



Justice Journal

Edited by
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**Raising Awareness,
Motivating People To Pray and Affect Change**

The Workman is Worthy of His Hire Fair Compensation for Honest Work

By Sarah Parker

Think about the job you do. Think about the time you invest in being productive and useful. Think about the resources necessary to ensure that you are able to do your job – transportation, rent, office supplies, phone and utility bills. You make a good effort during the course of the day in your job, you try to be a purveyor of excellence, and you are proud of your accomplishments. The people who hire you know the expertise and finesse necessary to do your job. At the end of the day, however, the pay you receive is less than what it costs you to work. How long would you continue working at your job? You may very well decide to switch careers so that you can make a reasonable living.

Imagine not having a choice. Imagine that the job you do is the only job you can do because there is no other work available. Even though you work long hours and try to be the best so that customers will prefer to hire you, still the money you bring home will not feed, house, clothe, educate or ensure basic healthcare for your family.

Imagine that those who pay you are well aware of the fact that your income is not enough to satisfy your expenses. They refuse to pay the price you set, even though they can afford to pay many times more than the price you are asking. To try to cut expenses, you pay your employees very little. You may even resort to using child and/or slave labor.

Friends, we find this scenario played out over and over and over again in the economies of third world and developing countries, particularly in the agricultural and textile industries. A significant portion of the produce and clothing available in the Western world comes to us through unfair business practices and leaves the producers of these products at a distinct economic disadvantage. While we enjoy the ability to purchase a variety of foods and articles of clothing at cheap prices, those who produce these commodities struggle to feed, house, clothe and educate their families.

The chocolate industry is one example of how people at the production level are suffering. The candy bar you bought yesterday for a snack probably cost you around 60 cents. Approximately one penny of that went to the farmer who grew the cocoa. A significant portion of the world's cocoa is grown in West Africa. In Ghana alone, 40% of their export revenues come from the sale of cocoa. The Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) produces 43% of the entire world's supply of cocoa. Yet the farmers in this region cannot sustain a basic standard of living for themselves and their families.

Another example is the cotton industry. In the West African countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Benin, more than 10 million people are dependent solely on cotton for their livelihood. Farmers in this region produce fine-quality cotton at extremely low cost. Yet they can't compete in the world market, however, because of subsidies given by Western governments to cotton farmers at home who already have the advantage of gigantic farms, modern equipment, fertilizers and irrigation. These subsidies and advantages make it almost impossible for the African farmers to sell their cotton for a reasonable price that they can live on.

In addition to cocoa and cotton, other crops and products affected by depressed prices include bananas, coffee, flowers, fresh fruit, honey, nuts and oilseeds, rice, spices and herbs, sugar, tea and wine. A significant, substantial percentage of farmers who grow or produce these products suffer from unfair practices on the part of consumers.

So, what's to be done? What is the Christian answer to this kind of injustice? How should we respond? As Christians, we are the standard bearers of light, truth and honesty in a world of darkness. To the extent that Christianity as a lifestyle reaches into the economic sector, we have a responsibility to support fair business practices and to make sure our economic decisions are not causing others to suffer by cheating them out of a fair exchange. But how do we do that? How can we keep up with what products are produced where and by whom? How do we keep track of the labor practices and environmental impact of millions of farmers half a world away? It seems a daunting task.

Part of the answer lies in simply being aware of the situation, and knowing that others have done much of the legwork involved in trying to equalize the situation. Recently, our church has changed the kind of coffee we serve in the café. Our new coffee is grown on farms using environmentally responsible techniques. The farmers receive a living wage for their labor, and their working conditions are safe, fair and humane. How do we know? Our new coffee is certified FairTrade.

Fair Trade is a concept that is quickly taking root around the world. Non-profit organizations like Trans Fair USA and Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International have organized networks of farmers and buyers with the intention of raising whole communities out of poverty, simply by implementing standards for the trading system. In exchange for the guarantee of a fair price for their crops, farms and cooperatives

**"Fair Trade gives us a fair price and access to credit. It also gives us dignity. We are treated as equals."
-Nicaraguan coffee farmer, Santiago Rivera**

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OUR MISSION: To continue the ministry of Jesus by attempting to live the way Jesus lived, teach what Jesus taught, and do what Jesus did.



Action Steps

1. Pray to Jesus that everyone who works receives a wage they can live on.
2. Educate yourself on fair trade issues from one of the websites at the end of the article.
3. Tell other people about what you learned about fair trade.
4. Encourage your grocery store to carry fair trade products and then support them by buying those products.
5. Buy clothing from sweat-shop-free stores.

Recent News

After a contentious battle that included allegations of spying, Burger King announced on Friday that it had reached an agreement to improve the wages and working conditions of tomato pickers in Florida. [The 1-cent increase] is a 71 percent increase, the first substantial one in decades for the workers. At the old wage, a farm workers' group said, the pickers typically earned \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year.

New York Times, May 24, 2008

Governmental Contacts

www.house.gov/writerep/
www.senate.gov
www.whitehouse.gov

The Workman is Worthy of His Hire - Continued

are required to invest in the health, education and general welfare of their employees and neighborhoods. Fair Trade addresses the systemic problems of poverty and injustice by empowering local farmers to enact real, sustainable change.

Just two years ago, Fair Trade was benefiting an estimated 1.4 million workers in 57 different countries across Africa, Asia and South America. That's 1.4 million people who now make a living wage, who now can afford basic levels of health care, who now can feed their families, who now can educate their children. That's 57 countries where farmers now are committing themselves to sound environmental farming techniques, thereby ensuring the continued production of crops for years to come.

As Christian consumers, we can make a major impact in this issue of fair trade. We can request Fair Trade products at our grocery stores. We can look for Fair Trade labels on our coffee, tea, fruit and chocolate. We can tell our friends that Fair Trade products exist. To be sure, there is a price tag involved. A 3.5 ounce bar of Fair Trade chocolate costs around \$1.99, compared with a non-Fair Trade candy bar of less than a dollar. But the hit our wallets take is incomparable to the peace of mind we have from knowing that our indulgence does not come at the price of continued poverty and injustice. And now that we know the truth, the issue shifts from an economic one to a moral one. Can we afford to buy Fair Trade? Perhaps it would better serve us to ask if we can afford not to.

"When my cooperative began to sell its coffee at the Fair Trade price, I regained hope for a better future. Thanks to Fair Trade, my family now owns a house, all four of my children have finished primary school, and two are currently attending high school. Our situation has greatly improved." - Yldefonso Riva Trigos, APARM cooperative, Peru

"Thanks to Fair Trade, I was able to put my children through school, purchase school books, subscribe to health insurance, and buy a cow!" - Augustin Rutaruisha, Dukunde Kawa coffee coop, Rwanda

"I know that part of the Fair Trade income my colleagues and I generate is used to buy medicine for Cooperativa Café Timor's clinics. For that I am very grateful, as clinic staff saved my wife's life." - Alfonso Sarmento, Cooperativa Café Timor, East Timor.

"The added value from Fair Trade is not just about money. It's about protecting the ecosystem and our community." - Mohammed Salim, PPKGO coffee cooperative, Aceh, Indonesia.

References and Additional Information

References:

To verify the information in this article and to learn more about Fair Trade, please see the following resources:

www.equalexchange.com

www.fairtrade.net

www.nosweatapparel.com

www.transfairusa.org

The NJV church's Fair Trade coffee is currently purchased from www.equalexchange.com.

Book of the Month - "The Irresistible Revolution, Living as an Ordinary Radical", by Shane Claiborne



Shane Claiborne will make you laugh and cry and think. Shane has worked with Mother Theresa in the slums of India, been in Iraq in 2003 during the initial invasion as a peace activist, has been a ministry intern at Willow Creek (one of the richest and biggest suburban churches in America) and started a community in inner city Philadelphia called the Simple Way which is dedicated to loving your neighbor as yourself. He shares his experiences of living a life of love by bringing homeless people into his apartment to sleep on his couch or bed or feeding his entire neighborhood out of his living room. Yet he insists that he is not a radical and is simply someone who takes the teaching of Jesus seriously. He firmly believes that God's kingdom advances through scandalous grace, one life at a time. Shane "stirs up questions about the church and the world, challenging you to live out an authentic Christian faith. This book will comfort the disturbed, disturb the comfortable, and invite believers to change the world with Christ's radical love." (Irresistible Revolution., back cover) This really is a great book.

Jon White