

Smoky Mountain Reflections, August 2010

During my senior year in high school, I spent 3 hours a day at a vocational technical school learning how to repair damaged cars in "Auto Body and Fender Repair." When we think of vocation, work is usually the first thing that comes to mind, however a fuller understanding of what vocation is from a biblical perspective can provide us with access to a fuller and more God-pleasing life.

In a discussion on vocation, Luther provides some keen insights into vocation. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal. We can today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the wholesale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers, agricultural scientists, mechanical engineers, and every other person instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bread. We are in essence called to our work. We don't choose our vocations—God chooses us for them. He does this by placing a natural joy and desire in our hearts to do what he has called us to do. Because of this the Christian can understand the ordinary labors of life to be charged with meaning. Through our labor, no matter how humble, God is at work. So the value in the work you do is not in how much you get paid. It rests in the fact that you do it to the glory of God.

But this still just discusses vocation in the context of work. We all as Christians are called by the Gospel to do our part in His church. We all have been called into faith. We are all called to a local congregation where we each have a part to play in the community of faith. The boards and committees, the Sunday School teachers, the trustees, the elders, the ushers, the altar guild, the choir members and the organist, the officers and the voters' assembly—all are doing their part to serve one another and their fellow members in building together the complex, living organism that is the church, the bride of Christ.

We are also called to be citizens. God provides for us through earthly government. God protects us through police officers, fire fighters and the members of the armed forces. God uses earthly authorities to administer the "first use of the law," to restrain and punish evil in society. Christians should also obey the laws, pay their taxes and honor their governing officials. Patriotism and civic-mindedness are fitting responses to the blessings God has given to the citizens of every country.

God is at work in every Christian in every God-pleasing thing we do. The biblical doctrine of vocation calls us all to do every task no matter how menial we may think it is. From the lowliest milk maid to the highest head of state, every activity should conform to the will of God and be done to His Glory. In this way our roles as children, parents, grandparents, parishioners, leaders, organizers, laborers, motivators, teachers, students, every relationship no matter how ordinary, every daily activity in which we engage is part of the whole of the vocation God has called us to. The way we spend every hour of our day, even resting to keep our bodies healthy and strong, becomes charged with the purpose of serving God and His will and glory.

In the words of Gustaf Wingren: "Creation comprises the fact that we are given the gift of life and in this gift of life we are related to God. Creation is not merely an act of God in the past about which man may or may not know. It is an immediate relationship given in the present, an on-going activity of God. To live means to be related to God, to be dependent on him." God is the Creator and He continues to create. God creates through man. God serves the neighbor through man and in this way preserves and sustains His creation. He is providing peace and prosperity all around us in spite of our sinful nature. God attends to our every need through mothers, fathers, teachers, doctors, waitresses and pastors.

We as Christians cannot live a compartmentalized life—our vocation does not allow for it. Your church life, home life, work life, and recreational life are all one life inseparable and we should fulfill each role given us with everything we have. Giving proper attention to the activity at hand, we should

work hard when we work, play hard when we play, worship with great reverence as best we can, and enjoy peace and quiet and sleep soundly when we rest. One of our weaknesses as a society is that we have it all mixed up. We play when we should rest, rest when we should worship, we worship our work, and work at our play. And in all these places and times, Christ should be evident in our every activity. It should be clear to all around us who we represent, and we should represent Him well.

We all function in some role in three places in our lives: in family, in church, and in our community. God designed us to have roles and function in these three places in our lives. We are spiritual, physical beings who need these three relationships to have fulfilling meaningful lives. We of course will all fall short in some or all of these roles and thank God for His forgiveness, patience and guidance in this life, and we glory in the wonder of eternal life with Him.

For a more complete study on vocation visit these websites;

The Cranach institute: www.cranach.org/vocation.php.

The web log of Professor John T. Pless: www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2OssDj1WGo.

In Christ

Pastor Portier