

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Paul the Tent-Maker

In today's society, people usually define themselves by their profession. But tying our value as a human being to our job loses sight of life's real purpose.

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers” (Ac. 18:1-3).

We catch glimpses elsewhere of Paul working with his hands to support himself while he preached (2 Thess. 3:8). But were it not for this passing reference in Acts, we would have no idea that Paul was a tent-maker by trade.

The Jews had a saying, “he who does not teach his son a trade teaches him to steal.” This maxim applied even those who, like Paul, chose to dedicate their lives to teaching the Law. So although he was trained at the feet of Gamaliel to be a rabbi (Ac. 22:3), Paul was also trained, most likely by his father, to be a tent-maker.

I have often wondered what kind of tent-maker Paul was. What kind of

materials did he use? (His hometown of Cilicia was noted for its goatshair cloth; but did he use something different in Corinth?) Did he specialize in a particular style or type of tent? What did his customers think of the quality of his products? Did he get involved in any trade guilds to enhance his skills or purchasing power? We have no idea about any of these questions, because Paul's occupation was not terribly important in the larger scheme of things.

We see the same casual treatment of professional trades in the New Testament's description of Jesus (carpenter, son of a carpenter), and Peter (fisherman). It's almost as though what these men did for a living was inconsequential. In fact, their occupations had little to do with their real purpose in life. Strange as it may seem to modern Americans, there can be a vast difference between the two.

In today's society, people — especially men — are defined almost exclusively by their careers. This identification of self-worth with work becomes painfully obvious when people lose their

jobs. When someone lives for their work, the loss of that job can be a devastating blow to their self-image.

Paul's example, however, suggests that our lives should be measured by a different standard. Our real value to humanity is seen, not in our job, but in our *character* — how we treat our fellow man, how we control our passions, how we serve God. In this equation, who we are as a person is independent of our occupation. The job is merely a means of paying the bills.

Paul was, no doubt, a fine tent-maker. But history does not remember him for his tents. His trade served a much greater end, namely, helping people overcome the effects of sin in their lives and prepare for heaven. His tents are long gone, but his life's *real* work is still producing fruit today.

This is not a defense of laziness. God intends that whatever our profession, we work hard and be productive (Eph. 4:28; 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 2 Thess. 3:11-12). But *what we do for a living* should never be confused with *what we live for*.

— David King