

Ephesians 4:28: a ‘Theology of Work’ in a nutshell and a stimulus for Entrepreneurship

Prof Volker Kessler, Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, and Akademie für christliche Führungskräfte, Germany.

Abstract

It is argued that Ephesians 4:28 presents a Christian theology of work in a nutshell and that it might serve as a stimulus for Christian entrepreneurship today. The phrase “working with his hands” is a favourite expression of Paul (1 Cor 4:12; 1 Th 4:11; Ac 20:34). It was likely a problematic phrase for the Greek audience. Jewish culture always had a high respect for manual work, which was very different from the Greek attitude towards work. The high value of manual labour has its theological source in Genesis where God himself is introduced as a working God, even working with His hands (Gn 2:7; cf. Is 64:8). Even the new world (Is 65) would include work. This positive attitude towards manual labour has some echoes in the New Testament, especially in the examples set by Jesus and Paul. According to Ephesians 4:28 Christians should not work for self-sustenance only but also to share with the needy. According to Calvin’s exposition of this verse work should contribute to the common good. In today’s societies, unemployment is a big issue. There are many people who are willing to work but have no access to the job market. There is a great need therefore for business people who can create new jobs. Ephesians 4:28 might motivate Christians to start their own businesses, not in order to become wealthy, but to supply jobs for the needy.