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# Why Christians Should be in Business

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Over the course of the last few decades, many dedicated Christian leaders and businesspeople have published books and articles regarding the relationship between secular work and the Christian church. In fact, so many insightful books and articles have been written that the persistent lack of teaching on work within the church seems perplexing. Even secular sources have commented on the growing number of Christian businesses.<sup>2</sup> The many voices crying out for change appear to fall just short of entering the closed doors of the established church. Yet the need for such discussion, understanding, and teaching by pastors and leaders within the church evidences itself in recent news reports. The public struggles of Christian-based businesses such as Chick-Fil-A and Hobby Lobby to navigate issues regarding homosexuality and legislation about birth control demonstrate the urgency of the discussion. Christian business leaders need to build bridges between sacred and secular issues that can help direct their daily lives at work.<sup>3</sup> Construction in many areas has already begun; nevertheless, some pastors and leaders within the church lag a step behind, still pondering the question as to whether a bridge should even be built between the church and the business world. Sadly, still many others have not even begun to consider this very basic question.

This article directs its arguments towards those who have yet to consider the role of Christianity in business or those who may struggle with the idea. Does a place exist for Christian businesses to live out what the Bible says within the context of the secular business world? What purpose does a Christian business have in opening its doors? Can a business play a role in announcing the good news of the kingdom of God? In

answering these questions, this article seeks to prove Christian businesses and their leaders are a crucial part in the world.

## **Spiritual Purposes**

One of the first categories in which business shows it usefulness is in its spiritual purposes. The word "spiritual" can refer to many things, but for the purpose of this discussion, it refers to the relationship between human and God. This section seeks to explore the way business echoes the nature of God as well as the way it contributes to evangelism and shaping the Christian business leader's spirituality.

#### Business as a Reflection of God's Nature

The nature of business can be seen as a reflection of the nature of God in several ways. First, the God of the Bible reveals himself as a creative God. He created the universe and everything in it, including humans. God created humans in His image and, as such, have a Godgiven creativity. Business provides one means through which humans can express this creativity in a meaningful way. Christian entrepreneurs also make a place for others to express their creativity. Problem-solving, inventing, and administrating exemplify a few ways Christian businesspeople might make use of creativity.

Second, the biblical understanding of God reveals a God who works. He actively involves himself in the lives of humans as a constant worker. Many metaphorical images of God in the Bible portray Him in terms of a worker, including as a potter, "metalworker, garment maker, dresser, gardener, farmer, winemaker,

shepherd, tentmaker, builder, architect, musician, and composer." He intervenes in human activity and shapes the lives and direction of his creation. In the same way, a businessperson also works on his or her "creation". The Christian business leader must actively work on directing and shaping the nature of his or her business.

Finally, business can also reflect God in its purposes. God's purposes on earth include redemption, providence, justice, compassion, and revelation of truth. Businesses involved in law can show the justice of God. Christians in the business of medicine or psychology can mirror the compassion of God. Many businesses fall into the category of providential work—they provide necessary products and services for human life, from electricity to food to clothing. God chose to use humans as his co-workers. In carrying out the purposes of God, businesses truly reflect God's nature.

# Business as a Means of Personal Spiritual Formation

Working as a leader in a business environment can contribute to the moral and ethical development of a person's character, as well as to its demise. For those who maintain a personal relationship with God, however, development can go a step further and stimulate spiritual growth as a result of the duties and obligations of daily work life. Whether through the practice of spiritual disciplines, dealing with money and power, or simply practicing faith to endure the innumerous unexpected challenges and difficulties, business contributes to spiritual formation.

When contemplating spiritual disciplines, people commonly think of reading the Bible, praying, and worshipping. However, ministering to the needs of others, giving, and sharing the gospel also play a part in acting upon the commands of God. These three areas of obeying God contribute greatly to the personal growth of Christians. Each of these areas can, in turn, be found within the business world. The Christian owner of a company should concern himself or herself with serving the needs of those who

work in the company, as well as consumers and fellow businesspeople. Churches notoriously like to tap into wealthy businesspeople to financially support church projects and ministries. Therefore, businesspeople must determine their giving practices. In addition, businesses work with people and, therefore, have opportunities to share the gospel on a personal level in a variety of different ways. These spiritual disciplines can produce greater intimacy and dependency on God.

In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly speaks of money and possessions both through the use of parables and in His interactions with others. In fact, Jesus speaks more on this topic than even on heaven and hell. 10 The Bible clearly teaches that a person cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24). In the business world where materialism and want for money pervade most every area, learning to live in order to serve God instead of money can be a huge stimulus for spiritual growth. For the businessperson in a world where profits often determine success, the reminder to stay focused on God and not material possessions requires even more careful attention. Deeper dependence on God for security, provision, and identity result from dealing properly with the issue of money and possessions.

Some Christians have a tendency to fear power and feel they need to live discreet lives. However, biblical leaders, such as Daniel and Joseph, illustrate that power can provide a means to accomplish God's will. On the other hand, power can lead to perversion and abuse. A businessperson who exercises considerable power must necessarily relinquish it into the hands of God and understand his or her limitations. The journey of understanding how a follower of God should wield power can serve as a profound means of growth.

A cursory look at any source of news will reveal concern over the economy and the ups and downs of the stock market. Those who lead businesses must necessarily deal with these economic woes along with many other problems. At times, the problems may seem insurmountable. For a Christian businessperson,

times of trials can force the testing of faith. Inspiring stories of businesspeople overcoming incredible difficulties in the world of work through faith abound. <sup>12</sup> Adversity and ethical dilemmas often drive Christian CEOs to their knees in prayer for direction and recognition of their complete dependency on God. <sup>13</sup>

Using business opportunities for the practice of spiritual disciplines, as well as for shaping attitudes regarding money and power, can fuel phenomenal growth in Christians. At times, faith in God may remain as the only solution in the midst of trying crises. These factors demonstrate business can result not only in a financial profit, but also in the spiritual formation of those who enter it depending on a personal relationship with God.

# Business as a Means of Evangelism

The traditionally accepted spiritual purpose of business in the church world has been limited to evangelism. Missionaries, pastors, and churches have readily tapped into the financial resources available in businesses in order to support their ministries. In fact, businesspeople often complain that people whom God calls to traditional ministries often look at entrepreneurs and business owners as fat checkbooks. 14 While this attitude is unfortunate, it does not invalidate the truth that many full-time ministers depend on others to support them financially. The Bible clearly indicates that some people will earn their livelihood through dedicated work in full-time ministry. 15 By supporting individuals called to serve the church exclusively, businesspeople help carry forth the message of salvation into the world.

Business can also serve as a platform for evangelism. <sup>16</sup> In the previous section, evangelism was portrayed as a means for spiritual growth of the individual. Here, evangelism through businesses becomes part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. John Knapp tells of two different companies, Interstate Batteries and Hobby Lobby, which actively pursue sharing the gospel. <sup>17</sup> For those businesses founded by Christians who see their work as a fulfillment of the Great Commission,

foundational mission statements and business practices can become a way to share the gospel, both with internal employees and external customers.

A word of caution: church leaders often have a hierarchical worldview of church and business, most likely stemming from the belief in separation of sacred and secular. Since church deals directly with spiritual matters, many think it must necessarily be more important. In fact, businesspeople often feel as though they are only second-class citizens. People who work in the business world are often brushed off as merely supporters for those actually doing the work of God. The following sections seek to inspire church leaders to comprehend a broader scope of business as a means of carrying out the work of God beyond the traditionally accepted spiritual purpose of evangelism.

#### **Internal Business Purposes**

Alongside spiritual purposes, Christian business owners can serve those who work inside their walls. Newspapers speak endlessly of employment woes. In the United States, the unemployment rate has been under intense speculation for the past several years as an economic indicator. Employees feel a lack of job security, which contributes to an already difficult life. Christian businesses can provide a light amongst such dark times by caring for their employees and providing an example of leadership.

#### Business as Care of Workers

Some of the ways a Christian business can contribute to the care and well-being of its employees are obvious—job security, livable wages<sup>21</sup> or just pay,<sup>22</sup> a safe and healthy work environment,<sup>23</sup> health care, and reward for hard work.<sup>24</sup> Christian business leaders, however, should go beyond these basic labor rights.

First, a godly business leader should care about the worker as a person, not just about what they produce. Some entrepreneurs, such as Henry Ford, refused to see their employees as people and took advantage of them for their labor. <sup>25</sup>

Providing dignity to employees is one key to showing care. <sup>26</sup> Another way to care about the person is by seeing each worker as an intelligent source of creativity, a person made in the image of God. In fact, Van Duzer argues employers should see their employees as "an end in and of themselves" and not just a means to a profit. 27 Business becomes a way to change the lives of its employees rather than just a money-making machine. Witherington would agree when he discusses the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 20. He points out the vineyard owner goes beyond fairness to meeting the need of the workers. In addition to getting the work done, the vinevard owner had a different view of business which included generosity towards his workers.<sup>28</sup>

The fruits of a radically different kind of employee-employer relationship are employee loyalty, <sup>29</sup> trust on both sides of the relationship, <sup>30</sup> and even a sense of community. In addition, the type of work a company does can provide meaningful work for its employees, which helps fulfill God's purpose for humans. <sup>31</sup> One Christian business owner showed care for his employees by personally interviewing every candidate for a job in his company. He found the practice built trust and understanding between him and his employees and led to genuine care and respect in the workplace. <sup>32</sup>

Finally, Christian business can provide a place for people to find their call or unique gifts. As a business owner, John Beckett actively looked for his employee's unique abilities and found ways to train and equip them for use.<sup>33</sup> This practice engages people in their work and adds fuel a great work environment. Most importantly, Christian business owners can honor God and work out His purposes in the world by caring for people created in the image of God in very practical ways. For some, the care of an employer can be life-changing.

#### Business as Leadership

Alongside caring for workers, Christian business people can provide godly examples of leadership, which inherently comes with power. This clout should be used to help empower those

who follow and have less influence. Amy Sherman boils leadership down to three important characteristics—servanthood, courage, and humility.<sup>34</sup> Jesus came to serve and told His disciples that greatness came with service (Matt. 20:26). God repeatedly told one of His appointed leaders, Joshua, not to fear but to have courage because He was with him. A business leader must have courage to face the many difficult ethical questions which arise in the secular world. Humility helps a leader to recognize personal limitations and weaknesses, thereby enabling him or her to find other people who have the necessary strengths.<sup>35</sup> These characteristics provide a firm foundation upon which a Christian businessperson can carry out leadership in practical ways.

Refraining from exploitation and cheating of employees<sup>36</sup> and treating employees fairly in the termination process<sup>37</sup> provide two practical examples of how a Christian leader can differentiate himself or herself from non-Christians. Herman Miller, the CEO of a Christian-based company, displayed this by capping his salary at no more than 20 times the lowest salary in the company.<sup>38</sup> Avoidance of the spotlight offers another way in which leaders can ultimately give God the glory for accomplished work and success.<sup>39</sup> Business leaders can also foster good communication and treat people fairly regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. Instead of using manipulation to get people to perform, Christians can use a transformational model of leadership—one that seeks to inspire. 40 Just as Jesus sought to inspire His followers to fulfill His mission on the earth, Christian business owners can seek to inspire ownership of the business mission in its employees and see them as investing their lives in the business 41

One could create an endless list of practical ways Christian business owners can model godly attitudes. Without a doubt, God will fulfill His purposes in the business world through Christian business leaders. Coupled with biblically-mandated care of workers, business leaders can leave a lasting and practical impact on the lives of many people, both individually and corporately. Through the internal dynamics

of business, the good news of the kingdom of God can be proclaimed. The next section will look at how businesses can impact those who are on the outside of the company.

#### **External Business Purposes**

Business can be an instrument of the common good. Instead of remaining focused on inward issues, Christian businesses have an opportunity to help change the world around them. The following section seeks to illustrate a few ways in which Christians can use business to affect the world in which they live and reveal God's love and care.

# Business as an Ethical Example

The topic of business ethics is a complex one. The purpose here is not to determine ethical practices, but rather to demonstrate Christians should be in business in order to both model and influence ethical business. Knapp argues that the church serves as an example of moral community. 42 By bringing characteristics of church into the business world, Christian business owners can exemplify biblical morality, which the business world needs urgently. The recent demise of the housing markets and lending practices in the United States shows how a lack of ethics can cause a catastrophic economic downfall in the lives of corporations and individual families. Perhaps the implementation of higher ethics among these companies and businesspeople could have averted this tragic mess.

Christian business can model morality and ethics in their relationships with customers, suppliers, and shareholders. A Knapp argues Christians should not simply respect what the law requires, but go beyond the law to fulfill righteousness. Just because the law allows something does not make it right in the eyes of God. In addition, Christian businesses can use their influence and power to urge reform and institutional transformation in their area of business. Clearly, businesses have an opportunity not only to demonstrate biblical ethics, but also to stimulate change in other businesses.

#### Business as Service to Society

Using business as a means to address societal woes is perhaps the most compelling reason for churches to avidly support their entrepreneurs and business owners. In the Bible, meeting community needs was "an essential purpose for work." One can generally categorize the ways in which business can affect change into three categories.

First, the business of a Christian company can provide a means of improving and serving society. The actual product or service of the business can be used to transform society. <sup>46</sup> Van Duzer suggests Christian businesspeople should look for ways to produce goods which serve to heal or restore society such as cleaning up toxic waste or developing vaccines for diseases. <sup>47</sup> Other examples of transforming products range from lifesaving medical devices to energy efficient ovens to places where community can develop such as coffee shops. <sup>48</sup>

A second way in which business can transform society is by using their profits to produce social justice. Chick-Fil-A uses a portion of their profits to aid foster children. Home Depot builds playgrounds for children. Many Christian companies use their profits to work social reform.

A different approach to business is to make social justice the driving mission of the company. Instead of using profits, the actual business becomes the means for social transformation. Sherman tells of members of a church who started a housing business to buy up rental properties in a specific neighborhood in order to renovate them and improve the quality of residents' lives.<sup>51</sup> Another church in Nigeria trains congregants to look for a way to start some sort of social enterprise to bring change in their community. 52 Business as Mission (BAM) seeks to plant businesses in other countries with the express purpose of evangelism.<sup>53</sup> By starting with a business, they seek to bring holistic change to some of the most desperate places.<sup>54</sup> This is strategic, especially since businesses can often go where ministries and churches are not allowed. 55 Christian entrepreneurs have

opportunities to bring about economically sustainable social change by grouping ministry with business.

#### **Business as Creation Care**

Before the Fall, God commanded Adam to steward His creation and be its trustee. 56 Unfortunately, many business practices have been some of the most detrimental to the environment. For this reason, Christian business practice has an opportunity to stand out in taking care of the world and practicing sustainability. Wong and Rae argue business can use the resources of the "garden" as God commanded; in turn, the business must care for the very same garden.<sup>57</sup> Whether considering the effects of a factory process on the environment or the eventual waste a product may create, Christian businesses can play a part in caring for the world God created. The act of care may be something as simple as purchasing company mugs for each employee to reduce the number of disposable cups being sent to the landfill.<sup>58</sup> The fact remains: Christian leaders can use business to practice and demonstrate green practices in their area.

#### Conclusion

#### Summary

Business can be an effective way of carrying out God's designs in the earth. In fact, business reflects the very nature of God by being a creative act. Just as God worked and watched over His creation, so an entrepreneur nurtures and grows his or her business. On a personal level, Christian business owners can experience tremendous spiritual growth through running their businesses. Business can also be a means for evangelism.

In addition to spiritual purposes, Christian business owners have the unique opportunity to influence the lives of their employees. In fact, simply providing employment and a healthy work environment can do much to further God's Kingdom. By providing a place where people can fulfill their need to create, and a way for them to earn sustenance, entrepreneurs show care for God's people. These Christian businesspeople also demonstrate servant leadership and model godly attitudes in their dealings.

Finally, Christian business can change the outside world. They can seek to manufacture products and services that help fulfill God's purposes in the world. They can provide an example of ethical business to other businesses and work to bring change in their area of expertise. A business could invest profits in social justice or make their entire mission and purpose helping people in need. Christian business can also participate in caring for God's creation.

### **Implications**

Now is the time for a paradigm shift within the Church. Pastors urgently need to recognize the necessity of holistic discipleship in the area of work. Instead of looking down on businesspeople and viewing their work as second class, church leaders must tap into the many ways in which Christian business can affect and carry out the purposes of God. In addition to supporting the financial needs of a church, God can use business to affect everlasting change in the lives of people and their communities. It is time to honor and support the people whom God has called into the business world.

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- <sup>4</sup> Jeff Van Duzer, Why Business Matters to God (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 42.
- <sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington III, Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 7.
- <sup>6</sup> Sherman, 103-104.
- <sup>7</sup> Witherington, 28-29.
- <sup>8</sup> Steve Lim, *Transforming Believers into Growing Disciples* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2012), 27-29.
  - <sup>9</sup> Sherman, 232.
- <sup>10</sup> Kenman L. Wong and Scott B. Rae, *Business for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 122.
  - <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 131.
  - <sup>12</sup>See Wong and Rae, 92-95 for the story of Barry Rowan.
  - <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 99.
  - <sup>14</sup> Sherman, 232.
  - <sup>15</sup> Wong and Rae, 45.
  - <sup>16</sup> Sherman and Hendricks, 70.
  - <sup>17</sup> Knapp, 136-137.
  - <sup>18</sup> John D. Beckett, *Loving Monday* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 73.
  - <sup>19</sup> Van Duzer, 148.
  - <sup>20</sup> Wong and Rae, 59.
  - <sup>21</sup> Van Duzer, 60.
  - <sup>22</sup> Wong and Rae, 203.
  - <sup>23</sup> Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 171.
  - <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 143.
  - <sup>25</sup> Wong and Rae, 207.
- <sup>26</sup> Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 156.
  - <sup>27</sup> Van Duzer, 71.
  - <sup>28</sup> Witherington, 94.
  - <sup>29</sup> Hill, 217.
  - <sup>30</sup> Wong and Rae, 173.
  - <sup>31</sup> Van Duzer, 41-42.
  - <sup>32</sup> Beckett, 87.
  - <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 97.
  - <sup>34</sup> Sherman, 130.
  - <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60.
  - <sup>36</sup> Hill, 218.
  - <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 167.
  - <sup>38</sup> Sherman, 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See John C. Knapp, *How the Church Fails Businesspeople* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), x-xii and 23-44; Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 91-93; Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Spring, CO: Navpress, 1987), 16 for views on the lack of teaching in the church. For a treatment on the history of theological thought regarding business, see Shirley J. Roels, "The Christian Calling to Business Life," *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 357-69. For an analysis of the evolution of Catholic thought, see Gary L. Chamberlain, "The Evolution of Business as a Christian Calling," *Review of Business* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 27-36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, Paige Akin, Melissa August, Deborah Edler Brown, and Greg Fulton, "Praying For Profits," *Time* 166, no. 7 (8/15/2005): A6-A12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See David Neff, "Neighbor Love Inc.: Christians in Business Have an Honored Place in God's Plan," *Christianity Today* 49, no. 9 (September 2005): 37, and Gaylord Noyce, "The Dilemmas of Christians in Business: There is no Community of Moral Support for Christians Working in a Capitalist Economy," *Christian Century* 98, no. 25 (August 12-19, 1981): 802-804, for further arguments on the need for bridging the gap.

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<sup>39</sup> Wong and Rae, 199.
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>42</sup> Knapp, 119. 43 Sherman, 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> "Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economics," *Transformation* 7, no. 2 (April-June 1990): 3.

Wong and Rae, 76. Van Duzer, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Wong and Rae, 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Knapp, 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Wong and Rae, 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup>Sherman, 210-212. <sup>52</sup> Ibid., 183-198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> For additional discussion regarding Business as Mission see David Clayton, ed., "Business as Mission" (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 59 produced by the Issue Group on this topic at the Forum for World Evangelization, Pattaya, Thailand, September 29 to October 5, 2004), http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP59\_IG30.pdf.

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55 Knapp, 141.

56 Van Duzer, 29.

57 Wong and Rae, 238.

58 Hill, 196.