

Theology of Work and Vocation

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Genesis 3:17-19

1) Before the fall God gave man work. It wasn't until after man sinned that work became "painful toil" How do you view work? Do you view it as a gift from God? What is toilsome about it?

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Matthew 25:21

2) Do you long to be released from work? How does Matt 25:21, which suggests that we will work in heaven affect your view of retirement?

She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night. In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. Proverbs 31:13-19

3) What does the Proverbs 31 ideal woman, reveal to us about the type of work that God honors?

Eusebius, a bishop of Caesarea before the "conversion" of Constantine in A.D. 312 suggested that "the perfect life is spiritual, dedicated to contemplation and reserved for priests, monks and nuns; while the permitted life is secular, dedicated to action and open to such tasks as soldiering, governing, farming, trading, and raising families." Os Guinness

4) How have you struggled with this unbiblical notion that some vocations are more sacred than others? What are some of the pitfalls of this line of thinking?

Do your work willingly, as though you were serving the Lord himself, and not just your earthly master. In fact, the Lord Christ is the one you are really serving, and you know that he will reward you. Colossians 3:23-24

5) How would you approach your work if you saw it as "unto the Lord" and on par with "full-time Christian service"? How would this change your work habits, goals, and relationships?

In following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have splendor and value in the eye of God. John Calvin

The Puritans were proponents of the idea that all work "has splendor in the eyes of God", "But what may have been a latent imbalance earlier grows steadily in the Puritan era into a full-grown distortion. Slowly such words as work, trade, employment, and occupation came to be used interchangeably with calling. As this happened, the guidelines for callings shifted: instead of being directed by the commands of God, they were seen as directed by duties and roles in society. Eventually the day came when faith and work were separated completely." Os Guinness

First, and foremost we are called to someone (God), not to something (such as motherhood, politics, or teaching) or to somewhere (such as the inner city, or Mongolia). Os Guinness

6) People mistakenly equate God's call in their life with their job, which is similar to the Puritan distortion. How have you been impacted by this distortion? How can service for God potentially compete with our primary call to follow Christ?

God calls us to be Christians and also calls us to daily tasks that require our immediate attention. "Yet, we each have unique calling, something that in the long run is greater than the daily tasks that confront us. This larger calling doesn't make the daily tasks unimportant; rather we realize that our lives have a purpose." Gordon Smith

Discussion Guidelines:

1. Allow everyone a chance to speak. If you are bursting with ideas and tend to share a lot – great – but occasionally pause a bit before you go, sometimes the quieter ones are just waiting for their chance and they need a little space before they go.
2. Respect the opinions of others, and refrain from giving advice.
3. Keep discussion focused on the material being studied.
4. Maintain the confidentiality of personal things shared within the group.

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