

Conflicting Priorities

Air Dates: April 17-21, 2023

Day One

Put yourself in this situation: You are at the job working and a coworker wants to talk about a personal problem. You want to listen and show compassion, but the conversation is on company time, and it's beginning to get lengthy. You have work to do and yet you don't want to be unkind or uncaring to this friend who is hurting. What do you do? Sometimes we face priority conflicts where it seems that doing one right thing will cause us to do something that isn't right.

One listener wrote me about his particular dilemma. He is a foreman with several men working for him. Quoting him, "In my position, I often find it hard to strike a balance between being firm enough with my men to lead them, and being a servant to them; also to serve others in the company (such as the unbelievers) without compromising the use of my time and/or resources. I want to be a servant, but I also must get the job done; I desire to be an example of Christ-likeness, but the things that I often feel I must do in situations seem harsh."

Often our duties and responsibilities seem in opposition to what we would like to do and think we should do as a Christian. How do we deal with these conflicting priorities?

Well, I don't pretend to have all the answers here. It's a good idea to be cautious when anyone is quick to give you pat answers. Have you ever wondered why God allows us to face what seems like conflicting priorities?

I believe it's because these are the things which keep us on our knees, going back to God time and again with each particular situation, asking for guidance. These are the predicaments that remind us of how weak and helpless we are on our own. I think I could easily become very cocky and self-assured if I thought I knew exactly what I should do at every decision point in my life. But so often I'm driven to desperation by what looks like an impossible decision, and that brings me just where I should be, begging God to guide me and help me.

So, we can see how God uses conflicting priorities and decisions for good. I'd like to share with you some thoughts that may help in choosing between conflicting priorities.

Day Two

Where do our loyalties lie when we feel pulled between job responsibilities and other priorities?

First let me say that I believe when you work for someone else, you have made a contract with that employer—explicitly or implicitly—to give them an honest day's work for your pay and to work so as to make that employer successful.

We read in Daniel 6 that as the top man in the king's organization, Daniel's job was to see that the king might not suffer loss; in other words, to help the king be profitable. That's not unlike jobs today. Sometimes employees seem to forget that. Christians certainly should work as efficiently and effectively as they can so that the employer benefits from the labor.

Now, obviously that means we have to work for an organization whose product and service are not contradictory to Christian principles. A young woman indicated to me that she was a Christian, working as a manager of a video store which rented X-rated movies. She didn't agree with this practice but felt strongly about first right amendments and the freedom people should have to read and watch what they please.

Well, I pointed out to her that aside from the first amendment issue, I could not see how as a Christian she could be involved with an organization that made a profit from pornography. How could a Christian in good conscience work for a company, helping them to make a profit and taking their money, which has been earned in part through the evil of pornography? So, we must first make certain that we work for a company whose products, services and practices are not contrary to God's Word.

You may find yourself in serious conflicting situations. You may need to resign your job because what is being asked of you, or the product with which you are involved, causes you to have to do things that are anti-biblical. That's a strong statement, I realize that, but God cannot bless you as long as you continue to stay in a situation which forces you to compromise. And you can trust God to provide for you if you resign in order to be true to the Lord.

Day Three

Have you ever found yourself faced with decisions which seem to force you to choose between two right things?

For instance, a coworker may really need to talk to you about a problem in his or her life, but you don't feel you should take company time for a lengthy conversation. Yet you don't want to be uncaring or rude. I believe our first priority is to do our job well. That means you may have to cut off that conversation with the hurting person and make an appointment to talk at lunch or break or after work, because it's not right to take company time for long personal conversations.

What about the particular dilemma managers and supervisors face in being a demanding supervisor versus showing concern and care for those employees? Think of Jesus and his staff of twelve men. Do you think he was demanding of their time? I get the feeling that those men put in long hard days quite often.

Being a firm supervisor, insuring that the employees who work for you do their jobs right and put in a good day's work is not contrary to Christian principles of love and kindness. As a Christian supervisor, your job is to make certain that your employees perform well and work hard for the company.

Of course, we cannot ask of others what we do not give ourselves. Whatever Jesus asked of his disciples in time and hard work, he did more than they did. As long as you role model hard work and dedication for your people, you have earned the right to demand that of them. Quite frankly, you will be doing your employees a favor to teach them the rightness of hard work, honesty and diligence.

Now, that responsibility may cause you to seem harsh at times. If you're like me, I much prefer having people like me than not like me! However, your job description does not say, "Everyone must like you." When you have an employee who resists working hard or doing the job right, and you as the supervisor insist on right work, that person is not likely to count you their best friend. Welcome to management and leadership; it goes with the territory.

Day Four

You know, sometimes you feel like if you do your job right, it causes you to be uncaring and tough with employees or coworkers. Did you ever find yourself in that kind of predicament? Well, how do we handle what seems like conflicting priorities like these?

It is right for you to demand of yourself and others that the job be done right. But it's also true that as a Christian, you should be concerned about the personal welfare and feelings of the people who work for you and/or with you.

The first thing we can and should do is to pray daily for those employees and coworkers. Pray for them specifically by name. As much as you can, learn something of their personal situation so that you can pray for them effectively. Obviously, you can certainly pray for their job performance and their relationships and attitudes on the job. That's the best thing you can do for them.

And then, remember that your attitude toward these people will clearly indicate that you care about them. Treating them with respect; understanding that in God's sight you are all the same; caring about their lives; giving them recognition when they deserve it; making allowances for personal situations when you can; treating everyone with fairness and honesty—all of these are ways to show God's love to your employees and coworkers and to be a servant to them.

What is often frustrating is that many times it's difficult, if not impossible, to carry on the daily duties of your job and still interact with each person, whether coworker or employee, on the personal basis that you would like to. Even in my small organization I find that a frustration. I'd like to know every little thing concerning my staff and take time to talk about their concerns in detail, but if I did that very often, we'd get very little work done. What I've been learning to do is to trust God to bring other people into their lives to help and care for them when I can't reach out to them as I would like to. And then I pray he'll make me sensitive to know when it's important for me to take that time and reach out.

Remember that as Christians in the marketplace we have unique opportunities to demonstrate what Jesus is like by the way we care about others. If you truly care about other people, loving them as you love yourself, placing their welfare above your own, you can be certain they'll know it.

Day Five

Jesus taught us to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Since there are no Caesars in our lives, what does that mean to us today in our everyday worlds? We conclude our thoughts about conflicting priorities. I think this is a principle we need to understand very clearly.

If you think of your employer as "Caesar" in this case, how does this principle apply to you? Well, first of all, what are the things you should be giving your employer—the things that are rightfully his or hers?

1. *Hard work.* You must be careful to apply yourself conscientiously and work your full shift. A Christian should never take advantage of their employer by cheating them out of time or work that is due to them.
2. *Protection of the employer's assets.* Those pencils and pens, paper clips and pads supplied by your employer are not for your personal supply room at home. Expense accounts should be meticulously honest and fair.
3. *Loyalty.* While you are taking your salary from that employer, you owe them respect and you should not be found stabbing them in the back or running them down to others.

But, on the other hand, what do you NOT owe your employer?

1. *Dishonesty of any sort.* Lying for your employer is giving to them what is due to God. An employer has no right to ask an employee to lie or deceive in any way. This is where you need to take a stand and not render to that employer what is not due them.

2. *Participation in any activity that is dishonoring to God.* Socializing after work can create some compromising situations. If you have to be a part of these in order to keep your job, it's probably time to look for another job. You are rendering to Caesar the things that belong to God.

As we think about how to choose between conflicting priorities, we want to always remember that there are some clear lines to be drawn. Give to your employer what is due them. Jesus gave us that principle, and we should take it very seriously. But make certain you don't get trapped into giving an employer what is God's right to ask of you.