



Scripture in Action



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Vol. 3 No. 2 – Workplace Harmony – Introduction

Each instalment of *Scripture in Action* will introduce a contemporary scenario, sometimes real, sometimes based on real events, sometimes hypothetical. You then will be asked questions such as “What would you do next?” In answering these questions, reflect on how Scripture can inform and influence your response. Later in the magazine, there will be a short discussion in which I shall present possible answers and the Scriptural basis for my answers. Will we agree?

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You work in an open-plan office with three other colleagues, Julian, Shannon, and Emily. You, Shannon, and Emily are all in your mid-thirties, but Julian is a twenty-something young man who thinks he’s a bit of a suave man-about-town.

The workplace is reasonably harmonious, except for one thing. Julian arrives for work each day smothered in an appallingly cheap and nasty cologne. The fragrance seems to rapidly take over the whole office space, including your own clothes. Julian obviously seems to like it and thinks that it adds to his persona. The rest of you just find it an irritating, sickly smell.

Shannon and Emily now regularly discuss the smell in terms that are very disparaging of Julian. They also act critical pantomimes, such as feigning asphyxiation, after Julian walks by. Poor Julian is now often nicknamed “Durian” behind his back, durian being a southeast Asian fruit that has a stomach-churning smell. Shannon and Emily are expecting you to join in their “games” as well.

What do you do?

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I would look for or even work to create a situation in which I could speak with Shannon and Emily in the absence of Julian. I would point out to them that we all have characteristics that might offend others. They carry on their games without Julian even being aware of the characteristic that they see as offensive in him. (Scriptural basis. From the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:1-5, “1“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. ...”.)

Furthermore, I would encourage them to talk to Julian about the problem of the cologne. Due to his age and limited life experience, he may even be grateful to you for your advice. Ephesians 4:29 is relevant here, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Matthew 18:15 could also be seen as relevant, although I would not go so far as to label Julian’s cologne as a “sin”, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” Also, insistence on talking to Julian about the issue, rather than just stopping their “behind-his-back games”, derives from James 2:26, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

If Shannon and Emily are dismissive of my rebuke, then I would tell them that if they do not follow my advice, then I will have a quiet word with Julian instead. (Scriptural basis. The same passages of Scripture in the last paragraph would apply to me as much as to Shannon and Emily.) Furthermore, I would inform Shannon and Emily that if they persist in their unkindness towards Julian, then I would report the matter formally as workplace abuse. (Scriptural basis. 1 John 3:17-18, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” That is, take action!)

If Julian is unresponsive to a calm explanation of the problem, then that too would have to be taken up as a workplace matter, the same instruction to “take action” being now applicable here.

