore human beings who sin, yet who may experience redemption and become good as God always intended. The truth about goodness, sin and redemption needs to be factored into organizational practices. Neither churches nor workplaces can function properly if they assume that people are good only, and not sinners. Accounts need to be audited, harassment needs to be stopped. Customer service needs to be rewarded. Priests and pastors, employees and executives need to be supervised. Similarly, neither churches nor workplaces can assume that people who err or sin should be discarded automatically. The offer of redemption — and practical help to make the transformation — needs to be made. In churches, the focus is on spiritual and eternal redemption. Non-church workplaces are focused on a more limited redemption related to the mission of the organization. Probation, performance improvement plans, re-training, re-assignment to a different position, mentoring and employee assistance programs — as opposed to immediate firing — are examples of redemptive practices in certain workplaces, especially in the West. The particulars of what is actually redemptive will vary considerably depending on the type of organization, its mission, the surrounding cultural, legal and economic environment, and other factors, of course.

If Christians in the marketplace are to understand how God would have them and those around them act (cf. 1 Tim. 3:15), they must understand God’s revelation in the Bible and believe in it. Truth leads to love (1 Tim. 1:5), while false doctrine promotes “speculations” (1 Tim. 1:4), “controversy” (1 Tim. 6:4) and spiritual destruction (1 Tim. 1:19). Knowledge of God’s ways as revealed in his word cannot be the domain of Bible scholars alone, nor is biblical understanding relevant only within the church. Christian workers must also be biblically informed so that they can operate in the world according to God’s will and for his glory.

All Christians have a leadership role, regardless of their place in the organization. Executives usually have the greatest opportunity to shape the strategy and structure of an organization. All workers have continual opportunities to develop good relationships, produce excellent products and services, act with integrity, help others develop their abilities, and shape the culture of their immediate work groups. Everyone has a sphere of influence at work. Paul advised Timothy not to let his perceived lack of status prevent him from trying to make a difference. “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

It is interesting to note that some of this reality is already perceived in contemporary workplaces. Many

organizations have “mission statements” and “core values.” These words mean roughly the same thing to secular organizations as “beliefs” or “doctrine” mean to churches. Organizations, like churches, pay close attention to culture. This is further evidence that what workers believe or what an organization teaches affects how people behave. Christians in the workplace should be at the forefront of shaping the values, mission and culture of the organizations in which we participate, to the degree we are able.

Prayer, peace and order are needed at work as in church (1 Timothy 2:1-15)

Paul begins this chapter by urging that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim. 2:1-2). The aim of this prayer is so that Christians “may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:2). Presumably, these first-century rulers had the power to make life difficult and disruptive for Christians. So Paul urges Christians to pray for their civic rulers. Prayer, peace and order are Christians’ first instruments of engagement with the secular world.

Again we see that Paul’s instructions are grounded in the oneness of God, the singularity of Christ as mediator, Christ’s universal ransom, and God’s universal desire for all to be saved (1 Tim. 2: 3-7). Christ is the Lord of creation and the Savior of the world. His realm includes every workplace. Christians should be praying for all of those who are in their particular workplace, especially those who have supervisory roles “in high positions.” Christians should strive to do their jobs without disrupting the work of others, without calling undue attention to themselves, and without constantly challenging authority — in other words, working “in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:2). For Christians, this kind of peaceable and submissive behavior is not motivated by fear, people-pleasing, or social conformity, but by a healthy appreciation for the order God has established and by a desire for others to “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). As Paul says elsewhere, “God is a God not of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Does this conflict with the duty to be at the forefront of shaping the mission and core values of our workplaces? Some Christians try to shape missions and values through confrontation around controversial issues, such as same-sex partner benefits, health insurance exclusion for abortion and/or contraceptives, union organizing, display of religious symbols and the like. If successful, this approach may help shape the mission and value of the organization. But it often disrupts others’ work, breaks the peace, and disrespects supervisors’ authority.

What is needed instead is a more personal, deeper and more respectful engagement of organizational culture. Rather than clashing over health benefits, could Christians invest in friendships with co-workers and become a source of counseling or wisdom for those facing major life decisions? Instead of pushing the boundary between freedom of speech and harassment, could Christians do their

assigned work with such excellence that co-workers ask *them* to explain the source of their strength? Instead of arguing about peripheral issues such as holiday decorations, could Christians help improve the core activities of their workplaces, such as job performance, customer service and product design, and so earn the respect of those around them? In answering such questions, we can remember that Paul's advice to Timothy is balanced, not self-contradictory. Live in peace and cooperation with those around us. Seek to influence others by serving them, not trying to lord it over them. Isn't that what the King of Kings did?

Integrity and relational ability are key leadership qualities (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)

1 Timothy 3:1-13 is well known and finds a parallel in Titus 1:5-9. Both 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 lay out qualifications for elders and overseers,^[5] whereas 1 Tim. 3:8-13 describes qualifications for deacons, including, possibly, women deacons. A variety of qualifications is given, but the common thread seems to be moral integrity and ability to relate well to people. Competence to teach, though mentioned as a qualification for elders (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9), doesn't receive the same emphasis overall. In these lists, we again observe the connection between the household and the church: managing one's family well is viewed as requisite experience for managing God's household (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12; Titus 3:6; cf. 1 Tim 3:15). We will reflect on this connection more in a subsequent section.

As noted earlier, different organizations have different missions. Therefore, the qualifications for leadership are different. It would be a misapplication of this passage to use it as a general qualifications list for workplaces. "Serious" may not be the right qualification for a tour guide, for example. But what about the priority given to moral integrity and relational ability? Moral qualities such as "above reproach," "clear conscience," "faithful [or trustworthy] in all things," and relational qualities such as "hospitable," "not quarrelsome," and "temperate" are much more prominent than specific skills and experience.

If this is true for church leadership, does it also apply for workplace leadership? The well-publicized moral and relational failings of a few prominent business and government leaders in recent years have made integrity, character and relationships more important than ever in most workplaces. It is no less important to properly develop and select leaders in workplaces as it is in churches. But as we prepare for jobs and careers, do we put a fraction as much effort into developing ethical character and relational abilities as into developing specialized skills and accumulating credentials?

Interestingly, many of the early church leaders were also workplace leaders. Lydia was a dealer in the valuable commodity of purple dye (Acts 16:14, 40). Dorcas was a garment maker (Acts 9:26-41). Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers (or leatherworkers) who became business partners with Paul (Acts

18:2-3). These leaders were effective in the church after having already proven effective in the workplace and gaining the respect of the wider community. Perhaps the basic qualifications of leadership in church, work and civic spheres have much in common.

God's Creation is Good (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

1 Timothy affirms “God’s way of ordering reality” and that this divine ordering has implications for how Christians should behave in their households, in church, and — by an extension of the text’s logic — how Christians should behave in the workplace. The clearest affirmation of God’s creation order comes in 1 Tim. 4:1-5. In 1 Tim. 4:4, Paul plainly declares, “Everything created by God is good” — a clear echo of Genesis 1:31, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” Within the context of the letter, this sweepingly positive appraisal of creation is used to combat false teachers who are forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim. 4:3). Paul counters their teaching by asserting that these things ought to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3, 4). Food, and anything else in God’s creation, is “sanctified” by God’s word and by prayer (1 Tim. 4:5). This does not mean that God’s word and prayer *make* God’s creation good when it isn’t good already; rather, in thankfully acknowledging God as the creator and provider of all things, a Christian sets apart created things such as food for a holy and God-honoring purpose. As a Christian, it is possible even to eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

This affirmation of creation means there is no created material that is inherently evil to work with, and no job engaged with creation that is unacceptable for Christians to do if it doesn’t involve sin. In other words, a Christian can drill for oil, design computer chips, scrub toilets, walk on the moon, fix cell phones, plant crops or harvest trees to the glory of God. None of these jobs or materials is inherently evil. Indeed, each job can please God. This may seem intuitive to those in the modern Western world who don’t struggle much with asceticism, as the ancient Greek and Roman world did. But 1 Tim. 4:4 reminds even us not to view the material realm as something neutral in moral value or to view something like technology, for example, as inherently evil. The goodness of all of God’s creation allows us to live and to work in joyful freedom, receiving all things as from God’s hands.

Good relationships arise from genuine respect (1 Timothy 5:1-6:2; Titus 2:1-10)

1 Tim. 4:6-16, is full of specific directives Paul gives to Timothy. It would be helpful for Christian workers to remember that training in godliness is a crucial component of professional development (cf. 1 Tim. 4:8). We quickly move from this section, however, to the next, which runs from 1 Tim. 5:1-6:2. Again, this section is similar to a section of Titus 2:1-10. Being a member of the church should not lead us to exploit others within the church (cf. 1 Tim. 5:16; 6:2) but rather should lead us to work harder to

bless them. This applies at work, too.

[Providing for Your Family \(1 Timothy 5:8\) \(Click to listen\)](#)

In particular, these two passages describe how men and women, old and young, masters and slaves, ought to behave within the family of God. The first two verses of this section in 1 Timothy are important ones. “Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters — with absolute purity.” This command does not flatten any distinction between families and the church (as 1 Tim. 5:4, 8 make clear), but it does suggest that the kindness, compassion, loyalty and purity that should characterize our most intimate family relationships should also characterize our relationships with those in God’s family, the church.

Paul’s exhortation to “absolute purity” reminds us that violations of sexual boundaries do occur in families and churches, and also in workplaces. Sexual harassment can go unchallenged — even unnoticed by those not being harassed — in workplaces. We can bring a blessing to every kind of workplace by paying deeper attention to how men and women are treated, and by raising a challenge to inappropriate and abusive words and actions.

Is it right to think of a workplace as a family? No and yes. No, it is not truly a family, for the reasons portrayed so amusingly in the television series, *The Office*. Membership in a workplace is conditional on fulfilling a role adequately. Unlike family members, employees who no longer meet the approval of management are subject to dismissal. Employment is not permanent, not “something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”^[6] It would be naïve — possibly even abusive — to pretend that a workplace is a family.

[Cultivating Young Talent \(Click to watch\)](#)

TMC Design, based in Las Cruces, New Mexico, champions young people by working with engineering students while they are in school. Owner Troy Scoughton’s goal has always been to keep young people in town by teaching them the joy of work.

Yet in certain senses, a workplace can be *like* a family, if that term is used to describe the respect, commitment, open communication and care that family members should show toward one another. If Christians were known for treating co-workers likewise, it could be a great point of the church’s redemptive service to the world. Mentoring, for example, is an extremely valuable service that experienced workers can offer to newer colleagues. It resembles the investment that parents make in their children. And just as we protect family members from abuse and exploitation, Christ’s love impels

us to do the same for people in our workplaces. Certainly we should never engage in abuse or exploitation of others at work because we imagine we owe them less respect or care than we do to family (or church) members. Rather, we should strive to love all our neighbors, including those in the workplace, as our family and as ourselves.

Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:3-10, 17-19)

The last section of 1 Timothy is packed with powerful exhortations and warnings for rich Christians. (We will skip over Paul's charges to Timothy in verses 11-16, 20, which are directed to Timothy in his particular situation.) 1 Timothy 6:3-10 and 17-19 have direct workplace applications. In reading and applying these passages, however, we must avoid two common mistakes.

First, this passage does not teach that there is no "gain" to be had by being godly. When Paul writes that those who are "depraved in mind and bereft of the truth" imagine that "godliness is a means of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5), what he is denouncing is the mindset that godliness necessarily leads to financial gain in this life or that godliness should be pursued for the sake of immediate, financial gain. The folly of this thinking is threefold:

1. God often calls his saints to suffer material want in this life and, therefore, God's people should not set their hope on the "uncertainty of riches" (1 Tim. 6:17).
2. Even if someone were to gain great riches in this life, the gain is short-lived because, as John Piper puts it, "There are no U-Hauls behind hearses" (1 Tim. 6:7).^[7]
3. Craving wealth leads to evil, apostasy, ruin and destruction (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Note carefully, however, that Paul encourages his readers to know that there is *great gain* in godliness when it is combined with contentment in the basic necessities of life (1 Tim. 6:6, 8). Our God is a God "who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17). Paul commands the righteous rich "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share" (1 Tim. 6:18) — not to sell everything they have and become poor. They are to be rich in good works *so that* they might store up for themselves "the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life" (1 Tim. 6:19). In other words, godliness *is* a means of gain as long as that gain is understood as life and blessings in the presence of God and not only more money now. Paul's exhortation in 1 Tim. 6:18-19 is very similar to Jesus' teaching, "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20; cf. Matthew 19:21; Luke 12:33).

The second mistake to avoid is thinking that this passage, and its condemnation of a love for money, means that no Christian worker should ever seek a raise or promotion or that no Christian business should try to make a profit. There are many reasons why someone could want more money; some of

them would be bad but others could be good. If someone wanted more money for the status, luxury, or ego boost it would provide, then this would indeed fall under the rebuke of this section of Scripture. But if someone wanted to earn more money in order to provide adequately for dependents, to give more to Christ-honoring causes, or to invest in creating goods and services that allow the community to thrive, then it would not be evil to want more money.^[8] To reject the love of money is not to oppose every desire to be successful or profitable in the workplace.

2 Timothy - Encouragement for a Faithful Worker

The letter of 2 Timothy, like 1 Timothy, is addressed from the Apostle Paul to his younger co-worker and is perhaps the last written letter we have from Paul. Unlike 1 Timothy, however, 2 Timothy appears to be more of a personal letter in which Paul encourages Timothy and gives him a solemn charge to remain faithful even after Paul has departed. The very fact that 2 Timothy has been preserved and included in the Christian canon of Scripture indicates, however, that this personal letter has significance beyond its original, particular context.

Cultures can persist for generations (2 Timothy 1:1-2:13; 3:10-17)

One of the striking features of 2 Timothy is the theme of generational faithfulness. Toward the beginning of the letter Paul reminds Timothy of the faith that lived in his grandmother, his mother, and then in Timothy himself (2 Tim. 1:5). This progression suggests that it was the faithful witness and example of Timothy's grandmother and his mother that was one of the means God used to bring Timothy to faith. This understanding is confirmed later in the letter when Paul encourages Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:14-15a). Paul too, as a member of an older generation, is a model for Timothy to follow. "Join with me in suffering for the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:8), "hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me" (2 Tim. 1:13), and "you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions (2 Tim. 3:10-11a)," Paul writes.

Not only has Timothy received from previous generations, but Paul intends for Timothy to pass on what he has learned to succeeding generations as well: "What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (2 Tim. 2:2). This theme challenges Christian workers to consider what kind of legacy they want to leave behind at their places of employment and in their industry. The first step toward leaving a positive legacy is to do your job faithfully and to the best of your ability. A further step would be to train your successor, so that whoever is going to replace you one day is prepared to do your job well. A Christian worker should be humble enough to learn from others and compassionate enough to teach patiently. Yet in the end,

Christian workers must ask themselves whether they left a legacy of redemption in words and deeds.

The generational aspect of 2 Timothy applies not just to individuals, but to all kinds of corporations, both for-profit and not-for-profit. The corporate form was created so that organizations could outlive the individuals who comprise them, without the need to re-form the entity at each transition. One of the basic principles of financial audits is that the corporation must be a “going concern,” meaning that it must be operating in a sustainable manner.^[9] When an organization’s pay practices, debt burden, risk management, financial control, quality control or any other factor become seriously detrimental to its sustainability, its leaders have a duty to call for change.

This does not mean that corporations should never merge, disband, or otherwise go out of existence. Sometimes an organization’s mission has been fulfilled, or its purpose becomes obsolete, or it ceases to provide significant value. Then its existence may need to end. But even so, its leaders have a responsibility for the legacy the corporation will leave in society after it is dissolved. For example, a number of companies expose their retirees to the risk of poverty because they have not adequately funded their pension liabilities. Municipal and state governments are even more prone to this failing. Organizations have a duty — from both a biblical and a civic perspective — to ask whether their operations are shifting liabilities to future generations.

Likewise, 2 Timothy suggests organizations must operate in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. To depend for success on unsustainable resource extraction or environmental pollution is a violation of the generational principle. To deplete the community’s “social capital,” meaning the educational, cultural, legal and other social investments that provide the educated work force, means of transactions, peaceable society and other factors that workplace organizations depend on, would also be unsustainable. To a certain degree, workplaces invest in environmental and social capital by paying taxes to support governments’ environmental and social programs. But perhaps they would have more reliable access to environmental and social capital if they did more to create sustainable systems on their own initiative.

Guard the tongue (2 Timothy 2:14-26)

In the next section, Paul counsels Timothy with a number of exhortations that could directly apply to the workplace. Paul repeatedly warns Timothy to avoid “wrangling over words” (2 Tim. 2:14), “profane chatter” (2 Tim. 2:16), and “stupid and senseless controversies” (2 Tim. 2:23). This is a good reminder for Christian workers that not all talk at the water cooler is profitable, even if it is not downright evil. Are the conversations we engage in and the ways we speak helpful to those around us? Do our words serve as ambassadors of reconciliation and redemption (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Unhelpful conversations can spread like gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17), lead to ruin and impiety (2 Tim. 2:14, 16) and breed quarrels (2 Tim. 2:23). One thinks of similar warnings in James (cf. James 3:2-12) about the destructive potential of

words.

In fact, the most important form of witness to Jesus is the way Christians talk with co-workers when we're not talking about Jesus. Three words of gossip may destroy 3000 words of praise and piety. But Christians who consistently encourage, appreciate, respect and demonstrate care by their words are a powerful witness for Jesus, even if their words are seldom directly about him. Humility and strictly avoiding judgmentalism are the surest ways to avoid stupid and senseless controversies.

Paul also urges Timothy to "shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness" (2 Tim. 2:22). This may remind us that employees bring their personal difficulties with them to work. Alcohol and drug abuse affect virtually every workplace, and "fully one quarter of employees who use the Internet visit porn sites during the workday . . . and hits are highest during office hours than at any other time of day."^[10] Another exhortation that can be applied to Christian workers is that "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:24-25a). Indeed, much of the portrait Paul sketches of Timothy in this letter could be held up as something for Christian workers to strive toward. Paul, writing a letter to Timothy, becomes a support network for him. We might ask what kinds of support networks today's organizations would do well to provide for workers.

The time of difficulty is now (2 Timothy 3:1-9)

The fourth and final chapter of 2 Timothy consists mainly of Paul's charge to Timothy, Paul's reflections on his life, and specific instructions and greetings. There is no doubt that some of this material could apply indirectly to work. In this article, however, we will examine just one more paragraph in the letter: 2 Tim. 3:1-9.

The first verse gives the main point of the paragraph. "In the last days distressing times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). What the description that follows makes clear, however, is that Timothy is living in these last days already (cf. 2 Tim. 3:2, 5). That the "last days" are already upon all of us is the clear and consistent witness of the New Testament (see Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3). Christians need to be prepared for the hardship and suffering associated with these last days. Paul later warns, "Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

This is a sobering reminder to those Christians who work in environments that may be difficult but are far less threatening than the social realities of the first century or of many places in the world today. As Christians, we should expect mistreatment at work, injustice, prejudice, opposition and mockery. If we experience few of these things, we have cause for rejoicing, but we should not allow our present benevolent working conditions to lull us to sleep. The days may be coming when being faithful to Christ at work results in more than strange looks and jokes behind our backs. Indeed, any worker at any time might find himself or herself pressured to act unethically or contrary to God's word. At that time it will

be seen more clearly whether we have more than a mere “outward form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5). If we do, we know that God will stand by us and give us strength (2 Tim. 4:17).

Titus - Working for Good Deeds

Paul’s letter to Titus is the final Pastoral Epistle and has many similarities to 1 and 2 Timothy (For Titus 1:5-9, see 1 Timothy 3:1-13 above. For Titus 2:1-10, see 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2 above.) In this letter, Paul reminds Titus that he had left him in Crete to “put in *order* what remained to be done” (Titus 1:5). Like Timothy, Titus needed to combat false teaching, install proper leadership, and ensure that the people were devoted to good works (Titus 3:8, 14).

Be zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-3:11)

We have already considered the leadership qualifications described in Titus 1:5-9 and the church family relationships described in Titus 2:1-10 in previous sections of this article. Much of the rest of this letter can be summarized by Paul’s vision of God’s people being zealous for good works. This vision certainly applies to the Christian worker — a Christian should be devoted to good works at their place of employment. Good works, of course, means work done in such a way as to please God, more than self or anyone else. Good works carry out the purposes of God seen in his creation of the world. They make the world a better place. They help redeem the brokenness of the world and reconcile people to each other and to God. Devotion to this kind of work drives the Christian worker more than a passion to do his job well for the sake of money or performance reviews. Yet for Christians to have this godly passion for good works, we must understand what makes these good works possible and for what reason they are doing them. The book of Titus addresses both of these issues.

First, it is critical for Christians to remember that God “saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy” (Titus 3:5). Our conduct in the workplace or at home or anywhere else does not establish our relationship with God. We cannot “earn” his mercy. Nevertheless, the book of Titus teaches unambiguously that God’s grace not only forgives our sins but also trains us to “renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly” (Titus 2:12). Jesus gave himself so that he might both “redeem us from all iniquity” and “purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). The wonderful section of Titus 3:3-7 describes God’s mercy in conversion and justification as the foundation of the command for believers “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone” (Titus 3:1-2). The grace that God grants in salvation results in a godly (though imperfect) life of obedience and good works. Would reminding ourselves of this reality throughout the day’s activities lead us to become more effective servants of Christ and stewards of creation?

Second, this section in Titus reminds us what the purposes of good works are. Good works are intended to meet the needs of others and to make our corner of God's creation productive (Titus 3:14). This harkens back to the mandate to till the ground and make it fruitful (Genesis 2:5, 15). Good works serve God and people, but they are not done primarily to earn favor from God and people. The production of good works is not the opposite of faith, but the essential consequence of faith. It is the response we give to God after our "rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). "Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7) and as a result devote ourselves "to good works, these things that are excellent and profitable to everyone" (Titus 3:8). Paul is not talking about giving speeches, passing out tracts, or telling people about Jesus. He is talking about good works in the ordinary sense of doing things that others recognize will meet people's needs. In workplace terms, we could say he means something such as helping a new co-worker come up to speed on the job, more so than inviting them to join a Bible study.

Moreover, godly behavior is encouraged "so that the word of God may not be discredited" (Titus 2:5) and so that opponents will have nothing evil to say (Titus 2:8). Positively stated, godly behavior is encouraged for Christians, "so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:10). So not only does right doctrine lead to good works, but good works make the truth of God attractive to others. That is the aim behind a Christian worker's devotion to good works at their job — to live out by their actions, the truth they are proclaiming with their lips. This may prove a powerful witness both to defuse antipathy towards Christians and to appeal to non-believers to follow Christ themselves.

Throughout the letter Paul gives practical instructions for doing good works. Most of them are easily applicable to the workplace. [11] Almost any workplace looking for a statement of organizational values and good practices could begin well simply by cutting and pasting from Titus. Paul's advice includes:

Respect

- Show respect to everyone (Titus 3:1)
- Be hospitable (Titus 1:8)
- Be kind (Titus 2:5)
- Don't engage in conflict about inconsequential matters (Titus 3:9)
- Don't be arrogant, quick tempered or obstinate (Titus 1:7,8)
- Don't use violence as a means of supervision (Titus 1:7). Use gentleness instead (Titus 3:1)

Self-control

- Be self-controlled (Titus 1:8, 2:6)
- Don't be greedy for gain (Titus 1:7)
- Don't become addicted to alcohol (Titus 1:7, 2:3)
- Avoid envy and ill will (Titus 3:3)

Integrity

- Act with integrity (Titus 1:8)
- Love goodness (Titus 1:8)
- Submit to those in authority over you in the workplace (Titus 2:9)
- Obey the civil authorities (Titus 3:1)
- Respect others' property (Titus 2:10) and manage it faithfully on their behalf if you have a fiduciary duty (Titus 2:5)

Authority and duty

- Exercise the authority you have been given (Titus 2:15)
- Be prudent (Titus 1:8)
- Silence rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, slanderers and those who intentionally cause personal divisions (Titus 1:10, 2:3, 3:10). Rebuke them sharply (Titus 1:13)
- Train others under your leadership in these same virtues (Titus 2:2-10)

We must be careful not to turn such applications into a simplistic dogma. "Be prudent," therefore, need not mean there is never an appropriate time to take educated risks. "Use gentleness" need not mean never to exercise power. These are applications to modern workplaces from an ancient letter for the church. These items from Titus serve as an excellent source of principles and values well-suited to good leadership, both in the church and in the workplace.

Conclusions to the Pastoral Epistles and Work

The Pastoral Epistles focus on organization, relationships and leadership within the household of God. The household of God begins with the family, extends to the church, and often applies to the workplace. The God who called into being the family and the church is also the God who created work. He established an order for the church that brings peace, prosperity and stability. The same — or a highly similar — order can bring the same blessings to other workplaces.

The first order of business for any organization is to understand the true nature of God and his creation. Every workplace needs to be founded on the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) if it is to be effective. We begin by recognizing the truth of God's good creation, the fall of humanity, the persistence of God's grace in the world, the mission of Christ and the church to redeem the world and its people, and the promise of the restoration of God's perfect order. We acknowledge that redemption arises solely as God's free gift, and it results in our desire and ability to perform all sorts of good works. Thereby we make the world productive and serve the needs of people.

The Pastoral Epistles lay out the implications of this truth for organizing the church, with special concern for leadership and good relationships. The considerations also apply to non-church workplaces,

as long as the differences between the church and other organizations are respected. Workplace applications of the Pastoral Epistles are not always direct nor obvious, but the truth found in these letters, when prayerfully applied to the workplace, can manifest God’s way of ordering reality and thereby bring glory to the one “whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16).

Key Verses and Themes in the Pastoral Epistles

Verses	Themes
<p>1 Tim. 1:3-5 I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.</p>	<p>Belief affects behavior or doctrine affects practice.</p>
<p>1 Tim. 1:3-4 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God [Gk. <i>oikonomia theou</i>] which is by faith. (New American Standard, updated version)</p> <p>1 Tim. 3:5 . . . If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?</p> <p>1 Tim. 3:14-15 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.</p>	<p>God’s way of ordering reality, as seen in households and in churches, should somehow be reflected in business organizations as well.</p>

<p>1 Tim. 2:1-2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.</p> <p>1 Tim. 2:8-9 I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently . . .</p>	<p>Christians should pray for the peace and order of their church, their society, and their workplace.</p>
<p>1 Tim. 3:2-3 Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.</p> <p>1 Tim. 3:10 And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.</p> <p>Titus 1:7-8 For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled.</p>	<p>Leadership that pleases God is characterized by moral integrity and trustworthiness.</p>
<p>1 Tim. 4:4-5 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.</p>	<p>Creation is good and our engagement with it can be sanctified by God's word and prayer.</p>
<p>1 Tim. 4:7-8 . . . Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.</p>	<p>Training in godliness is of an essential component of professional development.</p>

<p>1 Tim. 5:1-2 Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters — with absolute purity.</p> <p>1 Tim. 6:2 Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.</p>	<p>Christians should treat their business colleagues with the respect and care that they would show to their family members or to their church.</p>
<p>1 Tim. 6:6-8 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.</p> <p>1 Tim. 6:17-19 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.</p>	<p>Christians should be content with God's provisions and not love money. The righteous rich should be generous and seek heavenly reward.</p>
<p>2 Tim. 1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.</p> <p>2 Tim. 2:2 . . . What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.</p>	<p>A godly legacy is passed on from generation to generation.</p>
<p>2 Tim. 2:22-25 Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness.</p>	<p>Christians should strive for maturity and Christlikeness in their workplace.</p>

<p>2 Tim. 3:1 You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come.</p> <p>2 Tim. 3:12 Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.</p>	<p>Christians should expect difficulty sometimes in the workplace.</p>
<p>Titus 2:9-12 Tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to talk back, not to pilfer, but to show complete and perfect fidelity, so that in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Savior. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.</p> <p>Titus 3:14 And let people learn to devote themselves to good works in order to meet urgent needs, so that they may not be unproductive.</p>	<p>Jesus has purified us so that we may be devoted to good works. These good works adorn the principles of God and manifest the productivity with which he created the world.</p>

ENDNOTES

- [1] This article will assume Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, although this is not critical for applying the letters to the workplace. For a thorough discussion of this perspective on authorship, see William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), lxxxiii–cxxix.
- [2] Deming, W. Edwards, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 92.
- [3] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 149.
- [4] Johnson, *Letters to Timothy*, 149. Notice the similarities between the Greek words *oikonomia* and *oikos*. Johnson writes, “The noun *oikonomia* has as its first meaning “household management,” but

can be extended from that root meaning to notions of “ordering” or “dispensation” in larger spheres than the strictly domestic, without thereby losing its basic point of reference in the *oikos*” (148).

- [5] There is some disagreement about whether the words “elder” (Greek *presbyteros*) and “overseer” (*episkopos*) refer to one category of leaders or two. See Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 246–47, for a brief discussion of this issue.
- [6] Robert Frost, “The Death of the Hired Man,” line 125 in *North of Boston* (1915).
- [7] John Piper, *Desiring God*, rev. and exp. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2003), 188.
- [8] See Wayne Grudem’s important book, *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible’s Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003) for a more detailed account of this assertion.
- [9] [Auditing Practices Board](#), International Standard on Auditing ,#570, Going Concern.
- [10] Anna Kuchment, “The Tangled Web of Porn in the Office,” *Newsweek* (December 8, 2008). Cited 16 July 2010. Online: www.newsweek.com/2008/11/28/the-tangled-web-of-porn-in-the-office.
- [11] We assume here that instructions given to various categories of people in Titus (older men, younger men, older women, younger women, slaves and Titus himself) can be applied to workers in general. For the most part, we take our cue from the letter itself. Nothing about the instructions to older women, for example, (be reverent, don’t slander, don’t become slaves to drink, teach what is good) suggests that *only* older women should follow them. On the question of whether instructions to slaves can be applied to modern employees, see [Colossians 3:18-4:1](#) in “[Colossians & Philemon and Work](#)” at www.theologyofwork.org.