

Walt Larimore gives a salutary warning

EMPLOYED BY GOD

As a young man, Tom started a business that grew into a successful enterprise. His competence and character meshed, resulting in an outstanding reputation in his community. Over several years, he saw employees and customers begin a personal relationship with God and grow in their faith. Tom didn't anticipate facing a decision familiar to some doctors.

One morning his pastor inquired, 'Tom, have you ever considered really giving your life to God - working full time for the Lord?' Tom felt confused. 'Pastor,' he explained, 'I feel that what I'm doing now is a form of full-time work for the Lord.' The pastor smiled. 'Tom, there's no doubt that God has used you in amazing ways; but the work you're in is secular. I think God is calling you to consider becoming involved in something higher.'

Eventually, Tom sold his business and accepted an administrative role in a mission organisation. He was in that role for two years when he became my patient and was displaying an array of physical problems. As I got to know Tom and studied the results of his medical tests, I became convinced that he was suffering from anxiety and depression.

One day I asked, 'Tom, do you think you're doing what God wants you to do?' His eyes filled with tears. 'I think God had me right where he wanted me - in my business in California.' He paused and continued, 'Do you think there's a difference between sacred work and secular work?'

Faulty thinking

The mistaken concept that some people do sacred work for God while the rest of humanity lives by doing secular work is an ancient one. In Western thought, this idea developed from Greek philosophy, which taught that any kind of menial work with physical materials was beneath the gods or men who had the means to choose how they spent their time. Slaves did the menial work, while those with means spent time in pursuits of the mind: religion or philosophy.

Confucius, the father of much of Eastern philosophy, taught virtually the same thing. This mistaken notion has plagued the church with the conclusion that 'worldly activities' are viewed as a major distraction to a person's spiritual development. Accepting the secular-sacred split invariably leads Christians in the workplace to feel caught between the demands of two worlds. On the one hand, you sense the need to be engaged in your work. On the other, a worldview tells you that you're wasting your time and

THE BIBLE LEAVES NO ROOM FOR DUALISTIC SECULAR-SACRED THINKING

should be pursuing God. It is difficult to live successfully if you allow these forces to tug at your heart.

Plus, how can we be serious about God if we devote the largest measure of our time, talent, treasure and energy to a part of life we think God has no interest in? Dorothy Sayers asked the question this way: 'How can anyone remain interested in religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?'

What the Bible teaches

The biblical worldview leaves no room for secular-sacred, dualistic thinking. Unlike the aloof gods of ancient thought, the God of the Bible is actively involved in his world. He engaged in creation. Note that the biblical words used to describe God's work of creation are physical and earthy: 'When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens ... the Lord God formed man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed'. (Genesis 2:4-8)

The apostle Paul reiterates God's claim over the workplace. In Paul's day, slaves comprised the bulk of the workforce. Rather than using the terms employee and employer, as we use today, he addressed slaves and masters. 'Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 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. It is the Lord Christ you are serving'. (Colossians 3:22-24)

If you are living with a divided secular-sacred worldview, then you'll tend to make one of two choices: you will separate yourself as much as possible from 'worldly' things; or you will forget God and devote yourself to the pursuit of success as the world defines it. Trying to live in both worlds can be crippling. No matter what your job may be, God can and will use you when you do it with honour and integrity.

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