

Redefining Work According to the Gospel

A Theology of Works

Introduction

- What does it mean to bring Christian faith to bear on our work?
- How do we disciple people to obey Christ in every area of our lives?
- Our work makes no sense unless we put it into a story—a context—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration

The Moral Goodness of Work

- God commands us to work: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gen 2:15)
- Paul told the Thessalonians that “we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you” (1 Thess 2:9)
- Paul writes, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Col 3:23)
- The wisdom writer says, “A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?” (Eccl 3:24-25)

Consequences of Sin on Work

- After the entrance of sin into the world, man now eats and lives by the sweat of his brow (Gen 3:17-19)
- In the OT, work is marked by increasing vanity
“Meaningless... What do people gain from their labors at which they toil under the sun” (Eccl 1:2-3)
- In the NT, the only good that will stand the scrutiny of God are those effected by his Spirit and grounded in faith (Jn 3:21; 6:29)
- The Heidelberg Catechism defines good works as “only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and for his glory” (Q. 91)

Sin Distorts the Value of Work

- Sin distorts work in the directions of laziness or workaholism
- Paul writes about laziness: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim 5:8)
- The wisdom writer warns about never having enough: “I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: ² God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil” (Eccl 6:1-2)

The Divine Purpose for Our Work

- We were created in the image of God to imitate God's creative activities: "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen 1:26)
- Work allows us to support ourselves: "so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thess 4:12)
- Christian faith gives a sense of dignity and worth to all forms of work: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31)

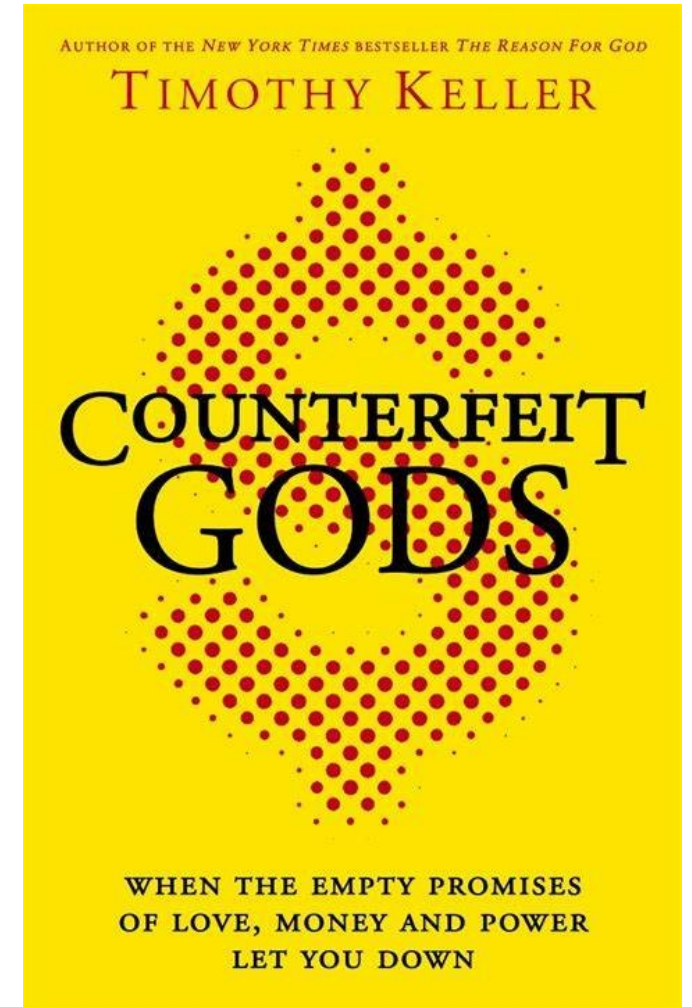
The Divine Purpose for Our Work

- Work promotes human inter-dependence to produce things that people really want or need: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31)
- The value of Christians working in the marketplace is not just to witness to non-believers or to make money to give to missions; it should benefit to both parties (win-win) and to love our neighbors
- Avoid taking a dualistic view of work: We do God’s work in the church. We do work in the world to make a living to do God’s work

Dangers of Work

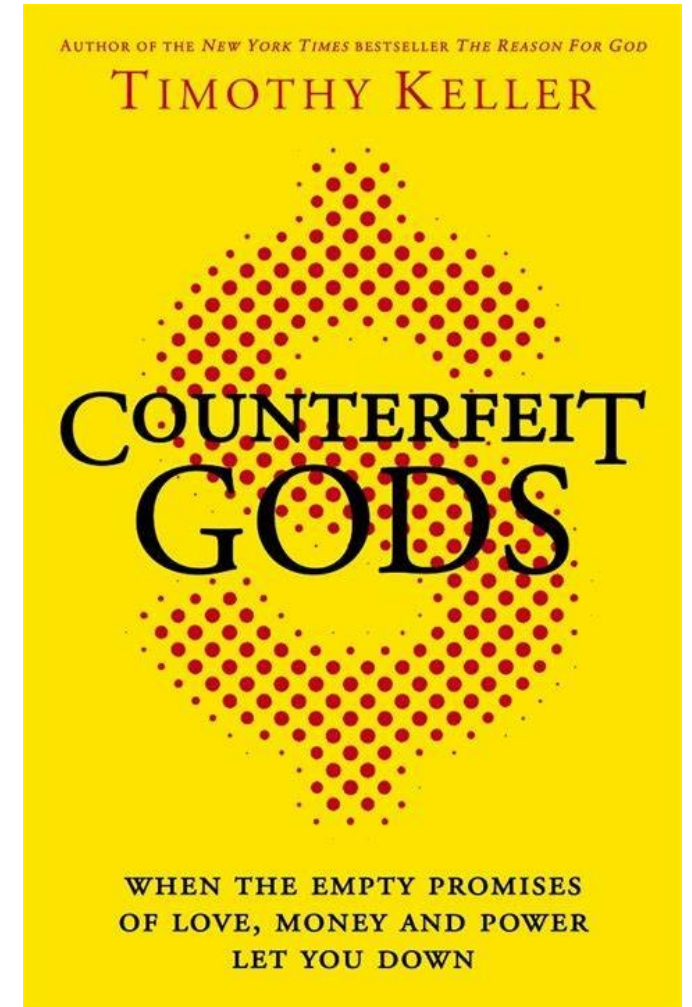
Christian faith gives us inner ballast without which work can become our identity

In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller writes, “The human heart takes good things like a successful career, love, material possessions, even family, and turn them into ultimate things. Our hearts deify them as the center of our lives, because, we think, they can give us significance and security, safety and fulfillment, if we attain them...”



Dangers of Work

“The trouble with exposing idols is that we realize that most of our idols really are good things that we have allowed to take undue importance. We do not want to cast away these good things. If we have made idols of work and family, we do not want to stop loving our work and family. Rather, we want to love Christ so much more that we are not enslaved by our attachments. The solution is not to love good things less, but to love the best thing more”



Reading Resources

