

# All Walks of Life

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What occupations are appropriate for Christians? What areas of study? The reformers were distinctive in their day in teaching that all occupations, excluding those that required sin, were pleasing in God's sight. In this issue of the Beacon Lights, we explore a number of occupations that young people should consider as they determine what is God's calling for their life. We have placed a particular emphasis on occupations that require higher education. We made this emphasis for two reasons. First, we felt that young people may have less knowledge and experience with these occupations. Second, few people currently enter these occupations in our churches and we felt that young people may not understand that these occupations can be appropriate for the Christian.

Some may feel that Christians should be careful not to pick certain fields of study because these fields of study may lead them astray. I know that I have been asked numerous times by well meaning brothers and sisters, "Why do you want to study psychology? Can a Christian really study that?" In the recent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches there have been a number of people that while pursuing advanced education left our churches, but this in no way should stop us from encouraging our young people from these pursuits. People from all walks of life have left our churches not only those who pursue higher education. If a young person has such a calling for their life, we must encourage them, trusting God to maintain them in their walk and life. We must teach our young people as Calvin says (Institutes 3, XI, 6), "that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."

But is the pursuit of higher education a reasonable calling for a Christian? In the current day and age there are no colleges or universities that hold fast to the truth in all or perhaps even most respects. Can the Christian learn from the ungodly? The reformers, and Calvin in particular, argued that understanding the knowledge that God has given, even the knowledge given worldly men, is not only a reasonable calling but a duty of the Church. As Calvin writes (Institutes 2 II, 15) "If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we condemn and reproach the Spirit himself. What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God?"

While Calvin recognizes that God gives even the reprobate these gifts of knowledge he is not proposing some sort of common grace. Calvin recognizes that these gifts are given to the reprobate for the sake of the Church. He further explains, (Institutes, 2, II, 16), "But if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths." Calvin's argument is straightforward. It is evident that God has given some ungodly men the gift of knowledge. This knowledge was given for the edification of the Church and the Church must use this knowledge to glorify God. Calvin's argument is forceful. The pursuit of higher education, even education from the ungodly, can be an appropriate calling for the Christian. With this thought in mind the current issue of the Beacon Lights is devoted to exploring

several professions and fields of study in higher education, with the aim that our young people may be able to discern the path to which God is calling them.

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