

8C DON'T DESPISE THE EARTH

Engineering is absolutely tied to the physical world.

If we really were convinced that the physical world itself is worthless or inherently evil we couldn't honestly be engineers.

At times in the church one hears the idea that this physical world, primarily planet earth, is to be shunned, or at least thought of very little, since it is thoroughly corrupted by sin and won't survive when Jesus returns. Such thinking is off-base for a number of reasons:

- God created it and called it "good."
- God takes pleasure in His creation.
- God provides for and sustains His creation.
- God redeems humans, even though we are corrupted by sin and our bodies die.
- Jesus entered this world, and, in fact, became a part of this world in a physical body to save us.
- Most vocations, particularly engineering, are linked to this world.
- At the end of history God will provide new heavens and a new earth, possibly a refined and renewed earth.

Christ is far more important than this world, but this world is still important.

The Bible teaches that the future for believers is life in a new heaven and new earth, yet engineering is absolutely tied to the materials of earth and the products and processes used on the earth.

Earth is not a problem because it's material and temporal. Earth is a problem because of our sin and results of the fall.

God created the world and pronounced His handiwork "good." He made mankind to have dominion over the earth.

"God creates humans out of the earth, for the earth, to fill the earth, and to be sustained by the earth." [1]

The Old Testament is full of work, marriage, and activities of the earth, including God's guidance for much of it.

Jesus was born on the earth with a human body, almost certainly worked as a carpenter or craftsman, and taught most lessons in earthly terms.

Much of the New Testament is about work, marriage, family, money, and government.

The body itself is not evil, and the pure soul is not trapped in a body waiting to be free (at death).

That's gnostic thinking, an ancient heresy.

After Christ returns believers will have resurrected bodies, not an existence as disembodied spirits.

This World

Lest we begin to think that God despises this physical world- [2] [3]

- God made every part of the physical creation and called it good.
- Adam was made of the “dust of the earth.”
- Adam sinned and therefore died both physically and spiritually.
- God rescued the Israelites from Egypt with physical plagues and miracles.
- God commanded (and provided blueprints for) the construction of the tabernacle.
- God promised physical blessings (food, safety, childbearing) if Israel obeyed Him.
- Israel was brought into a land flowing with “milk and honey (physical blessings).”
- Jesus, God the Son, was born to a human mother with a human body and lived on earth as a fully human man (God-man).
- Jesus healed physical bodies and multiplied physical food.
- Jesus died physically on the cross, receiving wounds and shedding blood, and was buried in a tomb.
- Jesus' resurrection (a foretaste of our resurrection) was in a body that could eat and demonstrate the wounds.
- The church is described as the Body of Christ (not the immaterial Soul or Spirit of Christ).
- We celebrate the Lord's supper with bread for the Lord's body and the cup for the Lord's blood.
- Jesus' return brings a new heaven and a new earth (Rev.21-22)

The story in John 21 illustrates Jesus' value on creation. Jesus appeared on the beach with the purpose of restoring Peter, yet he still thought it was important to give his disciples a miraculous catch of fish—which they gratefully counted to be 153! Jesus then used some of these fish to cook breakfast, which prepared Peter for their hard conversation. Think about it. Not long before the resurrected Christ ascended into heaven, he made breakfast on the beach. Jesus and redemption matter more than creation, but they don't eliminate creation. The gospel frees us to thrive in every aspect of our human lives. [4]

Living as Earthlings

Ninety percent of our time is spent in “non-spiritual” activities: work, family, travel, maintenance, leisure. How should we approach these as believers?

- We seek to please God in all aspects of life
- We pray about all that we do
- We make sure they’re good things
- We apply Biblical principles to them
- We think Biblically about them

Does This World Matter?

Christians assert that Christ is more important than anything in this world---but this world is still important. The goal must be to bring everything in this world under the Lordship of Christ.

Scripture and life both make it clear that this world matters to God.

- God created it and called it good.
- God fine-tuned this world so humans could live in it.
- God takes pleasure in His creation.
- God provides for life and sustains this world.
- Jesus physically entered into this world to save us.
- Most vocations, particularly engineering, are linked to the stuff of this world.
- At the end of history God will provide a new heaven and earth. (Some scholars think this is a refined and renewed earth.)

Glorifying God in the Real World

It is important that we not despise the man-made part of the world.

1. God at times commanded the making of material things.
Make for yourselves...
Take for yourselves
2. God’s instructions to Israel included proper handling of specific man-made items.
Deut. 24:6 – “No one shall take a handmill or an upper millstone as a pledge.” (since removal of the tools would make it impossible to earn any of the necessary money for payback.)
3. God used natural items as well as man-made items to deliver Israel.
Warfare and trees
Joshua – After marching around Jericho for seven days, blow the trumpets.
Judges –(Gideon) – Smash the pitchers with torches inside.
4. God described Himself by natural items (Our Rock, the Light, the Living Water) and by man-made things (our Shield, our Strong Tower,)
5. God made it possible for us to design and create items that benefit mankind.

Material and Spiritual Balance

(There) is an old, old booklet that had a great impact on me, by Francis Schaeffer, a little booklet called Two Contents, Two Realities. Francis Schaeffer just makes the point, there are two contents. There is a content of a material world, and there is a content of a spiritual world. There is a visible world, and an invisible world. And there is a content of men, and flesh, and organizations, and trees, and sky, and tangible things, and, just as parallel, a real, invisible, non-material world. And there are realities occurring in this invisible world, and there are realities that we experience in this visible world. And then, Schaeffer made the point: There is an arch, or a connection, between the invisible and the visible. [5]

It all counts now. This is liberating, because you are free to be yourself. But it also raises the bar, for you must be your best version of yourself. If everything counts, then there are no time-outs in the Christian life. We cannot divide our time or our money: Sunday is for God; Monday through Saturday are for me. This offering is for God; the rest of my money is for me. That's not how it works. God cares how we use our Sabbaths and how we give to his church, but he also watches how we spend the rest of our week and the rest of our money. God yearns for us to read the Bible and pray, but he is also deeply invested in how we talk to our family and friends, do our jobs, and surf the web. [6]

And that's the danger here. If we make too little of creation - if we don't enjoy the world as the world - we may lose our grip on its real yet relative existence. And without a real existence, distinct from yet dependent on God, we will have no place to stand to love God from. We and everything else will be subsumed into him. [7]

God must be more than merely our top priority; he must also permeate our lives. God and his kingdom are like the hub of a wheel, and the spokes that penetrate outward must transform every aspect of our lives. God cares deeply that we read our Bible, pray, worship, and support our local church. He also cares how we talk to our family, what we do for fun, and how we perform our jobs. We must remember this daily lest we become worldly from the other side. [8]

These principles underlie our relationship to the world:

- The physical world is real, not something that we dream or an illusion.
- All of the world was created good.
- The goodness of this world comes from the God who created it.
- The earth was made for humans to live on and to use (wisely).
- We can appreciate and enjoy the good things of this world (and should give thanks for them.)
- The material world is not all there is.

- The world suffers from the effects of sin.
- The world cannot ultimately satisfy us or provide a reason for good.
- There is always a temptation to worship the creation instead of the Creator. (Rom.1)

Living in the real world (suggestions):

1. Keep up a daily quiet time. Get to know the Lord better. Seek His direction in all matters.
2. Live in the world God made. There is a biblical pattern for enjoying nature, family, friends, food, music, good stories, good work, and giving thanks for these.
3. Learn to understand the culture and see Christ as Transformer of culture (Niebuhr's concept).
4. Be ready to bring the power and wisdom of God into problems at work and in society.
5. Have the mindset of servant, ambassador, minister, and repairer.
6. While we may own a home, a car, and some technology, more stuff will not make us happier, and if our stuff is taken away we can still have joy.

References

1. Attributed to D. Sterrett (Heaven and Earth).
2. Wittmer, M., *Becoming Worldly Saints: Can You Serve Jesus and Still Enjoy Your Life?* Zondervan, 2015.
3. Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, IVP, 1984.
4. Becoming Worldly Saints-Interview with Michael Wittmer
<https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2015/02/becoming-worldly-saints-an-interview-with-michael-wittmer/>
5. Chip Ingram, "Spiritual Warfare 101, Part One," Living on the Edge Ministries.
6. Wittmer, p. 26-27.
7. Wittmer, p. 66.
8. Wittmer, p.88.