



Christians in Business

I first entered business when interest rates were running at close to 20% for a “normal” mortgage, and unemployment topped 10%. The economy was looking shaky after the share market crash of 1987, and I had two children and a wife who was in remission with cancer.

At the time, going into business did not seem a great idea for a number of reasons; but the company that I worked for were anxious for me to return to Auckland, and I felt torn between uprooting the family and heading North, and staying put and looking for an alternative way to put bread on the table. After a few deep breaths we decided to stay where we were and start up a very small pig breeding operation on the little block of land we had purchased on the outskirts of Christchurch.

God's grace at work

As much as we may dislike the trials of life it can be in these times that we most clearly see the grace of God at work in our lives. Two children had become three and business was going well when my wife fell ill a second time with cancer and was given just months to live. Suddenly my life was full of hospital appointments and household chores. The farm took a distant place in my list of priorities, and without the help of Christian friends and family I cannot imagine how I would have made it through those days. God is able to give and take away at will, but He loves us throughout it all. The tools he uses to change us may feel harsh at times, but in the end we will only see his loving hand at work in our lives and marvel at the grace shown us.

The first and most obvious lesson here is that our destiny rests in the hands of God. We must accept that God alone determines what the future holds, and in the meantime we do our best to serve him in the opportunities he has given us. “Work hard as unto the Lord” applies to the salaried worker and the business person alike. Often you hear of the person going into business say they “want to be rewarded for what they do”. This is such a poor attitude, for we remain no more than stewards of the things God has given us, whether we work in business or for someone else. If the business succeeds and the rewards are great those rewards do not belong to us to squander on our own interests. They belong to God and our first duty is to use them for his purposes. Take what you need and no more from your business – it does not belong to you. I have seen how other Christian businessmen have modelled this ideal. Their generosity has been a blessing to many and a great witness to their love of Christ. The work of the gospel has often been advanced through the generosity of those who have given liberally. God “owns the cattle on a thousand hills” even though they may have your ear tag on them. So don't hold back when He asks for them.

There are aspects to the way a Christian will do business that should mark him out from the world. Many of these will be obvious, but lest we ignore the obvious let's spell them out.

- Tell the truth at all times.
- Let your love for Christ be known at the first opportunity.
- Pay your bills preferably before the due date. Pay your taxes happily.
- Always make sure your suppliers are making a profit from doing business with you. This does not mean that you have to pay for their inefficiencies.
- Avoid going into business with non-Christians. Going into business is much like a marriage, and you do not want to be unequally yoked.

- If you have the opportunity, surround yourself with some other Christians who will help keep you to account.
- We usually have to borrow money to do business, but if you can't sleep easy because of your debt levels, then you are borrowing too much.
- Don't take advantage of others' mistakes. If you are overpaid by mistake, pay it back. It is not your money.
- Be the best supplier that you can. Spare no effort to give good service, supply the best goods, and do so with good grace – never grumbling or keeping an account.
- Deliver on your word.
- Be a good employer.

This last point is for me the most difficult by far. People can be difficult and they will not always play nicely together, but God has called us to interact with people. We cannot be fishers of men or disciples of Christ without working with people. How we interact with our staff and others is more important than how successful we are at our business.

Value others

Jesus paid a high price to redeem us and we should place the same value on others' lives that He did. To have this attitude will change the way you talk to people and deal with the difficulties they bring to your table. It will also mark you out as a follower of Christ rather than just another philanthropist. Christ is the only one who can bring true healing to relationships and we should not hesitate to say so. It may seem odd to suggest this in the context of doing business, but I have never yet had anybody say they do not want me to pray for them.

Books are written about how to deal with people in the work place but I will again only state the obvious.

- Deal only with the truth. If you don't know what the truth is, do not jump to conclusions or make assumptions about what others have done or think.
- Be fair, honest and transparent when speaking with people.
- Pray with your staff when they are going through a rough time, regardless of their beliefs. You don't have to be restricted by their unbelief.
- Be gentle. Even the toughest men can be broken with a gentle word.
- Don't hold a grudge. Inevitably, someone will wrong you, but don't hang on to it.
- Show generosity when you can. It does not have to be big.
- Be interested in others' lives and find out what is important to them.
- Lead by example.

Be smart about the future. We are going to die, so don't invest as if we are going to be here forever. If you have someone who can take over your business after you, then start planning for that eventuality sooner rather than later. Train them to think of ways to use the business for the interests of the kingdom. The next generation may be of greater blessing to others than you.

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