

## Is Engineering Sacred or Secular?

### 1. Barnhart Intro:

- a. 30 years old
- b. Heavy Rigging and Transport (show presentation)
- c. 20 offices all over the country
- d. I have been with Barnhart for 13 years and I am currently the SVP Engineering & TS

### 2. My Story

- a. Brief intro –11 years ago Jesus invaded my life and freed me from Hedonism. He restored my struggling marriage and set me on a path to restore what the locust had eaten. As I began to read scripture and attend church, I was confronted with the question we are considering today. How do I serve the Lord with the gifts he has given me? Does God want me “full time ministry”? Do I really have to become an African missionary?
- b. I heard comments from other Christians that
  - i. “we need more people need to go into full time ministry”
  - ii. That our only purpose was to spread the gospel
  - iii. I really struggled to discover God’s plan for my life.
- c. I had no idea that my struggle was actually rooted in a centuries old debate within the church herself that still rages today.

### 3. Typical Perspectives about work

- a. There are typically three wrong perspectives about work and each can be traced to bad philosophy or bad theology. Doug Sherman wrote about this in detail in his book Your Work Matters to God.
- b. The first bad perspective is what Sherman calls the “Go For It” perspective.
  - i. This view of work is the one that says “Work is irrelevant to God” or even that since there is no God, work is the vehicle in which we find our purpose in life.
  - ii. This view stems from the philosophy of the Enlightenment.
    - 1. After the Enlightenment, human beings were no longer seen as the handiwork of God, living for high moral and spiritual purposes.
    - 2. They were now seen as a part of nature, driven by self-interest and expediency
  - iii. The “Go for it” perspective of work is as follows
    - 1. The ultimate purpose of work is to fulfill yourself
    - 2. Success in life is success in work (material wealth, profession position or recognition)
    - 3. You must do whatever it takes to do the job
  - iv. Consequences of this perspective are three fold:

1. We come to expect more of work than work can deliver
    - a. Loss of self by equating self-worth with career success
    - b. We begin to compromise our integrity as we attempt to navigate upward.
    - c. We can develop inflated notions of importance if our careers become successful
    - d. We can feel hopeless and stagnant if our careers stall or fail
  2. This view of work tends to make an idol of our career. Psalm 115 states it clearly “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands.”
  3. Most importantly, this view of work leaves God out of its system. This form of work ultimately leads to hedonism.
- c. The second wrong perspective of work is one that takes of two-story view of work
- i. The two-story view of work disparages work as the enemy of faith.
  - ii. Missionary story: A missionary comes to your church and shares his testimony which goes something like this:
    1. Work is worthless, go for things that last
    2. Career change
    3. Challenge to do like wise
    4. Not all missionaries feel this way, but sadly many Christians hold this view of work
    5. They feel that the only part of life that counts is religious activities and that day-to-day work has no intrinsic value, it contributes nothing to what God is doing, which is, of course, the only important work.
  - iii. This view of work actually has roots that go all the way back to Plato
    1. Plato taught a denigration of anything related to material things – including manual labor
    2. Slaves and artisans did all the “work” while intellectual the elite were freed for a “nobler” pursuit of culture and philosophy.
    3. Eusebius (4<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian) shared this view. He wrote that workers devoted to “the service of God alone is the perfect form of the Christian life” and that farmers and traders may achieve only a “kind of secondary grade of piety.”
  - iv. An evaluation of this view would show that its roots come taking this Platonian philosophy and wrongly applying it to Scripture. It makes 4 wrong assumptions:
    1. God is more interested in the soul than the body
    2. Things of eternity are more important than things of time
    3. Life is divided into sacred and secular pursuits
    4. Ministers and missionaries are more important to God because of the sacred nature of their work

5. Each of these assumptions has a two-story view of reality
- v. Numerous problems are created from this two-story view of work
  1. Guilt and a diminished sense of dignity – I felt this when I first joined the church
  2. Withdrawal from the work world – Christians abandon the culture to seek “sacred” work
  3. Moral compromise – we adapt a secular view of work, dump our ethics and then wonder why people call us hypocrites
  4. Skepticism about the relevance of Christianity – most of our waking efforts are in pursuit of things that don’t matter to God
  5. Lastly, the Christian worker is debilitated in this view of work. It silences God’s voice at the very place where our culture needs to hear him.
- d. The Third wrong perspective of work is what Sherman calls the strategic soap box
  - i. Many Christians hold this view of work. The strategic soap box model of work argues the only purpose of work is to give us opportunities to share the gospel. Work is our main strategy for evangelism.
  - ii. A person with this perspective may hold the following views:
    1. My career is valid only in light of its evangelistic value
    2. Career decisions should be made on the basis of how they will impact evangelism of people
    3. The primary work of God in the world is evangelism
  - iii. The origins of this view may have come from scripture itself. I call it the Genesis/Great Commission only view of the scriptures. It goes like this, work was cursed in the fall so work now has no good purpose. Jesus gave us the great commission so the only purpose of work is a platform for evangelism.
  - iv. To argue against this model of work seems to argue against the Great Commission!
    1. Before we critique this view of work, let me state that evangelism should be a priority for every Christian.
    2. But should it be our only priority? Sherman would argue (and I agree with him) that this view is inadequate for the following reasons;
      - a. The Great commission is broader than evangelism –
        - i. GC is primary about discipleship
        - ii. Discipleship is more than evangelism
        - iii. Discipleship includes first a response to the gospel and then a response of obedience to Christ’s commands– Jesus film story.
      - b. Life is broader than evangelism – the purpose of our life is not evangelism, it is to glorify God in everything we do
      - c. Work is more than just a platform – God has a much broader view of work than this as we will see shortly

4. How God Views Work

- a. It is my contention that your work matters to God and that all work for Christians is sacred!! Work is not something we do apart from God as the secular worker would view it. Work is not something beneath God's dignity or concern, as the Two story view believes. Nor is work a game that we play with non-Christians in order to accomplish a more important agenda as in the strategic soap box view.
- b. God is a worker
  - i. From Genesis to Revelations we see God creating/working
- c. God created people to work
  - i. Gen tells us God gave us work to do (tend and have dominion)
  - ii. Eccl calls work a gift from God (eccl 3:13)
- d. The bible tells us that work has many purposes:
  - i. Through work we serve people (Mathew 20:26-28) – serve like Christ,
  - ii. Through work we meet our own needs and those of our family – 2 Thes 3 Paul says that we should pursue gainful employment to provide for our needs, 1 Tim 5:8 say we are to provide for our families
  - iii. Through work we earn money to give to others – Ps 37 describes the righteous as being gracious and giving to others, Paul encourages us to share with others in Eph 4:28
  - iv. Through work we glorify God - Matt 5:16 - work before men to Glorify God
- e. When we consider our work in light of all of Scripture we get a proper view of our work.
- f. These scripture verses (and many others) show us that God esteems our work and that our work is sacred if properly motivated. Our chief end in ALL THAT WE DO is to glorify God. This is what separates us from the pagans.
- g. Royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9) that should work as unto the Lord (Ephesians 6:7).
- h. Many of Church leaders in our past have recognized the importance of work to God and have challenged the wrong perspectives:
  - i. Thomas Aquinas challenged this attitude and stressed the value of the created world.
  - ii. Reformers likewise protested vigorously against the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular and its implicit devaluation of creation.
    - 1. Luther totally rejected the notion that monks and clergy were engaged in holier work than shopkeepers and housewives.
    - 2. He wrote "Seemingly secular works are a worship of God and an obedience well pleasing to God."
    - 3. He also wrote "the entire world is full of service to God, not only the churches but also the home, the kitchen, the cellar, the workshop, and the field of the townsfolk and farmers."

- iii. The reformers believed that Jesus' parable of the talents showed that profiting from one's efforts is not immoral. The alternative to profit is loss, and loss due to lack of initiative does not constitute good stewardship.
  - iv. Chuck Colson in his book "How Should We Then Live" wrote "These beliefs about the value of work and entrepreneurial talent shaped what became known as the Protestant work ethic, which in turn, became the driving force behind the industrial revolution, which has raised the standard to living immeasurably for vast numbers of societies around the globe."
- i. So now the question you should ask to all teaching – "So what?"
5. Specific examples of how to serve God with our work.
- a. If all work is sacred, how should we do it?
    - i. First we must remember that Christ's death and resurrection has changed us workers. We now have freedom to work as children of God (Rom 8:21).
    - ii. As we offer up our work to God it should be the best we can offer. It shouldn't matter if our employer deserves our best or if you think you aren't being paid enough to produce great work. Our work is one of our offerings to God and since we will spend most of our waking time working, it's a significant part of our lives. Martin Luther King said "If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well.'" Martin Luther King understood the requirement of working to glorify God. Work as unto the Lord – Eph 6:7
    - iii. Ethics matter. Do not cheat in your work, do not yield to the temptation to cut corners when you know nobody will find out.
  - b. In addition to how we do our work, we can use our skills to help those who cannot normally afford to pay for our services in the open market. Your work with Emi is such an endeavor. You have been given skills from God and he expects us to use these skills to not only glorify Him but to serve others. As we have seen, our unique skills can directly benefit others. We can go on foreign missions trips or assist those in our own neighborhoods.
  - c. Lastly I will share my own company's story. Alan Barnhart went to the University of Tennessee to study engineering. He also had a passion for God. He too struggled with the notion that only mission work or pastoral vocations could satisfy his longing to serve

God. He planned to go into the mission field when he graduated. The closer he got to graduation to more he realized he also had a passion for business. He studied scripture and realized that possibly God had another plan for his life. He realized that he could better serve the Lord with his passion for business than he could in being a missionary. God had given him the gift of engineering and business not mission work. Alan was to become a sender. He put aside his dreams of being a missionary and threw himself into building a great company dedicated to the Glory of God. The purpose of our company is “ to glory God by providing an opportunity for His people to use their skills and gifts in His service through constructive work, personal witness and ministry funding “ and one of its core values is “profit with a purpose – we will attempt to make a profit and will invest the profit to expand the company and to meet the needs of others (physically, mentally, spiritually) “. Barnhart grew from a mom and pop crane rental company to one of the biggest crane and rigging company’s in the world. We are one of the top 60 specialty contractors in the US. We are still dedicated to the principles on which the company was founded. Over 50% of the company’s profits went to supporting missions work. Alan invites our employees to help him give away the profits. Employees act as champions for various ministry organizations. So not only to we support God’s kingdom but we allow God’s people to directly use their talents to support this work around the globe. This is a great example of how you can use your unique gifts to glorify God and serve others.

6. My encouragement to all of you is that you should view your work as sacred. Look for ways to use your skills to shine the light of Christ into the darkness. I am convinced that our vocation is very similar to the one that Jesus chose when he came to earth. We get to design and build things that help people. We get to transform a fallen world into a place where people have hope. As Christians, we make engineering a sacred calling.