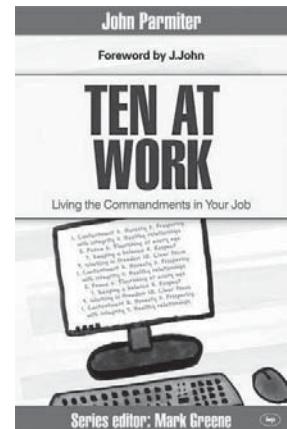


Ten at Work: Living the commandments in your job

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by John Parmiter

reviewed by Sally Orwin



Ten at Work shows us how to have a real faith in a real world ... comments Canon J. John on this volume, part of the IVP 'Faith at Work' series edited by Mark Greene of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity.* In his words, the series is 'designed to .. take on the tough issues facing workers and offer material that's fresh, either because it brings new insights to familiar topics or because the author's particular background and experience open up enlightening vistas' (p.10). Each book is written in short sections which allow for reading on the train or during a lunch break in a spirit of heart-to-heart encouragement for disciples of Jesus.

John Parmiter is a planning consultant with many years experience as 'a local government officer, a junior professional, an equity partner, a company director and self-employed' (p.24). Living 'out there' in the world, as he puts it, he is also a family man who came to faith at the age of 33. 'True freedom' he says, lies 'in here - in our hearts - and within the secure boundaries designed by our Creator God who loves us: a framework we know as the Ten Commandments.'

Parmiter introduces the book with Paul's reminder to the Romans that the commandments are summed up in the one command to love in Romans 13:9-11a. He goes on through Paul's exhortation to the Galatians in 5:16,18 to show that the commandments are not burdensome obligations but living promises: '... the work of God through the Holy Spirit transforms what was a burdensome law into our heart's desire.'

This means that the commandments are 'not so concerned with our outward behaviour - though they must follow - as with what is going on in our hearts' (p.14). Parmiter invites us to start 'at the edge' with the tenth commandment and work our way with him towards the first commandment, the 'core, the radiant central truth' (p.25). So our outward behaviours are rooted firmly in grace rather than works: the grace of the gospel, the relief it is to live in Christ in response to what he has already done on the cross. Parmiter's aim is to show how we can 'work out our faith in a loving God by doing the right thing - not good works, but righteous action, out of love' (p.23).

Parmiter gives many examples of the outworking of the human and structural sins of the world in factual lists, statistics and references to popular culture. There are many personal stories which in his view reveal how life in a fallen world impinges on our capacity to live out the commandments in the context of the workplace: contentment, honesty, integrity, relationships, peace, honouring our parents, keeping a balance, maintaining respect and working in freedom. It would be difficult to find a reader with whom at least one of these examples did not resonate: 'I'm not the only one!' He covers many useful areas including, for example, defrauding, money laundering, bribery and fraud under the eighth commandment 'You shall not steal', placing it in the context of *prospering with integrity*.

So Parmiter assures us that our hearts are rooted in the grace of the gospel which compels us in loving gratitude to righteous action. A weakness in the book lies in not

* The four other volumes already published are:

Get a Life
by Paul Valler
(review FiBQ 12:2),

Working it Out
by Ian Coffey and

Working without Wailing
by Jago Wynne
(review FiBQ 13:3),

Faith, Hope and the Global Economy
by Richard Higginson
was published in June,
and will be reviewed
shortly.

joining the dots between our knowing this truth and the ‘how’ of our being motivated biblically to execute such righteous action in the heat of life. He jumps from presenting the problem of there being lots wrong with the world to presenting the ‘how to..’ techniques of the consultant or therapist, bypassing the great eschatological ‘why’ of God’s purposes, namely to equip his church for eternity.

In his chapter on maintaining healthy relationships, for example, he offers a list of techniques which can support healthy relationships, particularly in the context of marriage and adultery: keep a clean mind, actively respond, practise affirmation, take evasive action, be selective in confrontation, be accountable, seek good maintenance. But in David’s anguished lament in Psalm 51, for example, issuing directly from his heart to the Lord over his adultery with Bathsheba, we discover what we are dealing with in the human heart: ‘Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.’

To avoid disobedience, would it have been enough for David to exercise the technique of a date night once a week with his own wife, to meet their mutual felt needs as a way of seeking good maintenance in marriage? (p.94). Parmiter does not address the problem that whilst we profess allegiance to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ we face hourly temptation to be pulled off course by a powerful functional allegiance to self. ‘It’s hard to love others when we don’t love ourselves’ says Parmiter. I wonder if it’s actually hard to love others

because in the tough issues of life we love ourselves too much.

There is room in a book of this length and pitch to be more concise about the extent of the problem and devote more time to unpacking the wisdom of the Bible. So in this context between knowing that God wants the best for me in marriage (God’s truth) and having a date night with my spouse (the ‘how to..’ technique), there is no reference to marriage as a shadow of the truth that the Godhead is preparing the Bride that is the church for eternity with the Bridegroom himself. An appeal to the deep practical truths of Ephesians 5 might have been useful in this case to help us understand God’s purpose for marriage in the ‘now’ but ‘not yet’ era of salvation history.

Parmiter touches on accessing biblical wisdom when he says ‘By studying the life, person and teaching of Jesus every day and giving time to prayer, we maintain a living relationship with him (p.55). If our task is ‘essentially to say and do the right thing on a daily basis’ (p.20), we need the power of biblical wisdom to bring alive the helpful techniques he suggests will enable us to do this: ‘For when we say or do even the smallest thing, we open up a door to heaven and we just don’t know what God will do when he comes in’ (p.20). If we make our appeal to Scripture, we do know what God will do because he has told us. In the tough issues of life he is preparing us for eternity with himself and it is this great hope that will motivate us to follow the Ten Commandments in actions of love and devotion. ■

Jesus did not rise from the dead as a spirit only. He would not have needed to move the stone for that. The nail-scarred carpenter’s hands came out of the tomb renewed. The arms that swung the mallet, the eyes that kept everything aplomb, the feet that pumped the lathe—they all were resurrected. Jesus came out of the tomb with His body, as a whole person. The radical news was that He was resurrected bodily. That was what shocked everyone: Jesus in the flesh. The Jesus who ate. The Jesus who broke bread. The Jesus who caught and cooked a fish by the shore. The Jesus who worked.

Dr. David Scott, from a WorkLife coaching session (www.worklife.org)