

Sacred or Secular Work (Part I)

I want to share with you a true story of a Christian:

"When I became involved in local church ministry work as a volunteer over two decades ago, I encountered a division of work into secular and sacred work. Sacred work in the local church ministry I was involved in meant serving as a fulltime minister or an administrator in the church ministry. Any work outside church ministry in the corporate world was referred to as secular work. Sacred work was elevated above secular or corporate work. I became a fulltime minister after serving as a volunteer for about six years and served as a local church pastor for 10 years.

When the Lord guided me into a ministry outside the local church, I sought a release from the local church ministry. The response I got was "...we must remind you that the man who puts his hand on the plough and looks back declares himself unfit. You may therefore wish to think the matter through, carefully and thoroughly." To me this response meant that my local church leaders believe that being involved in a ministry outside the local church and working in corporate world is a denial of the calling of God upon my life to serve him. I felt that they believe that I declared myself unfit for God to use because I chose to leave a local church ministry setting to serve God in another setting."

In my opinion, the position expressed by the local church leaders described above is not a biblical position. The division of work into sacred and secular work did not start with this local church ministry. It started with the Church Fathers about AD 300 when Greek thought pattern began to dominate theology. The Greeks in the third century considered everyday work to be a curse or demeaning occupation that has no spiritual meaning and is not uplifting. This led to the Church forming a lower view of work when it is not service unto God alone in a religious place setting.

On the other hand, the Jewish perspective was that work is part of God's purposes in creation. Jewish religious teachers were therefore not expected to just live on contributions from their students. The religious teachers were expected to be engaged in a trade to support themselves. You will recall that Paul supported himself as a tentmaker while planting churches.

I do not subscribe to the thought that a dichotomy exists between sacred and secular work. The desire that God placed in my heart about 15 years ago was to serve him fulltime and at the same time be a treasurer for his work on earth. My understanding was that God wanted me to serve him as a minister while I run an organization; promote the practice of biblical leadership and management principles by Christians; and fund ministry activities.

I did not fully understand how this desire could be satisfied considering the church denomination I was serving at that time. I sought counsel of the church denomination leaders and I was told that I could not be in fulltime ministry and be engaged in corporate work. I was asked to choose one and in obedience I chose fulltime ministry work and had to engage in

management consulting within the confines of Christian ministry. After many years of internal struggle, in 2007, I finally figured it out with the support of a life coach. I am a fulltime minister and child of God working and ministering in the corporate workplace. I felt free and excited that I could serve God as a minister to Christians and non-Christians in the workplace while engaged as a consultant just as it was impressed on my heart by God.

We do not all have to be local church pastors but we are all sent to share the good news with others wherever God has placed us. St. Francis of Assisi stated that we should preach the gospel always and if necessary use words. This statement reinforces the position that all Christians can preach the gospel without standing behind a pulpit.

How are you sharing the good news with others in your workplace and the community at large without words?

Sacred or Secular Work (Part II)

I am encouraged that my position stated in Part 1 that “We do not all have to be pastors but we are all sent to share the good news with others wherever God has placed us.” as it is based on the Bible. The Bible states, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” Col 3:23-24. In Deuteronomy 28:12, God stated, “I will bless all the work of your hands” as we live in obedience unto him. This means that every work we do is unto God and there is no separation or classification of work into sacred or secular work and neither sacred nor secular work is superior or more honoured by God. The individuals who work in ministry cannot fulfill their potential without the individuals in corporate world and vice-versa.

Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 stated, “Each one of you should stay the way you were when God called you. If you were a slave when God called you, do not let that bother you. But if you can be free, then make good use of your freedom. Those who were slaves when the Lord called them are free persons who belong to the Lord. In the same way, those who were free when they were called are now Christ's slaves. You all were bought at a great price, so do not become slaves of people. Brothers and sisters, each of you should stay as you were when you were called, and stay there with God.” This means we can serve God in the context that we find ourselves and we should stay there with God. Paul advocated for an integration of daily work with our faith in God. In the Old Testament, we had individuals who served God in environments that were not supportive of their faith in God. Esther, Daniel, Joseph and Nehemiah served as God's representatives just as Christians today are expected to serve in workplaces.

The Bible states “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen. 2:15). The word ‘work’ used in the verse is a verb and not a noun, which

means God asked man to be engaged in an activity. The purpose of Adam 'working' was to maintain and transform the Garden of Eden. Today, God wants individuals that are transformed by the gospel to transform their work by expressing their faith through their work.

A work that is transformed by faith will transform people touched by it and the society is also transformed.

- To 'work it' means to bring to pass a plan or an intention of God for the Garden of Eden; to fashion or create a useful or desired product by expending labour or exertion on plant and ground in the Garden of Eden; make or decorate; bring into a desired form by a gradual process (of cutting, hammering, scraping, pressing, or stretching); operate or produce; solve (a problem) (by reasoning or calculation); perform work or fulfill duties regularly for wages or salary; function or operate according to plan or design; and produce a desired effect or result.
- To 'care for it' means to feel trouble or anxiety; feel interest or concern; have a liking, fondness, or taste; have an inclination; and be concerned about or to the extent of.

In summary, before God there is no sacred or secular work, all work that brings God's plan to come to pass in life is ministry or act of service unto God. You are not the work you do. Your work is part of how you express who you are. Who you are is reflected in the way you do your work. You are a child of God and the character of God like love, excellence, care and wisdom should be reflected in the way you do your work.