

Lesson Seven

The Fruits Of Labor

LESSON IDEA

Keeping what we earn is one of the most essential incentives to work and produce. The right to enjoy the fruits of our labor can only exist in an atmosphere of freedom.

VISUAL AID

None recommended for this lesson.

IN EARLIER LESSONS, we discussed the importance of individualism and creativity — of being free to develop our talents, use our ability, and work toward our desired goals. This evening, let's discuss how rewards for accomplishments encourage even greater achievements.

There are many different ways to motivate people to accomplish their goals. Let us see if we can determine which ones are most effective and most compatible with freedom.

Imagine, for instance, that you own a large plot of land replete with boulders and trees. You prefer to clear that land so that you can plow it and begin growing crops. But the job is too big for one person. How can you entice others to help you?

One approach would be to explain the importance of the project to neighbors and ask them to help you clear the land. You could appeal to their kindness and generosity, and because many people enjoy helping others, some of them would probably come over on a Saturday morning and help you clear the field. Such willingness on their part to render assistance, without expecting something in return, is called altruism.

Another approach would be to force others to assist you. This would probably require a rifle or whip, or some other harsh way to enforce your demands. Although none of those who are coerced to help you would like it, this tactic has actually been used in many nations throughout human history. It is called *slavery*.

BUT THERE is a third approach, which would be fair to all involved and would help others as much as it would help you. Do you know what it is? [Encourage discussion,

until someone answers, "pay them."]

That's right. The best approach would be to hire others to do the work for you. This way, you would be helping them to earn a living by creating jobs for them. At the same time, you will have your field cleared so that you can grow crops.

If you only appealed to their altruism by asking them to do the work for free, some might help you for awhile. But what do you think would happen if you asked them to plow the field, plant the crops, do the weeding and watering, and harvest the crops, without receiving anything in return? Do you think they would continue to provide the help you need? [Ask each family member what would probably happen if the owner continued to rely on this method.]

Being rewarded for the work one does is called receiving the fruits of one's labor. And it is an incentive that will motivate almost everyone to work harder, produce more, and be more creative. Why do you think it is important to reward people fairly for the work they do?

It may surprise you to learn that there are some who do not agree that people should be able to receive and enjoy the fruits of their own labor. They argue that, because people have different skills and abilities, some will receive more than others, which they claim is unfair. They urge that everyone be paid equally, no matter what and how much work they do.

Perhaps the best-known expression of this viewpoint is the statement attributed to Karl Marx: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." What do you think this means? [Discuss this concept, until you are sure everyone understands it in principle.]

To many people, this deceitful slogan sounds like a marvelous way to live. Imagine everyone working as hard as they can, at whatever they do best, with everyone sharing equally in the results. There is one serious problem however: *it doesn't work*. To explain why, let us look at what would happen if the Marxist principle were tried in your school.

LET'S SUPPOSE that you and your classmates are told that there will be an important math test next week, and that your scores will largely determine the grades you receive for the class. Some of your classmates will study very hard for the test. They will get out their books and notes and review what has been taught during the class. They will do the sample homework problems they have been given, and review the types of questions included on earlier tests. Because the exam is so important, they will strive to do their very best on it.

But there will probably be others who will not prepare as well or study as hard. They may not care what grade they receive, or they may postpone their studies until it is too late. For whatever the reason, on the day of the big test, they will not be well-prepared.

Now suppose that when the exam is over, and the papers are graded, the teacher announces that each student will be given the same grade. One who missed only two questions will receive a "C," as will one who answered only two questions correctly. Everyone in the class, no matter how many questions they answered correctly, or how much effort they put into preparing for the exam, will receive an identical grade of "C."

What do you think your reaction, and that of the other students, would be? In our imaginary classroom, all would likely be surprised. Some would be elated, others disappointed. Students who had worked hardest and scored highest would be upset. They would ask the teacher why he had given each paper the same grade, regardless of how each student had performed.

The teacher might explain that under the new system, instead of giving each student a grade he or she actually earns, all scores will be averaged, and each student will receive an average grade. To the student who had missed only two questions, he would say: "Yes, I know. On this test you really scored a 95, and I agree that under the old grading system you would have received an 'A.' But we are now taking 'from each according to his abilities,' and giving 'to each according to his needs.' Your ability earned you a 95 on this test, but you only need a 75 to pass this course. So I took 20 points from your grade, and gave them to someone who failed the test. He needed them more than you did."

To the student who failed, the teacher would say: "You did very poorly. Under the old system, you would have received a 35, which would have been an 'F.' However, because you needed more points to pass, I took 20 points from two students who scored 95, and gave them to you. So you all received scores of 75, and 'C' grades."

What do you think would happen if such a grading system were actually used in your school? Do you think that most of the students would like it, and consider it to be fair? [Encourage each child to answer.]

If this system of grading remained in effect, what do you think would happen on the next test? How do you think students who normally study very hard, and do very well, would feel about this grading method? If they knew that the highest score they could achieve was 75, and the best grade a "C," do you think they would study as long and hard as they would if they had a chance to earn a higher score and grade?

And how would the poor students react if they knew that they would receive passing grades even if they did nothing to prepare for the test?

Obviously, virtually everyone in the class would stop trying as hard under the new system. And as class work deteriorated, the grades would worsen as well, since there would no longer be a sufficient number of high scores to offset the failing scores. The average grade would likely soon drop to "D."

Why would this happen? Is it important to give each student a fair grade, based on what he or she actually earns?

Whenever an attempt is made to put the theory "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" into actual practice, the results are inevitably disastrous. That lesson was learned by the first colonists who settled in America.

THE FIRST permanent colony in the New World was founded in 1607 in Virginia, when 46 men arrived from England to begin a new life on this continent. They settled on the banks of a river near the Chesapeake Bay, and because King James I of England had approved their journey, they called their new village Jamestown and named the river the James River.

The first homes built by the settlers were constructed of tree limbs and mud. Replicas of these

“wattle-and-daub” houses, which were comprised of four walls, a dirt floor, a thatched roof, and a door, are on display in Jamestown today. None were very large. The largest building in the village was the general storehouse, where meat, fish, grain, and supplies for the entire colony were kept.

The colonists were unable to bring many supplies from England, and they were not sure when the next ship might arrive, or how much food they could grow or game they could hunt. And because they believed that no one in the colony should receive more than someone else, they decided that all food and all supplies should be shared equally, with each person receiving the same daily rations from the general storehouse. In other words, “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”

It was assumed that all of the settlers would work as hard as they could to make the colony a success. But it soon became apparent to some that even if they did not toil as long or as hard as the others, they still received the same amount of food. So they began to shirk their duties. Then some of the others said to themselves, “Why should I break my back working from dawn to dusk, when I still won’t receive anything more to eat than these loafers?” And they, too, stopped working as long and hard as before. Soon, due to declining production, there was not enough food to go around.

The colonists were learning that their system of voluntary communism would not work. Virtually all agreed with the theory, but they came to realize that it was disastrous in actual practice. As the first motivation discussed above (altruism) began to fail, the leaders of the colony implemented the second method. Do you remember what it was?

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

The truths in today’s lesson should be easily understood by elementary school children, as well as older brothers and sisters. The basic theme of being rewarded for one’s labors appears in countless stories and fables, some dating back hundreds and thousands of years.

You may wish to relate one of the stories, such as the fable of “The Little Red Hen.” Or, you could ask younger children how other stories they have heard (such as “Cinderella”) illustrate the same point.

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

The arguments for and against the Marxist philosophy (“from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”) have been discussed in hundreds of tedious texts.

But few works have exposed the basic fallacies of the theory as effectively as George Orwell’s short parable *Animal Farm*. Ask older students to read this small book prior to your next Heritage Hour discussion. Following the lesson, encourage them to share what they learned about communism as practiced on Farmer Brown’s farm.

[Wait until someone answers “force.”]

That’s right. The next step was the use of force. Martial law was proclaimed in the village. Regular work periods were established. The storehouse was placed under armed guard, to prevent anyone from taking more than his daily ration. And when two Indians were captured, they were compelled to teach the colonists how to grow corn and live off the land.

But it was not enough. Even though more settlers and supplies arrived from England, including a boatload of women who came in response to the colonists’ advertisements for wives, conditions in the colony did not improve much.

FINALLY, in 1619 (12 years after the first colonists arrived), several additional changes were made. A new governor for the colony was appointed by England. He arrived in Jamestown with a new charter. The communal system was abolished, martial law was ended, and the common storehouse was closed. Each man was made responsible for feeding himself and his family. Instead of owning land in common, families were given land for their own farms and allowed to keep what they produced. Each man was told that his family’s needs would depend, not on the efforts of his neighbors, but on what he and his family could produce. What do you think happened?

Under this new system, where each family became responsible for its own welfare, the colony began to prosper. Women and children joined their husbands in the fields to help plow, sow, and reap. Everyone worked longer and harder, since they knew they could keep the food they grew, the fish they caught, and the game they shot. When they

produced more than they actually needed, the surplus could be bartered for new pots, or cloth, or anything else they might need. Or, they could voluntarily give it to others who were less fortunate due to illness, injury, or other circumstances beyond their control. For the first time, the colony began to flourish.

What do you think was responsible for this change? [Encourage discussion until someone answers that being able to keep the fruits of their labor made the difference.] Yes, the transformation was due to each family becoming responsible for its own prosperity, and being allowed to keep and enjoy what it produced.

Concluding Thought

The importance of being free to enjoy the fruits of our labor is as important now as when the colonists first arrived. What would happen today if a salesman, farmer, businessman, or others were told that they would not be paid according to their work, but only receive what someone else decided they needed?

In practice, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” soon means that more and more people receive less and less. Then force is often used in the attempt to make the theory work. The sad result is not only a loss of production, but a loss of freedom. By protecting freedom, we are actually protecting the fruits of our labor — the right to keep what we have earned, and use it as we wish, so long as we do not infringe on the rights of others.

Looking Ahead

In our next lesson, we will examine another aspect of the relationship between freedom and prosperity by taking a look at one of the most basic of all rights: ownership. There are some who claim that there is a conflict between property rights and human rights, but as we shall see, the right to own property is itself a crucial human right.