

# **What Does the Bible Teach About Business Ethics?**

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## **Introduction:**

- A. There is a difference between what is moral and what is ethical.
  - 1. It is the difference between what is absolutely right and what is generally acceptable.
- B. Ethics is a system of moral principles specific to a culture; the rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular group, culture, individual (subjective).
  - 1. Ethics claims to be beyond the scope of human understanding and is more concerned with actions and consequences rather than knowing absolutes of what is right or wrong.
- C. Morals are the rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong; founded on the fundamental principles of right conduct rather than on legalities or custom (objective).
  - 1. Morality refers directly to what is right and wrong, regardless of what people think.
  - 2. This term is characterized by definitive statements such as "That act is immoral" rather than descriptive ones such as "Many believe that act is immoral." It is often challenged by a moral skepticism, in which the unchanging existence of a rigid, universal, objective moral truth is rejected, and supported by moral realism, in which the existence of this truth is accepted.
- D. It is the difference between what a man believes is right or wrong and what God says is right and wrong.
  - 1. Prov. 16:1, 9, 20:24; Jer. 10:23; Psalm 37:23

## **I. WHAT IS MORALLY RIGHT OR WRONG, EVERY CASE, EVERY TIME?**

- A. The Bottom Line Rule: God is first in every case and every time
  - 1. Matt. 6:33, 22:37-38
- B. The Golden Rule: Every human being merits the same treatment for you that you want for yourself in every case and every time
  - 1. Matt. 7:12; Gal. 5:14
- C. The Honesty Rule: Tell the truth in every case and every time
  - 1. Matt. 5:37; Rom. 12:17; Eph. 4:25
- D. The Above and Beyond the Call of Duty Rule: Do your best in every case and every time - Matt. 5:41; Col. 3:23-24
- E. The Time Stewardship Rule: Be a good steward of your time in every case and every time - Eph. 5:15-16; Ecc. 9:12
- F. The Consistency Rule: Do the right thing in every case and every time whether in the presence of others or not - 1Peter 2:12; Matt. 5:16

## **II. HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO BUSINESS ETHICS?**

- A. Luke 12:15-21 - What was the wealthy farmer's moral issue?
  - 1. Was it because he had an abundance? Many Christians assume that having abundance is a sin. They believe that:
  - 2. "Corporations are "bad" because they are large and successful."
  - 3. "Prosperity only comes from exploiting workers and giving unfair competition to other businesses."
  - 4. "Christians who are wealthy are sinners, because they should give away all of their abundance."
  - 5. It is somewhat hypocritical, because when asked, "Who is a rich man?" An honest person will answer: "Anyone who has more money than me."
- B. The wealthy farmer's moral issue wasn't that he had abundance; many godly persons were people of means, starting with Abraham. Rather, it was how he viewed his abundance, and how his viewpoint affected what he did with his abundance.
  - 1. Ecc. 5:13 - Don't put words in his mouth, or take words out of it
  - 2. He wouldn't have abundance if God hadn't given it - Ecc. 5:18
  - 3. At best, to charge the wealthy with sin because they are wealthy is hollow rhetoric based on a flawed assumption.
  - 4. Very likely, it is someone expressing a blend of ignorance of the truth and a secret envy of the blessings of others.
- C. In business and labor, Christians never justify doing wrong with the reasoning that others have done wrong to them.
  - 1. "I can withhold information or even cheat the car dealer, IRS, utilities, etc. because I have been cheated by them so often in the past."
  - 2. "My boss does not pay me well, works me so hard, and doesn't care about me, so I don't care to do my best work in return."
  - 3. "My employees are lazy, demanding, and steal from the workplace; I don't think they deserve better wages and benefits."

## **III. BIBLE RULES FOR BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS**

- A. Products for sale are not to be misrepresented
  - 1. Lev. 19:35-36; Prov. 16:11
  - 2. False weights are an indicator of flawed character - Hosea 12:7
  - 3. Honesty is to be treasured above profit - Prov. 19:1
  - 4. Dishonest wealth does not last - Prov. 21:6
  - 5. Buyers should not dismiss the value of the product - Prov. 20:14
- B. Christians are not to defraud others - 1Thes. 4:6
  - 1. Don't misrepresent your competition - Prov. 24:24-26, 26:24-26
  - 2. Don't use flattery or exaggeration - Prov. 26:28, 29:5; Psalm 12:2

- a. Enthusiasm, politeness, and kind words are good, but they must be sincere as well.
- 3. Honesty must govern all of our conduct - 2Cor. 8:21

#### **IV. BIBLE RULES FOR EMPLOYERS**

- A. Workers have the right to be paid well for their efforts
  - 1. Deut. 25:4; Matt. 10:10
  - 2. Taking advantage of unpaid labor is condemned
    - a. Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5
  - 3. Some take advantage of those with limited choices - Prov. 22:22
    - a. This does not mean there cannot be low paying jobs, entry level work, or temporary and farm labor.
    - b. A worker can decide to accept a lower wage, and must take responsibility for his choice - Matt. 20:1-2
- B. Employers may not take advantage, but must pay in a timely manner
  - 1. James 5:4; Deut. 24:14-15; Lev. 19:13
- C. Employers must offer periods of rest to employees
  - 1. God rested from His labors on the seventh day, and later instituted Sabbath law requiring Israel to set aside a day of reverence for Him and rest for them
  - 2. Jesus provided His disciples opportunities to rest - Mark 6:31-32
- D. Provide work for your employees; see yourself as responsible to provide for them as human beings, not as disposable resources
  - 1. Do not use threats as a motivation for productivity - Eph. 6:8-9
  - 2. Treat them as you want treated: fairly, impartially - Matt. 7:12
  - 3. Give them justice and fairness - Col. 4:1

#### **V. BIBLE RULES FOR EMPLOYEES**

- A. If possible, get paid for doing something you enjoy - Ecc. 2:22-24
  - 1. But don't sit around refusing to work because you don't like the job you have - 2Thes. 3:10
  - 2. Sometimes you have to take an entry level job and patiently work your way into something you enjoy.
    - a. Some folks are looking for the perfect job; one that requires little effort and makes them independently wealthy. I'd like to have that job, too!
    - b. Take the first job at hand, and in your spare time look for something better.
    - c. A good job is a gift from God - Ecc. 3:13
- B. Respect your employer - 1Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9; 1Peter 2:18

- C. Be honest in your conduct - Titus 2:10
- D. Give sincere obedience - Eph. 6:5-8
- E. Work heartily, enthusiastically - Col. 3:22-24; Ecc. 9:10; Prov. 18:9
- F. "What about unions? Can a Christian be involved in a union?"
  - 1. It is an organization that is theoretically supposed to work together for the benefit of laborers.
  - 2. As with ANY organization of men that does good using honorable means, Christians are permitted to share in it.
  - 3. However, when ANY organization uses dishonorable means and unscriptural methods, We may not be partakers with them.
  - 4. When ANY organization requires its members to participate in activities that violate GOD'S rules for Christians as workers, they must choose God's rules over the organizations rules. That includes unions.
  - 5. Choose; you can look at the means and methods of your union, and you know what God requires of you as a Christian. You don't need a preacher to give you permission or restriction.

## **VI. IS SUCCESS AND WEALTH SINFUL?**

- A. The natural result of labor is profit; God designed it that way.
  - 1. Prov. 14:23, 13:11
  - 2. Hence, a successful business does not necessarily imply that the wealth was gained dishonestly or through exploitation.
    - a. Bible speaks of righteous, wealthy men: Abraham, Job,
- B. God's instructions for wealthy Christians implies that He accepts wealthy Christians - 1Tim. 6:17-19
  - 1. Do not to trust in wealth or expect riches to remain - Prov. 23:5
  - 2. Pursuing wealth is fraught with danger - 1Tim. 6:9-10
  - 3. But being wealthy does not imply that we have ill-gotten gains or that we are greedy or selfish or that we don't care about the poor
  - 4. Sometimes wealth happens by chance - Ecc. 9:11
  - 5. Rejoice when others are blessed in this manner; do not be judgmental or envious - Rom. 12:15; 1Cor. 12:26
- C. A Christian's focus should not be on this world, on wealth, fame, status, etc.
  - 1. These things are incidental to life under the sun; they are merely a means to an end. This world is passing - 1Cor. 7:29-31
  - 2. Worldly desires will not survive - 1John 2:15-17
    - a. Abundance comes and goes; it doesn't matter.
  - 3. Remember the rich farmer. Where is your treasure? Then, that's where your heart will be, and that's what your destination will become.