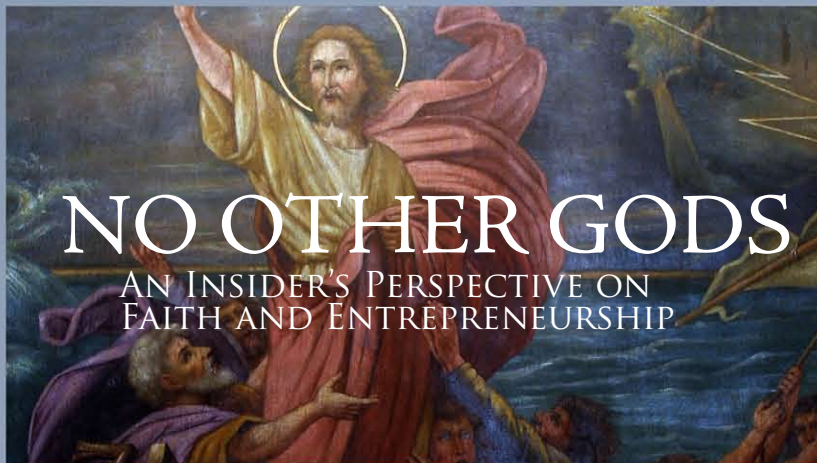
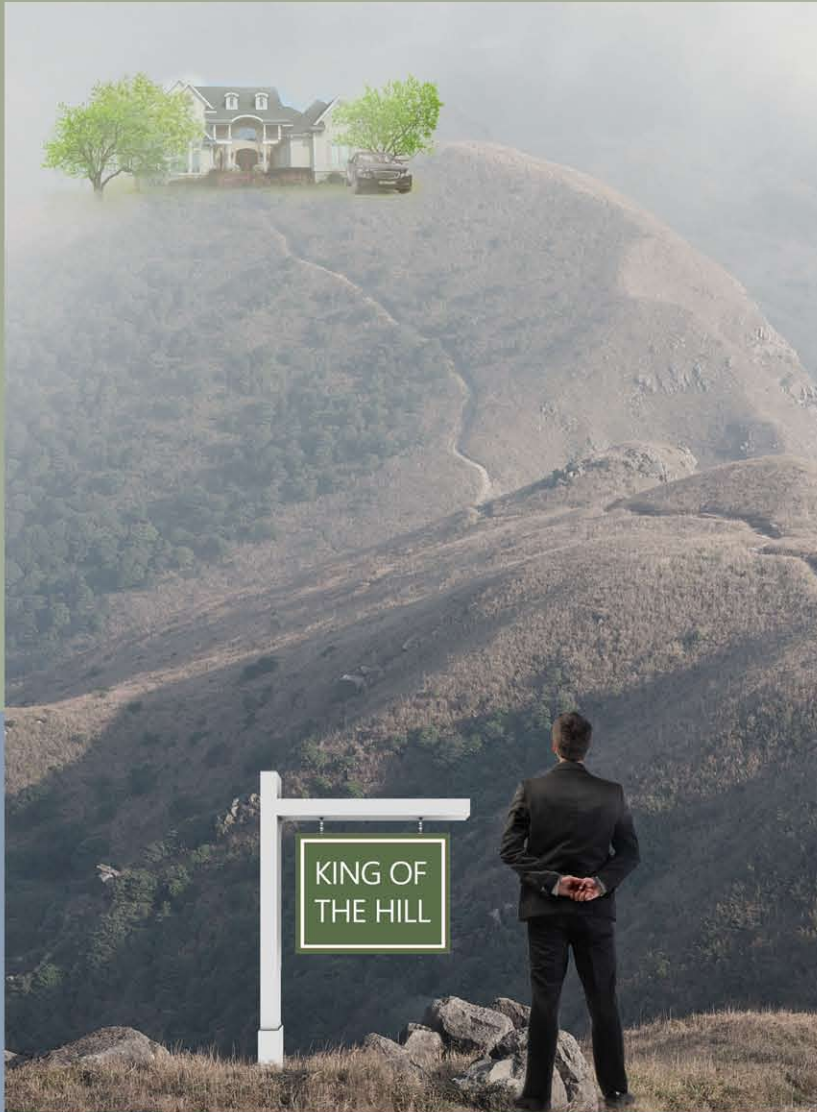


CHRISTIAN BUSINESS REVIEW

A JOURNAL BY THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIANITY IN BUSINESS AT HOUSTON BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NO OTHER GODS

AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON
FAITH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

NO OTHER GODS

FALL 2016

From Blueprints to Imprints

HOWARD TELLEPSEN

The "god" of Success

KYLE IDLEMAN

"No Other Gods": An Insider's Perspective

JIMMY ADAMS, FRED CALDWELL, JOHN WISENBAKER, JR., & BRIAN HORNER

A Look at the First Commandment

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The First Word on Business

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From the Image of God to "We Are God"

RICHARD MARTINEZ

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ISSUE 5 | FALL 2016

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ISSUE 5 | FALL 2016

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 **Living Cases**
From Blueprints to Imprints
How one family's faith forms the foundation of a prospering multi-generational business
Howard Tellepsen
-
- 7 **Book Excerpt**
The "god" of Success
The idol of success often wages a victorious stealth campaign in "gods at war"
Kyle Idleman
-
- 12 **Feature Article**
"No Other Gods": An Insider's Perspective on Faith and Entrepreneurship
Excerpts from the discussion of an entrepreneurial panel of business leaders
Jimmy Adams, Fred Caldwell, John Wisenbaker, Jr., & Brian Horner (moderator)
-
- 18 **No Other Gods - A Look at the First Commandment**
Insights into how the jealousy of God reflects His loving and generous character
Darrell Bock
-
- 22 **The First Word on Business**
A proper understanding of the First Commandment helps frame the right mission in life
David Gill & Albert Erisman
-
- 33 **Old God, New Garb**
How free market idealism could run counter to the intents of a benevolent God
Tim Wienhold
-
- 40 **Christian Leaders on Faith and Work - An Empirical Inquiry**
Insights from a sample survey of Christian business leaders on work-faith integration
Hallqvist Albertson
-
- 49 **From the Image of God to "We are God": Babel Revisited**
Scientific advances in the molecular economy should do well to steer clear of a purported defilement of the imago dei
Richard Martinez
-
- 59 **Guidelines for Contributors**

CBR Peer-Reviewed Articles



FROM BLUEPRINTS TO IMPRINTS

**BY
HOWARD
TELLEPSEN**

**Adapted from the author's speech at the Center for Christianity in Business Networking Luncheon in Houston Baptist University on September 25, 2015.*

It is a privilege for me to talk about how my faith impacts my role as the leader of a multi-generational business and how as business leaders we can draw on our faith to make decisions in our business and family lives. My faith and philanthropy, as well as my sister's and brother's, have been greatly influenced by both our parents and grandparents, as they set the example by always being dedicated to fulfilling God's purpose for their lives and serving the community. As we all know, children learn by watching their parents.

Our story begins over a century ago with my grandfather, Tom Tellepsen, who was born in a small town in Norway. His father came to America seeking a better life for his family and was unfortunately killed in a construction accident while working as a carpenter building the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City.

Tom was only 3 years old when his father died. So in the life of Tom Tellepsen, the figure of his mother stood as an enduring inspiration. To Tom, his mother was both good and beautiful. He recognized, in her character and

in her life, the real meaning of Christianity. He often said, "She has God within her."

The knowledge of his mother's love and faith in him was never absent from Tom's consciousness. It gave him strength in times of weakness, and sustained him in the face of hardship. He understood what the Lord reminded Paul in 2 Corinthians (12:9, ESV): "My power is made perfect in weakness." Her teachings of what constituted right and wrong were deeply rooted in the Bible, and her faith in God was the basis of Tom's high principles throughout his life.

On Tom's fourteenth birthday, and with his mother's consent, he shipped out of Norway as a cabin boy on a sailing ship. Can you imagine your teenage son leaving to go around the world to pursue his future? "God bless and keep you" his mother said, and because her benediction was the basis of his faith, he never doubted that God, too, was within him, guiding his footsteps, heeding his prayers. Worshipping God, to my grandfather, was believing in His goodness and obeying His direction. His mother had taught him, "In doubting ourselves, we deny Him," . . . "what you do for others, you do for yourself."

After two years traveling around the world, he ended up in Panama and worked as a carpenter for the high wages of \$5 per day building the Canal from 1906 - 1908. Malaria was prevalent in Panama and my grandfather could remember taking as much as 14 grams of Quinine to overcome the dreaded disease. During one attack, he fell into a half-conscious state and was taken to the tent hospital.

After observing him all day, the camp doctor proclaimed, "Tellepsen is a goner for sure." That night the fever passed and when he reported to work the next morning, he caused quite a stir. As Mark Twain is noted as saying, "reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated."

Just like my grandfather, we all go through life's challenges and our faith and strength is tested. We need all of our spiritual resources and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ during the tough times. In James 1:2 it tells us to "consider it joy as we face trials." Tom Tellepsen was not a victim and would never be. He was a builder, but he was first and foremost a believer! Five generations later, that foundation is firmly cast in our family and our business.

I'd like to share with you how I introduce Tellepsen when we interview for an opportunity to build a new

project. It will give you insight into the role faith plays in our culture and our company:

- Building Houston Since 1909
- Fourth Generation Family Owned
- Strong Culture
- Cornerstone of the Community

Tellepsen has been building Houston since 1909. We are a fourth generation family owned and operated company with a very strong culture, and are a cornerstone of the Community.

Building Houston Since 1909

My grandfather remembered from his seventh grade geography class in Norway that he wanted to go to Texas, to explore the new frontier. So, after working in Panama and at the age of 21, he traveled to Texas and in 1909 started building in Houston. I often tell people that I am glad my grandfather picked Houston and not Detroit. The population of Houston was only 65,000. That's amazing to me! Look at where we are today!

His first project was a house located in Montrose. It still exists today and is the home of the University of St. Thomas History Department.

During the 1920s when Mr. Tom (as he came to be known) was only in his 30s, he built several projects of significance that are still being used today: Miller Outdoor Theater at Hermann Park; the Chemistry Building at Rice University; Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church at the front

door of the Texas Medical Center; the Museum of Fine Arts; and the Anderson Clayton Longreach Wharves at the Port of Houston.

Six years ago we celebrated our Centennial, as Builders of Significance for 100 years. Houston has been good to the Tellepsen family, as we have had the opportunity to build facilities for five generations of Houstonians to live, play, work, heal, learn, and worship. We've had the blessing of serving congregations large and small throughout the city. In every instance our people become a part of the church for the time we are on campus. It is a very important part of our family and our business. It's a constant reminder of the importance of faith to our family. You might consider it part of our ministry.

We all go through life's challenges
and our faith and strength is tested.
We need all of our spiritual resources
and a personal relationship with Jesus
Christ during the tough times.

Fourth Generation Family Owned

I am the third generation – Tellepsen was previously led by my grandfather and then my father, who both lived until they were 88 years old. I have four sons who are living their faith and are all in leadership positions in the company, significantly contributing as the fourth generation in the family business. I'm pleased to say that their faith is as strong as their great grandfather's, and they continue his legacy of servant leadership.

When I was 60 years old, I started working on succession planning for our company. During this process, I learned several things:

- According to the Family Business Institute, family-enterprise success stories of harmony, health, and longevity seem to be exceptions to the rule with family owned and managed businesses - 30% last into a second generation, 15% remain viable into a third, and only 3% operate until the fourth generation or beyond. It takes much more than efficiency to make a great company. It takes faith!
- Succession planning is hard work and must include the family, as well as the company . . . it's an evolving, lifelong, intergenerational process. Planning, partnered with prayer, brings wisdom to these challenging decisions.
- 25% of typical breakdowns are due to heirs not being adequately prepared, and as a result, education of heirs is critical – the family and company history, the company's values and ethics, and most importantly, the nurturing of their faith.

Strong Culture

Tellepsen has always had a strong culture, a shared belief system based on our values, which are rooted in our strong faith. It all starts with mutual trust and respect:

- Internally, how we treat one another at Tellepsen;
- Externally, how we treat other members of the project team – owner, architect, engineers, and subcontractors.

I always heard my father and grandfather say, "It is important that Tellepsen be involved with something larger than ourselves;" it is not about us, it is about others . . .

giving back to the community, embracing those who are less fortunate than us.

It is important for key family members to stand at the center of the organization; personifying the corporate culture and aligning interests around defined values. Markets ebb and flow. We've certainly seen that over the past few months.

Our faith is the rudder that steers us as we engage these changes and make critical decisions. Our employees and their families depend on us, and we draw on the power of our God to give us wisdom.

We draw on our faith daily – constantly demonstrating why our values matter. Our values are reflected in our people and processes. We are judged by our actions and

behavior, not by words or mission statements. My father would always say, "Let your actions speak louder than your words."

We put our employees and customers first and emphasize social responsibility. Employees in the construction

industry tend to prefer "family owned" firms. "Family" is important to the feel of our company. Family values, rooted in our deep faith, give us a strong competitive advantage.

Cornerstone of the Community

The cornerstone is the symbolic foundation on which every building is constructed. In so many ways Tellepsen has been a cornerstone of the Houston community for over 100 years. Our family's involvement and commitment to the community is multi-generational - Ninety to a hundred years with organizations that share common faith-based values such as the YMCA, Boy Scouts, and the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Volunteerism shines within each one of us, for it is God's way to stay in touch with our soul through good and thoughtful deeds.

My grandfather wanted to improve himself after he arrived in Houston, and in 1910 he took architectural drafting classes at the Downtown YMCA night school, and that started an over 100 year relationship between the YMCA and the Tellepsen family. Five generations of our family have been involved with the YMCA . . . four generations have given continuous service on YMCA boards, with three of those generations being Life Board members of the YMCA of Greater Houston.

In 2010, one hundred years after Tom Tellepsen attended the YMCA night school, the Y opened their new flagship Family Center in downtown Houston and incor-

Our values are reflected in our people and processes. We are judged by our actions and behavior, not by words or mission statements

porated the Tellepsen name in acknowledgement and gratitude for the family's unprecedented continuity and deep-rooted commitment spanning a century of giving to the Y community.

You might ask why we are so deeply committed to the YMCA. The mission of the Y is to put Judeo-Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. Four distinctive attributes characterize both our family and the Y, and are displayed on each floor of the Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA. They all have Biblical roots:

- Faith: "That They All May Be One" is taken from John 17:21;
- Family: "Here Am I, and the Children God Has Given Me" comes from Hebrews 2:13;
- Service: "Do Not Merely Listen . . . Do" is from James 1:22; and
- Learning: "Your Wisdom Will Reward You" is from Proverbs 9:12.

Our family has also been involved with the Boy Scouts for 90 years, and three generations of Tellepsens have served on the local Sam Houston Area Council board of directors. I am a Distinguished Eagle Scout and have been strongly influenced as a youth and an adult by the 12 points of the Scout Law:

"A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and 'reverent.'"

Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, knew the importance of faith in building a young man's character. As the Scout Oath states: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

Four generations of the Tellepsen family, all who have been raised in the church, have served on boards and vestries, as well as built facilities, for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and our neighborhood parishes . . . starting with Mr. Tom's church, Church of the Redeemer in the East End - two blocks from his home, St. James in Riverside where I grew up as an acolyte and Boy Scout, St. Martin's in Tanglewood, Episcopal High School, and St. Luke's Episcopal Health System.

From Blueprints to Imprints

I mentioned that when I was 60 years old I began addressing our estate planning: started working on the business issues of management succession, business continuity, and ownership transfer. After several months I ended up focusing on family values and transition issues.

The result of my reading, research, thoughts and prayer was that I put together a "white paper" entitled Tellepsen Family – Blueprints to Imprints. It addresses our family's faith, values, and legacy.

The dictionary definition of legacy is something handed down or inherited from generation to generation. Everyone is going to have a legacy, whether they realize it or not. The Tellepsen family legacy is to be involved with something larger than ourselves – giving back to our community. I feel strongly that a legacy ought to be a life's work . . . something you live every day, not just pass on when you die.

I believe that people are defined by what they pass on to future generations. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Philanthropy is spiritual for me. Through the Bible we are taught and expected to serve our fellow man; to give our lives more purpose and to be part of something larger than ourselves.

My oldest son, Tadd, once asked me, "Dad, what would you tell your 10 grandchildren if they were sitting on the floor here in front of you?"

I answered by saying that I would get down on the floor with them, looking straight into their eyes, and share with them what I've learned from my parents and grandparents, and what your mother and I have tried to pass along to our four sons. I would start with....

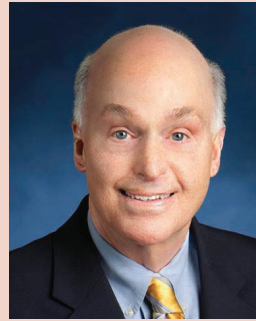
- Let your actions speak louder than your words;
- Have a strong work ethic;
- If you do your best (not just tell yourself that you did your best; not just check the box, but truly do your best), you can accept any outcome;
- Have confidence with humility; we know that confidence is important to self-esteem, equally important is to have humility with that confidence – our family has certainly been blessed; some would say we are privileged. However, we have never forgotten Luke 12:28: "To whom much is given, much is expected or required."
- Maintain an attitude of gratitude; be grateful for our many blessings;
- When you have many blessings, you have the responsibility to share those blessings – giving back by sharing your time, talent, and resources
- My father would often say, "If you do not give when you don't have it, there's a good chance you won't give when you do have it;"
- Giving begins with thinking of giving; giving is a habit;
- Be unconditional in your love with your family; the power of love is stronger than the love of power;
- Do not be a victim;
 - So often you see people when things aren't going their way, they look for excuses or other

- people to blame. We must be responsible for our actions;
- Your great, great grandfather was not a victim; when he was 3 years old his father died; he contracted malaria in Panama;
 - On a personal note, when I was 25 years old, Tadd was just 14 months old, and your grandmother was 6 months pregnant, we were living in Michigan and the furnace in our home exploded and I was seriously burned – 50% of my body, of which 30% was third degree requiring 20 operations of skin grafting;
 - Like your great, great grandfather I never considered myself a victim. It didn't cross my mind to ask God why did this happen to me.

Each one of us has an opportunity to make our own IMPRINT. Pray daily, seek God's purpose for our lives, and pursue opportunities to be involved with something larger than ourselves. I want to leave you with this Prayer of Faith (grandmother's influence)

*God is my help in every need, God is my every hunger feed.
 God walks beside me, guides my way, through every moment of the day.
 I now am strong, I now am true; patient, kind, and loving, too.
 All things I am, can do and be, through Christ, the Lord that lives in me.
 God is my health, I can't be sick! God is my strength, unfailing – quick!
 God is my all, I know not fear. Since God, and Truth and Love are here.
 Amen.*

About the Author



Howard Tellepsen is Chairman and CEO of Tellepsen, a fourth generation, family owned and operated business providing commercial, institutional and industrial construction services in Houston since 1909. Today, Tellepsen, known as “builders & believers” drawn to opportunities to be a part of something that is “bigger than themselves,” employs over 2,000 people and is perennially ranked among the top construction companies in the city. Howard received his Bachelor of Civil Engineering from Georgia Tech and is a trustee of the Georgia Tech Foundation. Howard serves on numerous civic and corporate boards, including St. Luke's Health System, YMCA of Greater Houston, Houston Associated General Contractors, and Boy Scouts of America, among many others. Howard and his wife of 47 years, Carolyn, have four married sons and ten grandchildren.



THE “GOD” OF SUCCESS

BY KYLE IDELMAN

*Taken from *Gods at War* by Kyle Idleman. Copyright © 2013 by Kyle Idleman. Used by permission of Zondervan (<http://www.Zondervan.com>). All rights reserved.

A Note from the Editors

The concept of idolatry often conjures up images of stone and clay statues worshipped by the superstitious, but for Christians it is an all-encompassing idea covering anything that consciously or subconsciously substitutes for our loyalty to God. One of the most prevalent of these substitutes is perhaps the idea of being successful. Pastor Kyle Idleman’s acclaimed treatise on the subject of modern day idolatry, and in particular on the “god of success,” refocuses modern day Christians on the subtlety of this idolatrous form of worship. It is a perfect introduction to the theme of the current issue of the CBR. We are therefore excited to reprint excerpts of Chapter 8 of Idleman’s book to help set the tone for the discussions in this “No Other Gods” issue. We greatly appreciate the author and Zondervan for the permission to reprint this material.

King of the Hill

The god of success has no problem finding followers. He is attractive, compelling, charismatic. He walks into your everyday, rat-race world and shows you what life could be at the top of the heap. And what he’s selling is hard to ignore. He offers us the applause and envy that makes life sweet.

This god gives us a line as old as the Garden of Eden: “You can run the whole thing. It’s your life, so why shouldn’t you be at the wheel? Why not put the pedal down and see how fast you can get to the finish line?”

He plays on the most basic problem of humanity – that pull toward doing it our way, aka pride.

The gods of success are all about personal achievement, rewards we chase and get for ourselves. Is life going to be good? Are we going to be satisfied? The gods of success give us very convenient ways to keep score: the title after our name, the sum on our paycheck, the square footage of the new house. We put our hope and find our identity in

what the god of success offers. And so we climb and claw our way to the top...

In Luke 18, Jesus has a conversation with a king of the hill. That's not exactly what he's called, but pretty close. He is described by three words, rich, young, ruler. He was a man who had accomplished, achieved, and accumulated. He was the very definition of success. Nothing wrong with that, unless those were the things he was living for.

Luke 18:18 reads, "A certain ruler asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"

Pay attention to that question. In essence, he wants to know what he must do to be successful. That's a good question to ask Jesus, but did you notice where he puts the emphasis? He asks, "What must I do to *inherit*?"

The Greek word for inherit could also be translated as "acquire" or "earn." Verbs reveal a lot, don't they? This man is assuming that eternal life is something he can achieve, something he can add to his resume. It's a red flag signaling that the god of success might be the king of the hill in someone's life. It's looking at things and thinking, "I can grab that."

For this rich young ruler, salvation is one more trophy, an earned reward. Worshipping the gods of success isn't just about secular accomplishments and commendations. It's not just getting caught up with job titles and social status. In fact one of the most common gods of success is the worship of religious rules. We put our trust in our own mastery of rule-keeping.

The god of success invites you to save yourself instead of depending upon Jesus to do it. This is one of the reasons I believe the most successful of people often have the hardest of times becoming followers of Christ. Being a devoted disciple means they must acknowledge their own helplessness and their ultimate need – the need for rescue. It's not easy for a successful person to admit the need for help.

This is why Bill Maher, the TV pundit, says this of the crucifixion: "I just don't get it. The thought of someone else cleansing me of my sins is ridiculous. I don't need anyone to cleanse me. I can cleanse myself."

This is why Warren Buffett, after donating 85 percent of his forty-four billion dollars to charity, would say, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way."

Sure, it would be a great way: just save up enough bucks, brownie points, box tops, soup labels, or Chuck E. Cheese tickets and redeem them at the golden gate. That makes sense to us, because life as we know it is all about earning things, making our own way. If you want something, you work for it. You pay for everything in blood, sweat, and tears, and economic systems are always based on getting what you pay for.

In most walks of life, that's a good system. When it comes to guilt, however, there's one problem: sin has put all of us hopelessly in debt. We'll never be successful enough. There are not enough deeds or donations in the world to buy an ounce of the purity we need.

So in God's economy, success only comes when we declare spiritual bankruptcy.

Back to the rich young ruler. He wants to know what he must do to be successful, and Jesus replies, in so many words, "You know the commandments, right?"

This is exactly the answer the successful man wanted. He bursts out that he's kept all the command-

ments since he was a boy. The commands were a checklist, a list of merit badges that he had devoted himself to. Through hard work and determination, he has kept the rules. Add spiritual as a fourth word to describe his success. He was the rich, young, spiritual ruler.

The Bible tells us that Jesus "looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21). He did so even as he observed, "One thing you lack."

And then he dropped the bomb.

Jesus told him to sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor, thus accumulating treasure in heaven. I wish I could've seen this guy's face when Jesus told him to sell all that he had. Picture Gary Coleman from *Diff'rent Strokes* saying, "Whatchoo talkin' 'bout, Willis?"

This wasn't the standard prescription from Jesus. This was a particular word for a particular individual. In fact, in Luke 19, Jesus makes no such requirement of Zaccheaus,

THE GODS OF SUCCESS GIVE US VERY CONVENIENT WAYS TO KEEP SCORE: THE TITLE AFTER OUR NAME, THE SUM ON OUR PAYCHECK, THE SQUARE FOOTAGE OF THE NEW HOUSE.

an evil tax collector who repents. So why does Jesus go so hardcore here?

Here's why: he looks into the heart of this passionate, successful young man, so well-dressed and energetic and well-meaning, and he sees that the Lord isn't on the throne. So Jesus puts himself in direct competition with the man's trophies of success. He says, "You choose."

The young man couldn't do it. "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:22).

His face fell. He doesn't seem to have taken much time to mull it over. He abruptly turned and sadly walked away, much like a kid at a carnival who walks up to the best ride in the park but discovered it will cost him all the money he has.

Sociologists tell us that our culture defines success as the prestige that comes from attaining an elevated social status. It's winning a big, public game of King of the Hill. Your hill might be slightly different than mine, but there's a broad consensus today about the ingredients that add up to success...

Success is finding out how the score is kept, and then scoring.

The word success is not found very frequently in the Scriptures, but one of the closest biblical equivalents is the word *blessed*. In ancient Greek culture, this term was used to signify "the state of happiness and well-being such as the gods enjoy."¹ Even today, we use that word as the more humble way of saying, "I'm successful." A guest comes by and says, "You have a beautiful home. I love your sports

IN GOD'S ECONOMY, SUCCESS ONLY COMES WHEN WE DECLARE SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY.

The rich young ruler had come to define himself by his success and accomplishments, whether they were counted in cash or commandments. He knew that no matter how much he wanted to go after Jesus, there was a price he would not pay; there was a god he could not overthrow.

Jesus exclaimed, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23)

I can imagine the sadness in Jesus' eyes as he said it. He loved that young man who had come after him with bright eyes and left in dejection. But Jesus doesn't chase him down and say, "Hey, hold up! Did I say 'everything'? You don't have to sell everything. I'm sure we can come to some kind of arrangement." Jesus doesn't treat this as a negotiation.

For some people, the idea of standing before God without an impressive resume is unthinkable. We want to show him our success, prove our worth. But to God, success is precisely the opposite of that. It's being willing to step away from all the stuff, all the achievements, and say, "None of that means a thing to me, Lord. I lay it all before you; you and only you are my success" ...

Keeping Score

What are we talking about when we say success? It's one of those words that could have a slightly different shade of meaning for each of us. We tend to attach it to a personal goal or objective.

cars and your yacht." You smile modestly and say, "I've been blessed."

So think about the difference between these two words, success and blessed. Success is a word we use to speak of something that we have done and accomplished. The circumstances of your life can be the same, but the word blessed is an indication not that you have done something, but that something has been done for you.

Let me put it this way: success is when we achieve; blessed is when we receive. If we say "I'm successful," we are giving the glory to ourselves. When we say "I'm blessed," we are giving the glory to God.

Jesus gives an in-depth portrait of what it means to be blessed when he begins the Sermon on the Mount. Beginning in Matthew 5, Jesus gives a rather shocking, counter-intuitive profile of the successful, blessed individual.

Who is blessed?

He says those who mourn are blessed, for they receive comfort.

He says the meek are blessed, and those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; peace-makers; people who are mistreated for doing right. Those are "the blessed."

And finally, he says that people are blessed when they're insulted, persecuted, and lied about because of their pursuit of Jesus.

This list, this redefinition of success, has an order to it that is very important – especially the first thing Jesus mentions. He begins by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

IDOL ID



Blessed are the poor? I know some of you are thinking, "Yes! I win! I am completely broke!"

But Jesus isn't talking about money here. This isn't a reference to how much you either have or don't have. His words are "poor in spirit." Jesus is describing people who know they don't have it all figured out, people who are humble enough to ask for help.

This world's success puts the emphasis on being self-sufficient and self-reliant, acting as if we've got it all figured out. But Jesus redefines a successful life as one that humbly says to God, "I can't do this on my own. I need your help." From the world's perspective, that's the opposite of what successful people do.

So you've got to admit, it makes a pretty jarring contrast to our picture of winning business honors, moving into mansions, and being named *Time's* Person of the Year. Jesus takes success and turns it upside down. We think that success is about being the king of the hill. Jesus points

to the downtrodden, humble, and pure-hearted who refuse to play the world's game.

When our lives are defined by the world's definition of success, that's idolatry. So what's the *right* way to keep score?

There's a board game that has been around for a while called the Game of Life. If you've played that one, you know the object is to collect beautiful homes and expensive property. You win the Game of Life by landing the perfect job and driving the nicest vehicle.

My guess is that even if you never played that game, you're playing the game. And Jesus has a question for all game players. "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Matt. 16:26). What's the point of the big promotion, the luxury car, and the second home if the price is your soul? Success would suddenly look like the deepest failure imaginable.

Maybe that's why we shouldn't be surprised when we read that as the rich young ruler walked away, he wasn't happy: "he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:22).

Taken out of context, that verse is almost funny. Why did he go away sad? Because he was rich! The way our minds are trained, it seems ludicrous, right? You don't go away sad because you're rich; you go away sad because you drive a seventeen-year-old three-cylinder Kia. Why would having so much make him sad?

Because he had too much to give up. He owned so much that it owned him. He was a rich young ruler, and Jesus was offering him an opportunity to be a poor young

servant. But the god of success took his hand and led him away.

IF WE SAY "I'M SUCCESSFUL," WE ARE GIVING THE GLORY TO OURSELVES. WHEN WE SAY "I'M BLESSED," WE ARE GIVING THE GLORY TO GOD.

We don't even know his name. We have no clue what became of him. Chances are the rich young ruler went on to become the richer older ruler. My guess is that he went on to do pretty well playing the game of life.

But what if, instead of walking away sad, the man had said to Jesus, "Okay, I'll do it! I'll trade all that I have for all that you are."

If he'd have said that, I imagine we'd know his name. Maybe there would have been thirteen disciples rather than twelve. Maybe there would have been five gospels rather than four.

Notes

¹ D.R.W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 143.

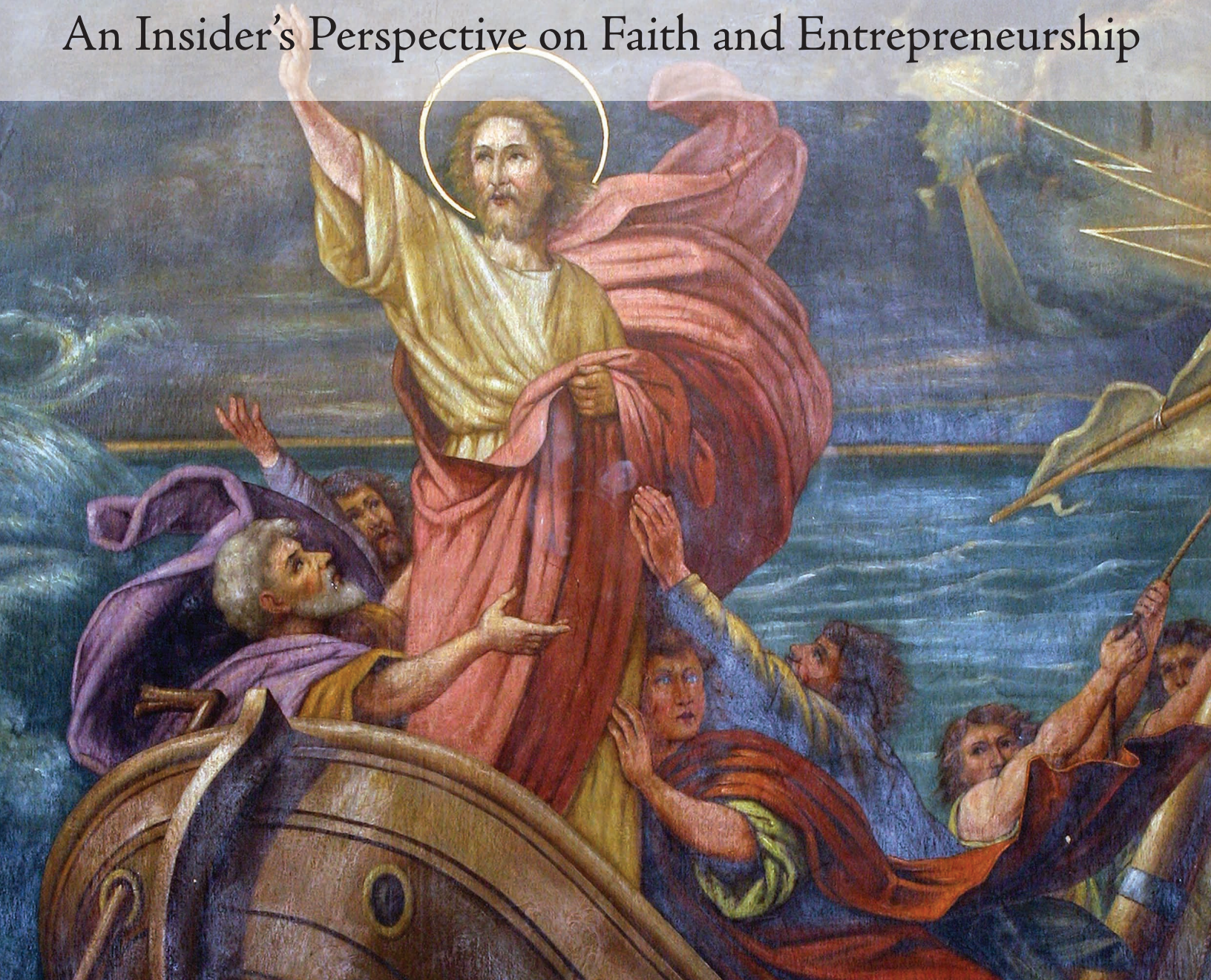
About the Author



Kyle Idleman is the Teaching Pastor at Southeast Christian Church located in Louisville, Kentucky, with over 22,000 in attendance every weekend. He is the best-selling author of *Not a Fan* and *Gods at War* as well as author and presenter of numerous video curriculum. Kyle's favorite thing to do is hang out with the love of his life, DesiRae. They have been married for 17 years and have four children: MacKenzie, Morgan, Macy and Kael.

NO OTHER GODS

An Insider's Perspective on Faith and Entrepreneurship



Editor's Note: On January 29, 2016, the HBU Center for Christianity in Business hosted a panel discussion with several entrepreneur business leaders on how their laser focus on faith guide the growth and shape the culture of their businesses. Brian Horner, Houston area leader of the Marketplace Chaplains, facilitated the discussion that offered valuable insights into the practice of work faith integration for Christ-centered entrepreneurs. The CBR is pleased to provide an edited excerpt of this discussion for the benefit of our readers.

The Panel



Jimmy Adams was founder and CEO of American Coatings, a Protective Coating and Industrial Paint company in Tomball, Texas. Until the sale of the firm in 2014, American Coatings was one of the Top 50 privately owned paint companies in the U.S. Before American Coatings, Jimmy was involved in several ventures, including a real estate company and his father's paint company. Jimmy has been an active member of Gideons International and has been the organizer of the Christian Business Luncheon in Tomball, Texas since its inception in 2002. Jimmy earned a Degree in Chemical Engineering from Texas A&M University.



John Wisenbaker, Jr. started his career with the family's Wisenbaker Builder Services in the capacity of outside sales, where he was instrumental in leading the company's diversification into new flooring and countertop products. In 1998, John co-founded U.S. Stone, a manufacturer,

fabricator and distributor of Avanza® brand quartz countertops, which became the preferred supplier of quartz countertops at Lowe's stores throughout the U.S. In 2003 he returned to Wisenbaker Builder Services as president and led its subsequent growth. John is active in his local church and involved in various youth organizations. John holds a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Distribution from Texas A&M University.



Fred Caldwell is the President and CEO of Caldwell Companies, a 25-year old fully integrated residential and commercial real estate firm involved in the development of planned residential communities, commercial office, retail and industrial projects, as well as in brokerage services and private equity investments. Fred serves on the Board of Directors of the Cy-Fair Educational Foundation, the 12th Man Foundation Executive Board, the Texas A&M Mays College & Graduate School of Business Development Board, the Lone Star College System District Foundation and the JH Ranch International and Outback Ministries boards. Fred holds a degree in accounting and a master's degree in finance from Texas A&M University.



Brian Horner (moderator) has for over thirteen years been serving as Division Director of Marketplace Chaplains, the world's largest and oldest employee care organization which sends chaplains into corporations and businesses caring for the most

valued resource - employees and family members. Brian previously held sales management and marketing positions in the healthcare industry. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Horner: Many business people say mixing faith and business is a bad idea. You would disagree. Why?

Wisenbaker: My parents laid a foundation of faith in our business which is founded on integrity and reliability. I view my job is to take that a step further - to ingrain that in our culture. Our goal is always "Be there for our people." If we could be there to listen when people needed us, we would have a chance to witness to them at the right time.

We don't need to beat people over the head with the Bible. We just want them to know that's part of our foundation, our culture.

Adams: As a Christian you have to take your faith wherever you go. God took us through many trials and made us stronger. When we are able to witness to others what the Lord has done for us and how he got us through situations, it may resonate with what others were going through. The

Holy Spirit is always working and things don't happen by accident.

I look at business being the third thing in importance - God being first and family second. Faith helps you put everything in proper perspective. I am not afraid to offend anyone, but the way you witness needs to be proper. I pray every day for the opportunities to impact others.

Caldwell: All the original disciples work including Jesus. They were all in the marketplace. They mixed their call with their vocation in making a living. I always feel that's God's purpose in our lives. He will use whatever platform he gives us for his glory and purpose, whether it be teaching or business. Every day I wake up to a great team of people with a common purpose - not only to do business but also to move the kingdom forward, in the way we do business, the way we treat people, and the way we reflect Jesus Christ in the marketplace.

Horner: Do you think that doing business God's way would impact the bottom line, whether positively or negatively?

Adams: Definitely affects the bottom line. Caring for your people costs you something, but it is a crime if they are not given a chance to hear about Jesus and what he has done in your lives. In my business I have all types of employees - different languages, different education levels, different family situations. You make a can of paint and you have people's trials written all over it. It pays to care for your employees, knowing what's going on in their lives, witnessing to them. Sometimes you learn too much when everybody comes with a different agenda every day, but it gets us closer together.

Wisembaker: I got a new perspective about faith in business when we moved to a different church where the preacher happens to be bi-vocational - meaning that he has a secular job and also serves as a preacher. He really does a good job of blending work and faith - his sermons are based on his work experiences. In retrospect he is probably not the best speaker I know but he is so authentic. I think we try to do the same in our company - not the most eloquent purveyor of the gospel and biblical values but be genuinely authentic. We try to treat people the way

we want to be treated and drive our core values through our organization. The challenge is how you scale an organization and hold onto those values along the way.

Caldwell: What is the bottom line? I don't know when we stand before Jesus in heaven he would ask us about a particular deal. He would probably ask us about the people we are called to shepherd. As leaders we have the great privilege of shepherding our people. At the end of the day I think the metric is how well we did in shepherding our people through good and bad times.

These days the talk is all about low oil prices and how we can steer the ship through rough seas ahead. The test

of real leadership is in those rough seas. Can we be at peace like Jesus in that boat amidst the storm, knowing that God is in control? The bottom line for me is more than financial. It has to be how well we lead and bring people to Christ through the way we treat

people and the way we live our lives every day.

Horner: Dr. Tim Keller in his book *Reason for God* said we are becoming the world, more religious and less religious at the same time. Being the people of faith and living out your Christian worldview in a world that seems to be increasingly hostile to people of faith, can you relate some instances of conflict, pushbacks perhaps, from vendors or customers as you witness for your faith?

Caldwell: I remember people questioned why we did things the ways we did, even to the point of questioning whether our way was legal. My answer has been pretty consistent: Oh, no. Frankly I really don't care. I care but not enough to do something different. Even if we suffer in leadership when we are in the heritage of Christ, for our faith, I am personally pretty cool with pushing the boundary when it comes to proclaiming the truth of Christ in the marketplace. Amazingly God has protected our business from major events because of that.

Wisembaker: I don't think we encountered anything that rose to the level of persecution. My view is if there is any pushback, so what? We are called to seek first the kingdom of heaven. We'll not shirk from seeking in the face of resistance. It is immaterial in the big scheme of things.

The test of real leadership is in those rough seas. Can we be at peace like Jesus in that boat amidst the storm, knowing that God is in control?

Adams: What I experienced is when you meet someone you don't know, perhaps a customer, you need to act genuine. The devil has deceived many with those who claim to be Christian but are not. I would present Christ whenever I could, knowing whoever facing you is watching you. Your walk needs to be what you say it is. Your employees too are watching to see if you are for real and do what you say. If you are around long enough they know what you stand for and that would be great witness for our faith.

Horner: We all grow in our walk and our faith. Was there any moment in your life you questioned your faith in relation to your business, wondering if you were on the right track?

Wisembaker: I often wondered why God put me in the construction business. It is a hard business to stay straight and narrow. I sold a business in 2001 that I co-owned with a partner and I was naïve enough to do an earn-out in the business. We paid off the debt but my partner never paid us any of the earn-out. I struggled with what would be the right thing to do. Is it legal and is it the right thing to seek legal counsel. That was one tough decision for me – it was where the rubber meets the road. For me it wasn't just an automatic answer – go and find a bunch of lawyers to sue people – I had to search and try to understand what the right action should be. I sought counsel from my pastor and other believers.

Caldwell: I used to say we had never been sued, but it changed about 10 years ago. We now seem to be regular targets for some folks when it comes to lawsuits. From a Christian perspective we struggle with whether winning or losing actually glorifies God more. Legal matters for sure present the biggest challenge for me.

Adams: In 2010, our paint factory was torched by an arsonist. The whole 45,000 sq. ft. building was burned to the ground. Through that ordeal I was reminded of Romans 8:28 many times. I prayed for weeks and didn't get any answer. I couldn't talk about it for 3 months without breaking down and cried. I was on my knees a lot asking for wisdom to bring the business back up. The Lord answered. He got us back up the very first year – back to \$10 million in a \$15 million business in just 5 months. He presented a paint

facility we could lease, in spite of all kinds of permits we had to acquire.

One thing the Lord showed us is that we made pretty good paint. We competed with the big guys like Sherwin Williams and International Paint. Our customers would keep asking when we would get back into making paint for them. That gave us lots of encouragement and our employees pulled together. Now 3 years later we still had no building – applying for the permits is just a very slow process in Texas.

The Lord then presented us with an opportunity to sell. Even without any facility a buyer was willing to take over our business, believing that we are worth more money now than when we had a factory. So we sold the company. I know when there are great adversity and we pull through by faith it would bring glory to the Lord.

Horner: In contrary to common perception, we know business owners or CEOs don't get it easy and face lots of struggle. Can you share some insights about leadership – things you learned from challenges as the business grew?

Caldwell: For sure there is no such thing as getting a Ph.D. in leadership

and you are done. I am learning everyday about leading people and how to do it better. I can tell you everything not to do. I keep a little red spiral-bound notebook that for 25 years at each year end I would review the year and write down everything that I did wrong. I wish I could tell you none of the poor decisions I made I repeated, but the discipline helped.

As a pilot I run into turbulence while flying all the time. Turbulence generally existed in lower altitudes, so you need to get altitude to avoid them. In business turbulence is bound to occur almost daily. As a leader I can choose to dive into that turbulence or I can climb above it and guide the organization without being mired in issues that are not the best use of time in steering the enterprise. For example, issues involving people and personal conflicts. Biblically we learn the best response is to try to put the two parties together and see if they can resolve the issues amongst themselves first. Fly high and lead from the vantage point of what God wants you to see clearly where the organization needs to go.

We are called to seek first the kingdom of heaven. We'll not shirk from seeking in the face of resistance. It is immaterial in the big scheme of things.

Wisembaker: I used to think leadership is all about you, but when you get there you realize it is not about you but about your people. We run a quarterly leadership academy for the managers in our company and last year a topic we went over was on servant leadership. How can we say we value our people when the executive team takes all the parking spots close to the building while everyone else parks at the far end of the parking lot? To push authenticity we encourage the executive team to take the outside parking spaces instead. We also encourage our leaders to have a leadership position in a volunteer organization – youth soccer, church, charity, etc. Whatever it is, it is where they must lead people whom they cannot fire.

Adams: Unlike Fred, I know I cannot fit all my mistakes in a spiral notebook. When you start your business from scratch you have no followers; what you put into the business day and night is a kind of leadership as your family sees what you are doing - caring for them. Vision guides the business; any wrong move can break it, so relationship with God and prayers are so important. Again and again, every time we needed somebody God would send that person right up to our door. The Lord will put you on the right track as you lead by faith, trusting Him.

Horner: What tips would you give aspiring entrepreneurs who want to run a successful business without compromising biblical values?

Adams: Starting a business means sacrifices – time, willingness to treat others like yourself being treated, walking the talk.

Wisembaker: When I began at the family business which my dad started twenty years earlier, I was eager to show my dad how much as a college graduate I knew so much more than he did. But when I started my own firm, I realized how little I knew about starting from scratch. When people are counting on you and there are tough choices to make, you realize you are not prepared for the sacrifices. Work life balances will be tough to get when you are starting out.

Caldwell: Starting and running a young business is a seven day a week occupation. It never leaves you, ever. I like to look at work life balance as seasons in life, as Scripture would teach us. Your family has to be prepared for those seasons. My wife fortunately was supportive of us starting a business and the sacrifices that followed.

On the flip side, someone mentioned if you count up all the key events in life that led the business forward, they don't equate to the number of hours worked. I can count 4-5 key events that allowed us to move the business forward, and they are not related to the hours I put into the business. They are more like co-incidences, like God answering prayers. Our success is probably never a result of my own efforts and dedication, but God's leading. Sometimes we overvalue our own effort and forgot God is actually carrying us through.

Having said that, setting priority is still important. I don't believe the apostles led balanced life at all – most certainly they led a prioritized life. I do believe in seasons

of call – prepare, work, rest – perhaps unbalanced, but prioritized.

Horner: When you hire employees, do you make them aware of your biblical convictions?

Adams: We don't try to be politically correct when we hire. We don't inquire about their religion, but try to get a good assessment of their

values. We are upfront about being a Christian company. The applicant will make a decision based on what we disclosed.

Wisembaker: We went over the company history and related how God used the depressing 80's to broaden our horizon and lifted us up as a company. We don't have a litmus test for employees but we certainly make it clear we thank God for what he has done to this company.

Caldwell: In every interview we say we are a faith-based company. We hire non-Christians because they present great witness opportunities – and some became believers. We make it known that we are a great company with great culture and we attract highly qualified people. We hope they find Christ in that culture. Our vision statement starts with "We honor God by..." People who don't feel comfortable will opt out very quickly on their own.

Our success is probably never a result of my own efforts and dedication, but God's leading. Sometimes we overvalue our own effort and forgot God is actually carrying us through.

Horner: How do churches and universities prepare young people who want to live their faith out while being the best possible worker?

Adams: I read that more and more kids are not getting the history of our country – how it was founded on God’s principles. Our founding fathers fasted and prayed when they had problems or conflicts and they came back together after beseeching the Almighty. Churches should be teaching about what we can and cannot do in the face of challenges from political correctness. For example, we are told that you cannot bring God into school because of the separation of church and state, etc. But I know we have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. Christians

sometimes become squeamish and fail to stand up for what is true.

Wisembaker: My pastor does a good job of integrating work and faith since he has a full time job outside the church. I look to church and faith-based institutions to teach how we can integrate work into faith.

Caldwell: When I ask a roomful of students how many want to be a great sales person I usually get one hand. I don’t know any successful business person who is not also a great sales person and a good communicator. Effective communication is a very biblical model when we look at the apostles and Jesus. It needs to be an integral part of the leadership preparation in college.

No Other Gods

A Look at the First Commandment

by Darrell Bock

The First Commandment in the Old Testament

Ever since God delivered Israel from being a house of slavery in Egypt, God has asked for allegiance from his people (Exodus 20). When God issued the Ten Words, as the Old Testament calls them, he was marking out ethical standards that not only would make Israel a kingdom of priests, he also was creating a nation that would live in the world in a way that respected both God and others (Exod 19:5-6).

The very structure of the Ten Commandments has one portion discussing how to relate to God and another on how to relate to others. When Jesus boils down the Law to the two commands of loving God completely and loving your neighbor as yourself, he is drawing from the same moral expectations and guiding stone.

What we are seeing is the outwork of God's original commission to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2 that humans were created in the image of God to reflect their Creator and manage the world well—to exercise a flourishing dominion over the creation God gave to us as a garden to

care for and live in. It is in this context that God utters the first commandment, which says “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3).

This commandment was repeated after the colossal failure of Israel worshipping the golden calf. In Deuteronomy 5:7, God repeats this command in the very same Hebrew words. In both settings the context points to a covenantal relationship God would have with his people, a “special possession among the nations” (Exod 19:5). God was to be a God so near to them it was unlike any other god of any other nation (Deut 4:7). In Deut. 4, before this first commandment is repeated, God makes the point that no replica of God should be formed. God had married himself to his people and he is a jealous God, a jealous husband.

In our world, jealousy is seen as a mostly negative quality, but in the Old Testament in certain contexts it was seen as a positive attribute. God deserves the loyalty he seeks. He had delivered Israel. He had drawn close to her. He had protected her. He was in the process of giving her a home when before she had been a captive, caught in slavery. He had taken this enslaved people and made them special. So he is jealous to preserve the relationship he had formed with them. Only the Lord is God, there is

no other besides him (Deut 4:32-35). So he is the only one worthy of adoration. Our primary obligation in life is to our Creator.

It is in this context that God declares that there are to be no other gods before him. The Hebrew word for “another” (aher) is actually more descriptive than this. It is a “strange” god, one not appropriate for the relationship being attributed to him. The word is used for something that is of another kind. So we have the exhortation in Exodus 34:14 (NET) not to worship another God for God’s name is Jealous and is a jealous God. Here is the verse: “God shares his glory with no one else (using this same Hebrew term for “another” that often is translated as no one else or anyone else; Isa 42:8- “I am the Lord! That is my name!

I will not share my glory with anyone else, or the praise due me with idols.”

Idols of any sort are ruled out as objects of worship in this passage from the prophet. Even the name of other gods

are not to be on their lips (Exod 23:13). The prediction of unfaithfulness in going after other gods comes in Deuteronomy 31:20 and it is described as the breaking of a covenant. This is why God compares his relationship to his people with a marriage in the book of Hosea. God’s people are to be like a faithful wife, but God is faithful even in the face of our unfaithfulness. He continues with jealous loyalty to pursue his bride, both in judgment (Josh 23:16) and in restoration (Hos 3:1). The first commandment is a call to loyalty to a good, gracious and delivering God, who loves us as a faithful husband.

The idea of having no idols before us means that anything else that controls our lives and acts as a “god” for us demeans our relationship and loyalty to God. An idol need not be a wooden object to which we bow in order for it to control our lives. Idolatry can come in many forms. The most subtle are those where we are simply looking after ourselves for basic needs. The difference between a proper set of priorities and excessive self focus can be tricky but needs reflection.

The Old Testament teaching leaves us with a first set of reflective questions: Is there anything that garners more loyalty from us than our relationship with God? If the answer is yes, then the first commandment is violated. Adjustments need to be made to get the priorities aligned.

Our biblical survey may help us consider when the line is crossed. Let us turn to Jesus and the New Testament to see how loyalty works.

The Temptations of Jesus and the First Commandment

Behind Jesus’ response to the third temptation of Satan in Matthew 4:10 stands an allusion to the first commandment God as he cites Deuteronomy 6:13. Luke’s rendering has a different order of the temptations, so this is the second temptation in his account (Luke 4:8; Deut 6:13). This reply is part of Jesus’ commitment of total loyalty to God’s will and way in all the temptations. He will not test God and his goodness. He will not live by bread alone but rests in response to God’s Word.

Deuteronomy 6:13 states the commitment to God alone that mirrors the first commandment. Jesus’ action shows how loyalty to God and worshipping him also should point to faithfulness to God’s way and will. This is an important mirror for how the commandment works itself out in positive terms.

The commandment to worship God is not only about not worshipping other gods; it is about being faithful to the one God. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in John 4:23-24 that God is looking for worshippers who do so in spirit and truth. That idea reflects what he has done in surviving the temptations.

A question emerges from Jesus’ example: How does one’s loyalty to God express itself in faithfulness to God in what one does and says as one lives and works?

The Roots of Discipleship

The roots of discipleship also reflect a commitment to the first commandment. When Jesus says that one who is to be a disciple must hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he is also evoking the fact that God stands in a priority relationship to us. The family was the core earthly relationship people have. So for these relationships to be ranked below a commitment to God and his way, we can see that honoring God is before everything.

The term hate here is rhetorical and is used in a relative way to say that God and his way is to come first. The first commandment is the idea behind this call to discipleship. In the original context it meant that if loyalty to one’s family prevailed, one might not even choose to consider Jesus as many of the Jews Jesus shared with had rejected his claims and call. If one’s sense of heritage, tradition and

The first commandment is a call to loyalty to a good, gracious and delivering God, who loves us as a faithful husband.

family identification prevails, one might not even consider coming to Jesus because family might be alienated from that choice. Jesus' point is that God has first place in our loyalty.

This raises a third set of questions: Is what I do for my family or for anyone else in line with and related to the prior calling God has given to me? This idea of calling does not mean I have to be in church or other ministries. Work done well and morally that serves

people and the creation honors God. But is my labor and the way it is undertaken, whatever it is and however it is done, honoring to God? Is what I do for my family and what I seek to gain for them done in a manner that also shows honor to God?

Lessons from the Concept of Idolatry

If worshipping other gods is idolatry, then speaking of idolatry also evokes a violation of the first commandment. It is here where the issue of idolatry tied to things other than idols and images of God appears. In a fascinatingly brief reference, Colossians 3:5 calls greed idolatry. Only a careful study of how the love of things corrupts can explain how this works.

In the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21, we see a man who is blessed with a rich yield of his crops but only uses it for himself. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we see a man who had no compassion for the beggar outside his gate and who saw the beggar only as a pawn to serve him. After the rich man had died, he ended up in judgment. The rich man and his own needs were the only thing this rich man was concerned about.

So the question becomes, does my use of resources honor only myself or my own family or does it extend out to others in ways that reflects the giving and generous character of God?

Both the negative and positive use of resources is covered in 1 Timothy 6:8-10, 17-19. They treat the array of both the danger and the opportunity that comes with wealth. The trap is that resources can fuel a selfish desire that leads into many a path that is not honoring to God. Wealth can lead to pride, a reliance on that which is temporary. It can make us think we have more control over our lives than we do. It can turn us into thinking, subtly, we are little gods. We are to enjoy what God gives us, but in a way

that is generous, doing good and being rich in good deeds with what God allows us to steward. Such generosity leads into a life that pleases God.

So another question emerges: Do I use my resources in ways that honors God and gives to others? Are there some on the fringe of life who are honored and impacted by my use of resources? A text like Luke 14:1-24 says we should look to serve those who

Is my labor and the way it is undertaken, whatever it is and however it is done, honoring to God? Is what I do for my family and what I seek to gain for them done in a manner that also shows honor to God?

lack.

A Diagnostic Guide for Living According to the First Commandment

The first commandment sets the stage for thinking about how we order our relationships, use our resources and set our priorities. No relationship is more important than our relationship with God. Even something as important as family comes second. To aid our thought process that might guide us to live and work in light of God being first and foremost, try reflecting on these diagnostic questions:

1. Is there anything that garners more loyalty from us than our relationship with God?
2. How does my loyalty to God express itself in what I do and say as I live and work?
3. Is what I do for my family or for anyone else in line with and related to the prior calling God has given to me?
4. Is my labor and the way it is undertaken honoring to God?
5. Is what I do for my family and what I seek to gain for them done in a manner that also honors God?
6. Does my use of resources honor only myself or my own family or does it extend out to others in ways that reflects the giving and generous character of God?
7. Are there some on the fringe of life who are honored or impacted by my use of resources?

Recently a very popular Christian ad campaign being circulated is called "I Am Second." That statement may rank us too high. If I am to love God and love others as myself as the Great Commandment says (Mark 12:28-34), then I may not be second as my regard for others is to be as great as my self regard. If I am to think of others as more important than myself as Paul argues in Phil 2:3, then in my regard for others my self-ranking would go down.

If as Jesus taught, the one who is great among us is servant of all (Mark 10:35-45), then I am asked to look at my

life before God as one where I serve and respond to him by serving others well. This certainly is a great challenge,

Does my use of resources honor only myself or my own family or does it extend out to others in ways that reflects the giving and generous character of God?

but it also shows that in worshipping God and avoiding the temptation to have other gods, we are not just discussing worshipping idols of images made in the form of humans or other creatures made of wood or stone. We must not

consider putting people, self, family, or things in a place where only God belongs. In fact we are called to do and be the opposite of what often happens. We are not first nor even second, but are to be the servant of all.

About the Author



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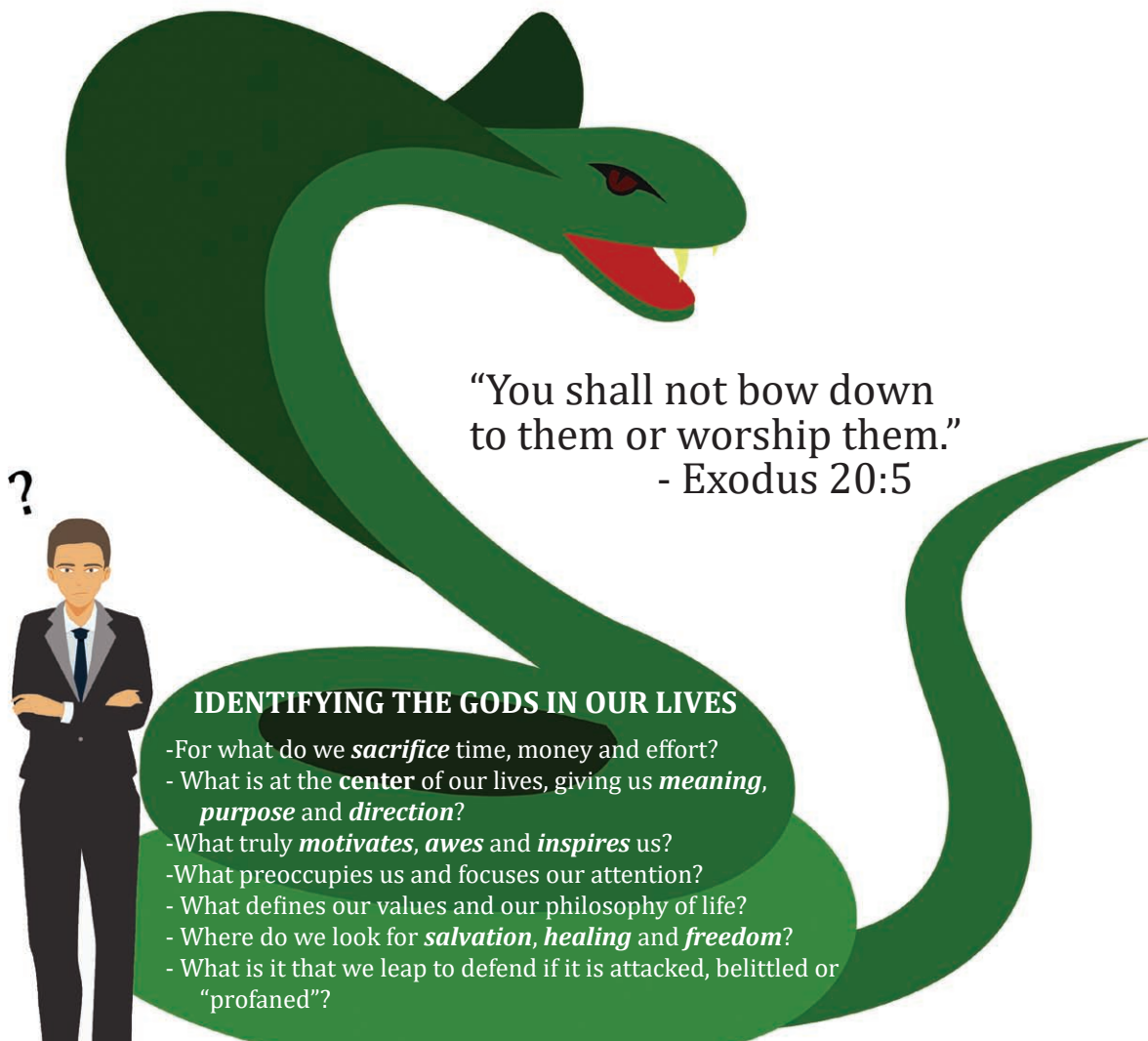


THE FIRST WORD
on
BUSINESS

by David W. Gill & Albert M. Erisman

What are the top ten ethical issues and challenges facing Christian business people today? Answers: honesty, corruption and bribery, fair wages for workers, executive compensation, debt, product quality, sales tactics, unfair hiring and promotion practices, dangerous or unhealthy products or services, employee gossip . . . you can imagine the list.

Now what would God's answers be? Would his list look like ours? The point is that God already has written the list: the Ten Commandments. On God's list, the first issue is always Who is going to be God here? The text makes this plain: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." The reach of this command goes far beyond business, of course. In every arena of life, having the true



Today, our god substitutes are things like money, the nation, race, or gender.¹ Martin Luther warned against letting mammon (money and possessions) or "great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor" rival the true God.² Jacques Ellul's great little sociology of religion, *The New Demons*, argues that the major twin poles of today's sacred are the nation-state and technology.³ It is to the government that we look for care, for solutions, for education in basic values and so on. It is in technology that we have faith and hope for medical cures, better food production, longer lives, more meaningful relationships and so on. People used to rely on God for healing or for rain. Today we rely on biotechnology and irrigation technologies. Probably the greatest rival to God in our era is the self. The gospel of self-satisfaction, personal autonomy and self-determination is wowing and wooing thousands of converts today. Mammon and material possessions *look* a lot like gods today but these are often means to serve the self, rather than sacred *ends* in themselves.

God on the throne is the decisive question, the point of departure.

The first commandment is stated as a simple, straightforward prohibition: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3; Deut 5:7). Jewish tradition actually views this as the *second* “word” with the earlier statement “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery” as the first. This “prologue” is really the precise “Gospel” counterpart (and foundation) to the “Law” prohibiting “any other gods before me.” “Yes” to the true Lord God; “No” to all rivals. “I am the Lord your God and nobody else gets to have my place.”

Jesus warned that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot worship God and Mammon, for example (Mt 6:24). He refuted Satan’s temptation by citing Deuteronomy 6:13: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Mt 4:10). The first commandment guides us to say to the Lord, “You are my Lord and God. I want nobody but you on the throne of my life. You

alone, you uniquely, will have this exclusive place in my life. This is not merely a commandment to *flee from* other gods; it is an invitation to *run to* the God of the universe, the Creator and Redeemer. “I will be your God,” promises the Lord, “and you will be my people” (e.g., Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 2 Cor 6:16).

In this essay we want to explore and unpack four rich and powerful lessons the First Commandment provides to Christian business managers and leaders. We believe that non-Christians will also usually resonate with these lessons because they bear the imprint of God’s image and likeness and because the law of God is written on their hearts and consciences.⁴

1. God Must Be God At All Times, Including in Our Working Lives

Anytime we narrow our view of God, or confine him to particular out of the way corners of our lives, we are in effect “having other gods before us.” Every area of life comes under his authority. Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments.” This does not mean we will ever be able to serve God perfectly. We are fallen people and can only seek to please him through the power of

the Holy Spirit. But our desire should be to grow in our understanding of him and what it means to please him in all areas of our lives.

One way we have other gods before us comes in how we set out priorities. Well-meaning Christians have often taught that our life priorities are, in order, (1) God, (2) Family, and (3) Work. This sounds pious and right, and is often the basis by which we might think we are “having no other gods before us.” But what does this mean in practice? That we spend more time in prayer, worship, and reading the Scripture than we spend with our family or at work? That our “religious” or “devotional” and “spiritual” disciplines and activities get more hours than anything else? For most people, this is just not possible. This cannot be what the first commandment requires.

Further, this way of setting out our life priorities suggests that family and work are areas where God is not directly present. We took care of God’s concerns first, then we move on to family and then to

AREN'T OUR WORSHIP OF GOD AND STUDY OF THE BIBLE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR FAMILIES AND OUR WORK? AND ISN'T OUR FAMILY MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR WORK IN GOD'S PERSPECTIVE? WE BELIEVE THE ANSWER TO THESE QUESTIONS IS A RESOUNDING "NO!"

work? But God cares deeply about our families and our work, and everything else in our lives. Separating him from these areas is another way of having other gods before us, since we are not serving a God who is over *ALL*. What the first commandment teaches us is that the list of priorities is: (1) God.

God cares about our worship and our church life, our families, our work. He cares about every aspect of our lives. He is not a separate priority alongside others; he is the priority in every area of life. He is God at all times. All that we do should be under his authority, and in a way that honors him. It is not God vs. our families or God vs. our work, but God *in* our families and God *in* our work.

But aren't our worship of God and study of the Bible more important than our families and our work? And isn't our family more important than our work in God's perspective? We believe the answer to these questions is a resounding “No!” If God has called us to be a teacher, a banker, a software developer, or a construction worker, then this is important work. We cannot trivialize it. When we create these hierarchies, we are acting as our own gods, and in this way we are having other gods before us. We are not saying that it is okay to sacrifice your marriage or family for your work, or that your Bible study and prayer group are not of great and essential importance. What we

are saying is that God is God all the time, in every area, and creating any kind of abstract hierarchy that appears to bracket God off from being the leader of all parts of our lives has to be wrong.

How then do we set these priorities? How do we achieve balance among the conflicting demands we face in our lives? The ultimate answer is that we don't. Rather, we seek God's guidance and authority in our lives; we ask him to help us with our day-to-day priorities and need for balance. We believe this works in two parts.

First, every task we do should be done under his authority and with his guidance. Whether this is on our job, in our family, or during worship, each task at that moment is carried out in sacred trust. *Second*, we also set our schedules under his authority. We acknowledge all that he has given us to do is "under God" and seek his help in laying out the schedule of our days. This doesn't mean being paralyzed by fear over getting it wrong. He has entrusted the work for us to do and has given us gifts and abilities to carry it out. But it does mean that we should be open to his interruptions. We have a schedule but an event happens that requires us to do something else. We need discernment to assure this new task is from God, and then to do it willingly, even giving up what we may have thought was the priority.

One of the authors was recently on a long airplane trip and had a book he was eager to read. Settling into his seat, he heard a question from the person sitting next on the airplane. That question resulted in a five hour conversation across the country with a young agnostic software engineer. It seemed at first to be an interruption, but it was clearly God resetting his priorities. We need to be open to these kinds of "interruptions" and not treat them as problems but as opportunities.

Together the setting and carrying out of the many tasks in our lives is a clear way we "have no other gods before us." All is done according to his priority, and each task is done under his authority. We have broken our own hierarchies, and acknowledged God's interests in every aspect of our lives. So the first step in "having no other gods before us" is to recognize God's authority over all of our lives, not simply the spiritual domain. The God who we worship is one who made us in his image, who gave us our work to do, and who calls us to live our whole lives in relationship to him. He is Lord of all, including our work. When we fail to acknowledge this we are worshipping a different god.

2. Purpose Motivates and Specifies Ethics

The Moral Architecture of the Decalogue

The second lesson from the Decalogue is that it is God (command #1) who determines what is good (commands

#2 - #10). The Decalogue shows us a moral architecture where God, the ultimate purpose and End, *motivates* obedience to the laws that follow. We follow his ways out of love and duty to him. But the Decalogue also shows us a moral architecture where the very *content* of that ethical guidance flows from his character. Our understanding of what is right and good flows organically from God's character and will. For example, we observe the Sabbath and work six days out of obedience and love for God; but we do this because God is himself the Creator for six days and the Sabbath rest for one day. The great French Reformed pastor Alphonse Maillot wrote that:

...this commandment is *the Commandment*, the commandment par excellence, of which all the others are only the consequences or commentaries...Thus, in truth there are not ten commandments but one plus nine. One true, one great, one alone, and nine which develop it, explain it, and show its consequences. This is why I would repeat my reticence before a too strong distinction between two tables of the Law . . . just as in the same way it is erroneous to separate too much the two commandments of the Summary of the Law. It is fundamentally the same: "you shall love. . . ." God is the one who delivers and Israel is a people liberated in all of its existence. . . Fundamentally there is only one table, that of the new life, that of freedom for Israel. . . It is not only at worship, not only in my prayers, nor only when I read my Bible that I may not have other gods, but it is in all of my life. In my work, in my family, in my political actions, in my relations with my neighbor, there is no question that I could have another God, another reference, another criterion than the one who delivered me from Egypt out of all my slaveries.⁵

The nine commandments are merely elaborations of the first. They delineate nine direct implications of having Yahweh as our living God. If God is truly on the throne of our life, then, we will make no idols; use his name respectfully; remember his sabbath day; honor our parents; protect life, marriage, property and reputation; and avoid covetousness. There are nine implications of having this God in his unique place. As Luther put it, "Where the heart is right with God and this commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the others will follow of its own accord."⁶

This pattern or "architecture" of the Decalogue provides us with an important insight for our participation in organizational, institutional and business ethics. Learning from this model, Christians should work first at calling attention to the broader, deeper purposes of such organizations, perhaps questioning them and prodding them toward a richer and better content. If we can prod colleagues and organizations explicitly toward the justice, love and freedom of God, that's great. But even if our companies

do not commit themselves immediately or explicitly to the service of God in their mission statements, our encouraging them to commit to larger, positive, godly purposes can help leverage better ethical performance in the details of daily work. Anytime Christians can encourage others to address the broader questions of the meaning and purpose of life, work and business, they have contributed something significant.⁷

Lacking an intimate connection to such an ultimate purpose, much of today's business ethics is reduced to little more than case-by-case "damage-control." Various moral crises, dilemmas, quandaries and problems spin out of control and beg for careful analysis and creative resolution. Unfortunately, at this damage-control level our responses tend to be narrow, negative, legalistic, and reactive. The best outcome is pretty much "get through this situation with as little damage as possible." That is hardly an inspiring motive to be ethical; and the very definitions of "ethical," "right," and "good," are at sea. What we need is an "ethics of mission control" rather than an ethics of "damage control."

Mission Control Ethics

What is the foundation of an ethical organization? Contrary to some common thinking, it is not the company code of ethics. Nor is the key step to hire an ethics officer, or to schedule some employee ethics training. The foundational step is not to create a list of common ethical infractions and start doing some case studies on them. None of the preceding steps will have much power to leverage or guide behavior unless they are intimately linked to a compelling overall organizational mission and vision. First get the mission and vision straight. That's where healthy organizational ethics begins. All moral guidelines with any power to actually lead us, point back to, and are dependent on, their connection to a compelling purpose and mission. If we don't buy the mission, we won't buy the principles and rules. The architecture of the Ten Commandments clearly displays this "mission control" pattern. If God's position is solid and unrivaled, then his agenda of justice, love and freedom will follow, and we will be formed by the other nine specific area principles.

It is encouraging that some of the best and most popular business books have promoted this sort of mission-control ethics. James Collins and Jerry Porras's best-selling

study of great businesses, *Built to Last* (1995), argued that the best long-term companies first "preserve the core" and then "stimulate progress."⁸ The order is crucial, they say. The core mission and fundamental values must be the first priority. Collins and Porras define core purpose (what we're calling "mission") as "the set of fundamental reasons for a company's existence beyond just making money. Purpose is broad, fundamental, and enduring; a good purpose should serve to guide and inspire the organization for years, perhaps a century or more. A visionary company continually pursues but never fully achieves or completes its purpose - like chasing the earth's horizon" (p. 77). Collins and Porras argue that mission-driven, visionary companies have experienced greater business success, over longer periods of time, than companies that were not mission and vision focused. Max DePree's books, such as

Leadership Is an Art, make the same point in other language: the leader's chief responsibility is to tell the story that establishes the identity, mission and values of the company.⁹

Once the core purpose is clarified, the question be-

comes "what kind of value-embedded corporate culture and what kind of principle-guided practices are needed for the business to achieve its mission?"

What guidelines will get us from here to there with excellence? Business writer Douglas Sherwin explained how ethical values relate to mission and purpose in a classic essay several years ago: "The values that govern the conduct of business must be conditioned by 'the why' of the business institution. They must flow from the purpose of business, carry out that purpose, and be constrained by it."¹⁰ Ethics is essential to fulfill the "why" of business. If the ethical guidelines are not integral to the company's purpose and mission, they will fail. When the purpose is clear, the guidelines are compelling, and the specific dilemmas and problems can best be resolved or managed. From mission to guidelines to problem-solving.

This moral architecture is demonstrated by the Decalogue and biblical ethics. But it is confirmed by common sense and broad human experience, by common grace and natural law. It is the stamp of the Creator's image on all people. It is the "law written on the heart and conscience." Think about an athletic team: only when a team is truly gripped by an intense, shared vision of winning a championship will they sacrifice and suffer through extra workouts. Only then will the players subordinate their individual egos to team interests. Only then will the play-

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ers study the play book with total seriousness. Only then will they follow the exercise and nutritional guidelines for exceptional fitness. Only a compelling mission changes team behavior.

Think of how a person's bad habits and long-entrenched behavior sometimes change radically. This doesn't happen very often but when it does it is often because that person fell in love and wants so badly to please or win another person that they will change their ways. And think of how in an era of epidemic childhood obesity we see an impressive band of super-fit kid athletes (gymnasts, skaters, basketball players). What makes these kids behave so differently from their peers? A major factor is their vision of getting a gold medal at the Olympics or playing in the NBA. Mission and vision motivate and leverage behavioral change like nothing else.

Negative feedback can have some impact on human performance, of course. Threats of punishment, insults, and shaming can motivate some behavioral improvement in both sports and business. Such negativity, though, makes for a generally weak foundation for ethics (most sexual harassment employee training is of this negative type). Positive, shared vision is much more powerful over time (in raising children, coaching athletes, building nations, or leading organizations).

Toyota watcher and management expert Jeffrey K. Liker describes the first principle of the "Toyota Way": "Base your management decisions on a long-term philosophy... Have a philosophical sense of purpose that supersedes any short-term decision-making. Work, grow, and align the whole organization toward a common purpose that is bigger than making money." Liker goes on: "Throughout my visits to Toyota in Japan and the United States, in engineering, purchasing, and manufacturing, one theme stands out. Every person I have talked with has a sense of purpose greater than earning a paycheck. They feel a great sense of mission for the company and can distinguish right from wrong with regard to that mission. . . . Toyota's strong sense of mission and commitment to its customers, employees, and society *is the foundation of all the other principles* and the missing ingredient in most companies trying to emulate Toyota."¹¹ Costco is another great company that gets the priority and importance of mission. Here is how they articulate in the introduction to their Code of Ethics. "***Our Mission: To continually provide our members with quality goods and services at the lowest possible prices. In order to achieve our mission we will conduct our business with the following Code of Ethics in mind.***" (emphasis added).

Mission-control ethics also happens to be the standard way ethics has been understood, taught, and practiced for millennia. Aristotle began his *Nichomachean Ethics* with "The good is that at which everything aims." Ethical/moral goodness is about "Ends," and means to those ends.

An Aristotelian approach asks "what makes for a good knife?" Well "what is the purpose of a knife?" Answer, "to cut things." Therefore the virtues of a good knife are things like sharpness, safety, durability, etc. If the purpose of a knife was to be displayed in a museum, things like shininess and color might be among its core virtues; if the purpose is to cut, then sharpness tops the list. Identify the purpose first, then detail the characteristics necessary for excellence in carrying out or achieving that purpose.

So mission and purpose don't just motivate ethical behavior, they specify the *content* itself of an effective ethics. By analyzing what it will take to achieve the mission and fulfill the vision, we can figure out the appropriate values and guidelines. The mission of "cutting things" logically leads us to conclude that the first virtue must be "sharpness." After a business gets its mission and vision straight, it then (and only then) figures out the core values it must embed in its culture and the basic principles that must guide its practices in order to achieve success and excellence. This is, by the way, a common mistake made by many businesses and other organizations, i.e., separating and treating as independent the mission and vision, on the one hand, and their core values and ethical guidelines, on the other. This of course is an alert that the character of that purpose and mission is of decisive importance. If "moving money from your pocket to mine" or "building myself the biggest pile of money in the shortest amount of time" is our business purpose, watch out for the behavioral practices and cultural values that follow from that choice!

We should not be surprised if philosophers, management experts, or any other careful observers of life figure out that purpose and mission drive ethics, or that the End drives the Means. This is witness to common grace and the imprint of God's image on people. But what is vaguely and intermittently seen in these common ways is explicitly and clearly seen in biblical revelation, and in the structure of the Decalogue and Commandment One in particular. When God is on his throne in our life, things happen. William Barclay commented on the First Commandment:

People necessarily wish to be like the gods in whom they believe, and, therefore, the kind of gods they believe in will make all the difference to the kind of life which they live. . . . It is of the first necessity to get the idea of God right, for a man will quite inevitably become like the god he worships. . . . It is from here that ethics takes its start. A man's god dictates a man's conduct, consciously or unconsciously.¹²

3. Seeing Creation & Redemption As Two Basic Aspects of Godly Purpose and Mission

Let's take the analysis one step deeper by considering who this God is on the throne of our lives. There are many ways of describing God's character, being and action. He is the Almighty One, the Prince of Peace, the Everlasting Father, and so much more. But if we are to focus on the two most basic descriptions, it would have to be Creator and Redeemer. In the Decalogue we are explicitly told that he is the Lord "who brought you out of Egypt, the land of slavery (Redeemer) and he is the one who created the world in six days (Creator). The focus on these two aspects of God is reinforced by the themes of the two great songs of eternity praising God as Creator (Revelation 4) and Redeemer (Revelation 5).

The God whom we serve is the Creator of good and beautiful things - and he is the Redeemer of lost and broken things and people. He is the Innovator, Designer, and Builder par excellence. It is in his character; he is the Creator. And he is the compassionate Healer, Liberator, and Savior par excellence. It is in his character; he is love; he is the Redeemer. And every man, woman, and child today and throughout human history has been made in the image and likeness of this Creator and Redeemer. As broken and sinful and wounded as we are, we have some of that creator and redeemer "DNA" in our character as well. The first commandment challenges us to be sure that it is precisely the Creator and Redeemer who are on the throne, inspiring and guiding our values and behavior in the workplace and everywhere.

If a company has a clear purpose but it is a bad or negative one, be prepared for negative ethical consequences. For example, if the mission is really all about maximizing short-term financial payoffs (perhaps especially for a handful of executives), the characteristics that are generated may include ruthlessness, greed, selfishness, cunning, and willingness to step on others. The fall of Arthur Andersen (described in detail in *Final Accounting: Ambition, Greed, and the Fall of Arthur Andersen* by Barbara Ley Toffler) offers a clear case study of how a mission turned bad rapidly led to behavior turned bad and unethical.¹³

Our mission cannot simply be to "relieve customers of their money." There must be some basic product or service we are delivering in light of which people will part with their money. It is that essential product or service, that change we leave behind in our customer's life, that is our core mission. So, what is it? What does the company want to accomplish? What is the target out there? What is its business in the most basic sense? Only beggars and thieves can have "relieve you of your money" as a stand-alone mission. A successful, sustainable business depends fundamentally on delivering some product or service well enough to keep customer cash flow coming in. What, in a brief phrase or sentence, is that core product or service?

Create and Redeem – Corporate Mission Examples

The mission of Walt Disney has been a good example of the inspiring potential of the "create something beautiful" theme: *To bring happiness to millions.* While some recent events may give us pause, the broader Disney story has been one of mission-driven, ethical business success. Who wouldn't be inspired to work for a company whose mission is "to bring happiness to millions"? As might be expected, the great pharmaceutical companies have (in the past at least) tapped primarily into the "help somebody" theme. Johnson & Johnson's mission has been *"to alleviate pain and disease."* Merck described its mission as *"the business of preserving and improving human life."* As long as, and to the extent that these phrases really focus the mission and purpose of these companies (assuming of course a reasonable financial success), employees find these companies inspiring places to be associated with.

Sony's older mission statement was an inspiring statement of creativity with a secondary "help somebody" theme: *To experience the sheer joy that comes from the advancement, application, and innovation of technology that benefits the general public.*

Hewlett-Packard's "H-P Way" also picked up both the creativity/innovation and helpfulness themes. Some of its key elements: *To make technical contributions to fields in which we participate... To make a contribution to the community... To provide affordable quality for customers. . . To provide respect and opportunity for H-P people including opportunity to share in H-P success.*

What is the change your business makes in the lives of its customers that warrants their paying you?

Not just customers but employees are affected by our mission. What kind of business mission and purpose will motivate people to want to get out of bed in the morning and bring their best self to work? We believe that an inspiring mission and purpose taps into one (or both) of the two basic theological themes: creation and redemption. All human beings are made in the image and likeness of the Creator and Redeemer, whether they know it or acknowledge it or not.

Creation

When a company challenges its people to innovate, create, and build in some way, it connects with something profoundly human, something God planted in human nature that persists no matter how wounded by sin and ignorance. People are rarely inspired by jobs that have no space for creativity, that ask just for repetition, compliance, and maintenance. There are some classic psychological and anthropological studies of this human characteristic (Latin, *homo faber*, “man the maker”). But it is also common sense and personal experience: think about how good it feels to take on a challenge and have the freedom and responsibility to carry it out. Think of how good it feels to finish the project and be able to look back on it. Getting a book published, finishing a deck building project, running a marathon - completing an acquisition project at work, etc.: human beings are builders by nature.¹⁴

Great companies tap into this creative “build something good” characteristic in their workforce. Toyota is a model: “Central to the Toyota Way is innovation . . . from the small workplace changes made by plant workers on the shop floor to fundamental breakthroughs in production technology and vehicle engineering.”¹⁵ Toyota’s development of both the Lexus and the Prius are expressions of creativity and innovation unleashed by a mission-driven organization. So here is the first way we motivate our people to want to get out of bed in the morning and bring their best self to work: we challenge and empower them to express their God-given creativity for something good, useful, or beautiful. Quench, ignore, or repress that side of human personality and we’ll watch their lackluster, half-hearted, perhaps even negative performance on the job.

Redemption

This refers in general to setting people free, healing their hurts, fixing their brokenness. The whole creation groans, waiting for this ultimate redemption. This is who God is, the Redeemer who is love and, in effect, can’t help but reach out in love to the lost, hurting, broken, and rebellious. We know that every man, woman, and child has been created in the image and likeness of that Redeemer God. No matter how fallen, wounded, and selfish we have become, there remains something in us, most of us anyway, that responds positively to the opportunity to help somebody, fix some problem, comfort and heal someone hurting. People are inspired by organizational missions and visions that help those in need, heal the sick, liberate those in various kinds of bondage, and overcome hunger, ignorance, or oppression in some form.

Again, there are academic studies of this “herd instinct” and altruism but the evidence of common sense and observation is powerful enough by itself.¹⁶ Think about how people respond to disasters and human cries for help - there is something in us (most of us, most of the

time) that makes us want to help others. When a tsunami, earthquake, hurricane, or terrorist assaults our neighbors, most of us join together to help. When a child falls down or an older person struggles to carry something, most of us step up quickly to help. It actually makes us feel good about ourselves to be able to help others. We de-humanize ourselves when we could help someone in need and we selfishly turn away. A viable, inspiring mission and purpose either helps people “fulfill their dreams” or it helps people “overcome their nightmares.” Tapping into one or both of these themes is really about aligning the organizational mission with the best aspects of human nature, and more profoundly with the character of God on the throne.

Aligning Misaligned Missions

How do we work all of these out in a setting where we don’t have influence over the company’s mission? In other words, what does this look like when the mission of our company doesn’t appear to line up with God’s mission for work, if it is not about creating good and beautiful things for people or fixing broken things and healing hurting people? If we are to “have no other gods before us,” we must align our personal mission with God’s mission and this may create some dissonance. Here are three suggestions of how one might respond:

First, we can try to see the work God has given us in a missional light that may not be otherwise evident. The old story of two men working in the middle-ages makes this point. The two men were doing the same job, hauling rocks. One said, “I hate my job. It is hot, dirty work and seems so meaningless.” The other said, “I love my job, I am building a cathedral.” Barry Rowan, CFO of Vonnage, says we need to bring meaning to our work rather than find meaning in our work.

Second, we have enough scope for leadership that we can help some in the company see a connection between their tasks and the broader vision. Bill Pollard, former CEO of ServiceMaster, used to do this for the people who did the dirty work of cleaning toilets and bathrooms in the hospitals where they worked. He had the medical people meet with his cleaning people to build awareness of the link between their task and the larger mission. Cleaning the toilets and bathrooms was an important task on the team that was helping patients get well.

Finally, in our imperfect world if we can’t nudge the company mission in the direction of God’s bigger purposes, we may need to do something else in order to “have no other gods before us.” Making this difficult call is best not done individually, but in a community of believers. We can be blinded by the money from the job, our own egos, or even a misplaced sense of self-righteousness that clouds our own vision. Our families may have needs that make leaving a job especially difficult. Leave or stay, Jesus said that we should be salt and light wherever we are, and

working this out in the workplace is one of the most important ways that this happens.

4. Treating God and Those Bearing His Image with Uniqueness, Value, and Exclusivity

We saw in the opening paragraphs of this essay that God wants to be our only God. His first command is that there be no rivals allowed into his rightful place: “You shall have no other gods before me.” We can call this the principle of “exclusivity” or “the unique place.” The Decalogue teaches us that this is the first way we love God, that God has a right to be accorded this exclusive place. He is unique, not replaceable or dispensable. He is valuable, not to be discarded or ignored.

This first command habituates us to a basic pattern of how to treat people made in the image and likeness of God. As we learn to love God, we learn at the same time how to love a neighbor made in God’s image and likeness. Our business corollary to the first commandment can be stated as follows: *The first way to love and care for the other is by granting them a special, unique place in our existence and not letting any rivals emerge to threaten or take that place.*

The first movement of love is to make sure people have—and know that they have—a unique and irreplaceable place before you. If they think they are replaceable, all is lost. Children need to feel and know that, no matter how many other people are in the family, they have a unique place in their parents’ lives. In a flash, something occurred to one of the authors as he was giving a lecture on the Decalogue to a group of university students about thirty years ago: “this is exactly the first thing that my wife wants from me: to have her place in my life unthreatened by any rivals.” (Of course he knew this about marriage before that night: the new insight was that the first movement of love and justice was the same for God, for a spouse, for anyone). In the case of marriage, you may have other good friends, people you love. But no one should be offered the special place of life-long soul-mate, lover, and unconditionally intimate life partner that you dedicated and committed to your spouse. While there are many ways of threatening a good marriage, the most threatening of all is to allow a rival to enter the picture, to begin to come between you and your spouse. The point is easily seen in the marriage illustration but it applies equally to parenting: each of your children must know that they occupy a unique, irreplaceable position in your heart and mind. If they come to doubt that, the relationship is in trouble.

The principle applies in business as well: each of our employees (and customers and colleagues) need to feel

valued and unique by their employers and colleagues if they are to flourish. Are they overlooked, dispensable, replaceable, or “just a number”? How will they perform if that’s the case? People can usually sense whether we notice them and value their individual existence. The fact is that every person is unique in their DNA, in the upbringing, experience, and perspective. Everyone has value somehow, somewhere (even in the case where they do not fit into our organization and must be replaced). Because people are unique, they deserve - have a right - to be treated as unique individuals.

Legendary founder of Hewlett-Packard David Packard wrote “Our strong belief [is] that individuals be treated with consideration and respect . . . Every person in our company is important and every job is important.”¹⁷ Stanford business school professors Charles O’Reilly and Jeffrey Pfeffer concluded their major study of personnel and management practices of successful companies by arguing that “These places are also better at attracting and retaining people as a byproduct of how they operate. That is because great people want to work at places where they can actually use their talents, where they are treated with dignity, trust, and respect.”¹⁸

It is not surprising that common sense and experience would lead many observers - philosophers as well as managers - to see the importance of treating people as unique and valuable. Immanuel Kant stated his “categorical imperative” as “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”¹⁹ Don’t use people as means; value them as “ends.”

We don’t propose this principle simply on the basis of common sense or expediency, however. We argue that the Decalogue clearly teaches that the first way we must treat God right is by granting him a place that no one else can have and valuing him as he deserves. Because people are made in his image and likeness, they too wish to be so treated. It is important to let this implication of the first commandment permeate us and reform our relationships. We need to pray, “Lord, help me to truly see those around me as you see them: unique, valuable, made in your image. Help me to carve out a special place for each of them in my heart and my affections, my consciousness and my actions. Help me to value them and protect their place in my life. Help them to know where they stand with me.”

This is, more often than we might think, really a matter of justice as well as loving care for others. Our women colleagues, for example, have a right before God to be granted dignity and value equal to what is given to men. This is justice, not grace! Our spouse and our children deserve to be treated as unique, valuable individuals; we are not doing them a “favor” when we do so. This is guarding their freedom to be who they are - who God wants them to be. Our workplaces can be transformed by those who live out this

principle: “Treat all people as unique, valuable individuals. Never treat anyone as though they are dispensable, without value, or “just a number.”

Conclusion

It is a powerful experience to relate to the God of the universe and to have no other gods before us. This is not just for us in church or for us in our personal lives. We are whole people, and this first commandment should be at the core of everything. It starts with getting a right and full understanding of who God is. While we can never understand him fully, we at least know that he is God over everything including our work and business lives. To have no other gods before us means that there is no corner of our lives where we can retreat and not be involved in living this out.

Understanding God moves us to carry out his mission in the world. Serving him is our mission. Our work is part of his mission, and doing our work missionally is part of what it means to live under his sovereignty. It leads us to an ethic that is much bigger than not doing wrong; it is about doing right and advancing the mission. God’s mission in the world involves both creative work and, on this

side of the Fall, redemptive work. In all of the work he has given us, we need to “work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men” (Col 3:23). As we pursue and promote godly creative work and godly redemptive work we are living out what it means to have no other gods before us but Yahweh.

Finally, because every person is made in the image of God, living out our acknowledgment of “no other gods” causes us to treat image bearers of him in a unique and singular way, parallel to the way we treat God by protecting and valuing his unique place in our lives. James and John both remind us that we cannot say we love God and mistreat our brothers and sisters. We demonstrate our love for him in the way we treat each other.

Do the commandments, and in particular the first commandment, have anything for the Christian who is “not under law but under grace,” the marketplace Christian in the 21st century? We can’t miss it!

About the Authors



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Notes

¹ Actually, it is not nation, race or gender per se that threaten God's place but rather nationalism (and Americanism is no better than Serbianism or any other), racism (in all forms, covert and overt) and sexism (including genderism in either of its two potential versions).

² Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (1529; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) pp. 9-10.

³ Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

⁴ On the ethics of the Ten Commandments see David W. Gill, *Doing Right: Principle-Guided Practices* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); "Ten Principles of Highly Ethical People," *Radix Magazine* (2002) 29.02: 4-7, 27-30; and "A Fourth Use of the Law? The Decalogue in the Workplace," *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics* (2011), vol 2, issue 2, art 4.

⁵ Alphonse Maillot, *Le Decalogue* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1985), pp. 22-23. (David W. Gill translation)

⁶ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, p. 15.

⁷ A general market business ethics book that articulates and illustrates this kind of mission-driven approach is David W. Gill, *It's About Excellence: Building Ethically Healthy Organizations* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008/2011).

⁸ James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

⁹ Max DePree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).

¹⁰ Douglas Sherwin, "The Ethical Roots of the Business System," *Harvard Business Review* Nov-Dec 1983, p. 186.

¹¹ Jeffrey K. Liker, *The Toyota Way* (McGraw-Hill, 2004), pp. 37, 71-72. Emphasis in the original.

¹² William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 17-18.

¹³ Barbara Ley Toffler with Jennifer Reingold, *Final Accounting: Ambition, Greed, and the Fall of Arthur Andersen* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).

¹⁴ Nikos Mourkogiannis describes this as "discovery," one of four basic core purposes grounding great companies, in *Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies* (Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Liker, *The Toyota Way*, p. 42.

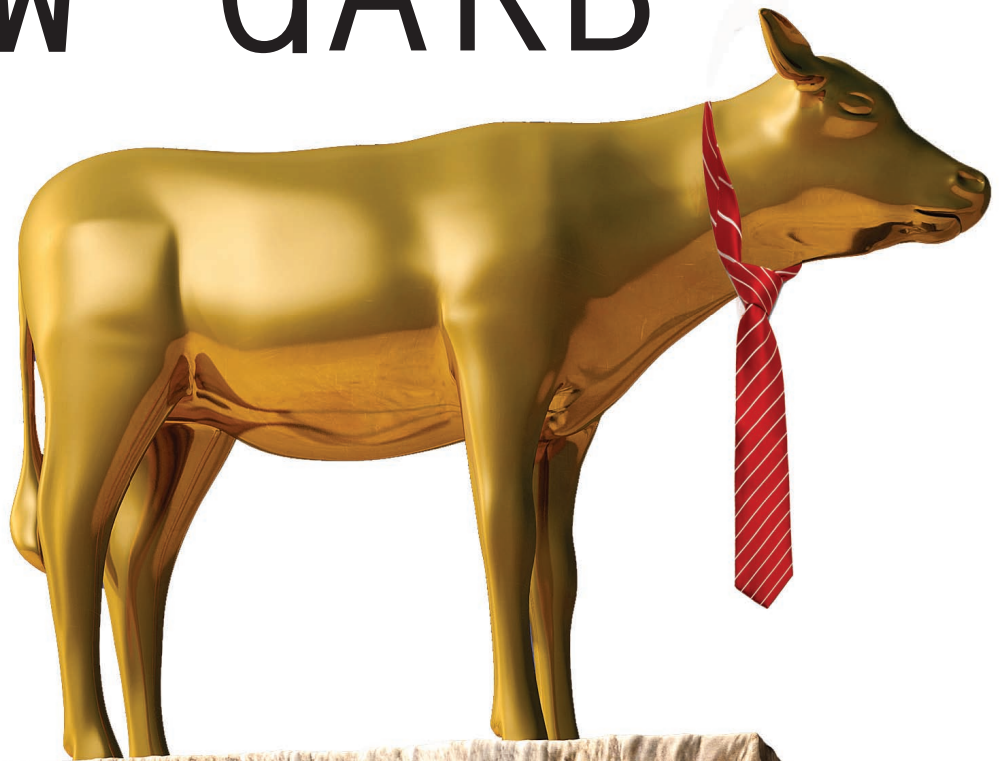
¹⁶ Mourkogiannis also highlights this theme, calling it "altruism," one of his four basic core purposes. He suggests "Excellence" and "Heroism" as the third and fourth core purposes undergirding great companies. There is no single way to describe our topic but, in our view, excellence and heroism are more about how we approach "creating good and useful products and services" and "fixing broken things and helping hurting people" (the "two great themes") than separate thematic purposes. See *Purpose: The Starting Point of Great Companies*, pp. 32-37.

¹⁷ David Packard, *The HP Way* (San Francisco: Harper Business, 1995), p. 127.

¹⁸ Charles O'Reilly and Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Hidden Value: How Great Companies Achieve Extraordinary Results With Ordinary People* (Harvard, 2000), p. 3.

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785).

OLD GOD, NEW GARB



BY
TIM WIENHOLD

Preachers tell us that America has increasingly traded in Christianity for irreligion — meaning more and more of us have abandoned religious faith altogether. I beg to differ. America remains deeply religious. Rather than renouncing reverent devotion, we have, in fact, ratcheted up our reverence to record levels. But we have thrown over one God for another. We have elevated a new deity, one more to our liking. Or to be more precise, we have elevated a very old deity, tricked out in modern garb.

Worshipping a false god is idolatry, of course — the besetting sin and recurring failure of humankind. But here's what's surprising. This particular idolatry is being practiced not merely by non-believers. Instead, this idolatry has been embraced by many devout Christians, and is especially prevalent among Christian business people and investors. The new god to which (much of) America is enthralled? You've probably guessed — it's the Free Market.

Just to be clear, as a long-time Christian business person I find much to like in free market capitalism. I believe Scripture does as well. But idolatry is something different.

In his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller instructs that idol worship occurs when “the human heart takes good things . . . and turns them into ultimate things.”¹ As examples, Keller says we can make idols of such perfectly good things as children and family, career achievement, financial success, a romantic relationship, peer approval, social standing, personal beauty . . . even success at Christian ministry. He adds:

What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give . . . Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God.²

We engage in idolatry, therefore, whenever we look to something other than God to give us what we most deeply desire. Which means idolatry gestates in the deep recesses of the human heart and, like cancer, may long go undetected. We may, for example, accept in our head the idea that true fulfillment comes from God. But if our heart believes there can be no real happiness without a romantic partner . . . or career success . . . or some other must-have . . . then that is idolatry. Similarly, we may tell ourselves that true security can be found only in God. But if our heart actually believes our security requires a seven-figure investment portfolio (or

eight, or nine), that also is idolatry. In every case, though, there is a telltale sign — we elevate human wisdom over divine as we pursue the object of our heart's devotion.

All of which means it is perfectly appropriate to believe the free market delivers compelling benefits. I certainly do. And to believe it offers real advantages over socialism or communism. No idolatry there. But our most ardent free market advocates find such claims much too tame. Over and over, conservative economists, politicians, and business people assert that only an unfettered free market can solve our myriad problems and usher us into a better and brighter future - not God, but the free market, and that's idolatry, even when espoused by seemingly devout believers. Unfortunately, such idolatry blinds its disciples to capitalism's weaknesses, and blinds them as well to Scripture's better and more balanced economic counsel.

Free Market Crusaders

David Barton, named in 2005 by *Time Magazine* as one of America's 25 most influential evangelicals, and called the most important man in America by Glenn Beck, provides a representative case in point. Barton is a former Christian school principal and ordained minister. He served as vice chairman of the Texas GOP for nearly 10 years and in 2012 was a member of the RNC's Platform Committee. In the 2016 campaign cycle Barton heads a super PAC that supported Ted Cruz for president. He is also a prolific author and speaker, primarily regarding his views about America's founding as a Christian nation and Scripture's



endorsement of a libertarian, laissez-faire understanding of free-market economics.

Barton argues the Bible makes clear that government “certainly has no right to tell an employer what to pay an employee, including with a so-called minimum wage.”³ He believes the Bible is pointedly opposed to capital gains taxes, estate taxes, and progressive income taxes. More broadly, his view is that the free enterprise system, as revealed in Scripture, is one in which “prices and wages are determined by unrestricted competition between businesses, *without government regulation*.”⁴ In fact, he views any policies that penalize productivity and profits as “completely unbiblical.”⁵ And in one of his WallBuilders broadcasts in January 2011, he offered the sweeping observation that “Money does not belong to the government, it belongs to individuals, and to steal money from individuals through whatever government spending program is taking private property, and you’re not supposed to do that.”⁶

Robert A. Sirico shares Barton’s devotion to unfettered free market capitalism, and his confidence that Scripture is similarly devoted — but little else. Barton is a life-long evangelical, and Sirico has been a catholic priest since 1989. Barton has been castigated as a “quack historian,”⁷ even by fellow evangelicals. Fr. Sirico is generally viewed as a serious, thoughtful scholar. He is the cofounder and head of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. His 2013 book, *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy*, is likely the best contemporary moral/biblical argument for unfettered free markets.

There is, in fact, plenty to like in Sirico’s case for free markets. For instance:

Businesses don’t thrive by robbing others. They are successful when they have the foresight to anticipate the wants and needs of others and provide goods and services to customers at prices they are willing to pay . . . It may be an over-used slogan, but it’s true: the market is a “win-win” proposition. It provides incentives for people to serve each other.⁸

He is similarly on target when he refers to jobs as “the best anti-poverty program.”⁹ As a long-time Christian business person, I especially appreciate his willingness to critique the anti-business bias of many religious leaders and clergy. He pointedly calls them out for their instinctive disdain toward business and profit and says they “simply do not have the faintest notion of the vital role of ethical business enterprise and entrepreneurial creativity for a flourishing economy that can lift people out of poverty.”¹⁰

Yet our subject is not whether free markets are a good thing, but rather that idealizing free markets is an idolatry just as dangerous and unbiblical as any other. As with Barton, Fr. Sirico glorifies the free market and demonizes virtually any government intrusion. Sirico believes

that the right to own property is the essential linchpin for all other individual rights, arguing that other human rights “tend to be eroded wherever property rights are violated.”¹¹ This leads Sirico to conclude that “The best thing that politicians can do in regard to property is to . . . protect people from having their belongings unjustly confiscated.”¹² By which he means, of course, confiscated by the government.

It follows for Sirico that a whole host of government efforts focused on the common good are, in fact, violations against the sacrosanct right to own private property (really the right of businesses and individuals to hold onto their money). Prominent among such violations are measures to protect the environment at cost to business profits: “Efforts to protect the environment that jeopardize economic progress should be viewed with skepticism.”¹³ He considers the Endangered Species Act to be an attack on private property rights. In fact, he is convinced that the real solution to environmental degradation is fuller protection and enforcement of private property rights. Notably, he fails to address how that would actually fix such ‘tragedy of the commons’ environmental issues as air and ocean pollution.

A similar logic has Sirico opposing Medicare because he considers the taxation for its funding an unjust taking of private property wealth. Besides which he says there is no need for Medicare since private insurance companies can perform the same function. He takes an equally rosy view when it comes to free market relationships between employer and employee — assuring that their relationship “is not one of exploitation, as Marx would have it, but of mutual benefit.” He explains:

If a society has extended economic freedom to all of its citizens, then business owners will be competing with a host of other enterprises and opportunities in their efforts to attract and retain employees. The entrepreneur and future employee voluntarily arrive at a mutually agreeable arrangement, and the result is that social bond known as the employer-employee relationship.¹⁴

This may roughly approximate what it’s like to be an MIT-trained computer geek looking to get hired by Apple or Goldman Sachs. I doubt, though, that most cashiers at Walmart or McDonald’s believe his description depicts their situation.

Free Market Critics

In “The Market as God,” his oft-discussed essay in *The Atlantic*, prominent theologian Harvey Cox marvels at the degree to which America has replaced biblical theology with business theology:

At the apex of any theological system, of course, is its doctrine of God. In the new theology this celestial pinnacle is occupied by The Market, which I capitalize to signify both the mystery that enshrouds it and the reverence it inspires in business folk . . . Such is the grip of current orthodoxy that to question the omniscience of The Market is to question the inscrutable wisdom of Providence.¹⁵

He then comments rather pointedly on The Market as a serious — and sinister — rival to other religions:

I am beginning to think that for all the religions of the world, however they may differ from one another, the religion of The Market has become the most formidable rival, the more so because it is rarely recognized as a religion. The traditional religions and the religion of the global market, as we have seen, hold radically different views of nature. In Christianity and Judaism, for example, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein.” The Creator appoints human beings as stewards and gardeners but, as it were, retains title to the earth. Other faiths have similar ideas. In the Market religion, however, human beings, more particularly those with money, own anything they buy and — within certain limits — can dispose of anything as they choose.¹⁶

More recently, the ‘profits over people’ bias of Market religion has drawn sharp criticism from another quarter of Christendom. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), the first major apostolic exhortation of his papacy, wrote that “We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose.”¹⁷ He goes on to make clear that he does not oppose capitalism per se, acknowledging its many benefits. But Francis opposes its deification, especially as evident in the oft-voiced business view that government should not be allowed to interfere with The Market:

They [proponents of unfettered free markets] reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules... In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before

the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.¹⁸

The Pope was equally critical of the increasingly lop-sided distribution of rewards under the current economic system. “While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few.”¹⁹ He added:

[S]ome people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naive trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile the excluded are still waiting.²⁰

In a subsequent speech in Bolivia, Francis reiterated his call for economic justice. “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment.”²¹

Pope Francis, Harvey Cox, Robert Sirico, David Barton — all believers, yet espousing rather different views about free market capitalism. How, then, should we distinguish a biblically-grounded appreciation of capitalism from a dangerous and unbiblical idolization? There are three key aspects to that answer.

Business vs. Government

Free market crusaders like Barton and Sirico believe an unfettered market necessarily delivers optimal economic outcomes — meaning output is maximized and people are appropriately rewarded for their economic contributions (or lack thereof). They believe, in turn, that governmental efforts to regulate and tax business activities impede the market in accomplishing its beneficial outcomes. As a result, free market disciples harbor a deep antipathy to any government activity that impinges on business, or taxes its rewards. Today much of the business community — Christians included — shares this view, as does the conservative political establishment.

Scripture, however, has a distinctly different posture. The Apostle Paul commands:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves . . . For the one in

authority is God's servant for your good . . . This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants. (Romans 13:1-2, 4a, 6a NIV)

The Apostle Peter offers similar counsel:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right . . . Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2: 13-14, 17 NIV)

Those advocating for an unfettered, laissez-faire free market are doing so, therefore, in direct opposition to

This self-reinforcing wealth-creation dynamic lies at the heart of business power and significance.

But it is also its Achilles' heel. The ability to create wealth provides a constant temptation to greed, and to the dangerous behaviors greed compels. So we regularly read about business misbehavior driven by a thirst for greater profits - not just a little bit of misbehavior, but a lot.

As I write this piece, Goldman Sachs has just agreed to pay over \$5 billion in fines for fraudulently peddling CDOs it knew to be chockfull of subprime mortgages virtually certain to fail. Coupled with similar behavior by other investment banks, the resulting financial meltdown cost over 7 million Americans their jobs, and millions more their homes. A few months back, Volkswagen was caught in a massive cheating scheme that illegally added nearly a million tons of nitrogen oxides to our atmosphere annu-

Unfortunately capitalism, left to its own devices, is much better at wealth creation than at God-pleasing wealth deployment. It seeks to maximize economic output, but is indifferent if its rewards go only to a fortunate few. For God, the determined intent is just the opposite: provision and prosperity for everyone.

Scripture. Moreover, elevating The Market above the authority divinely delegated to government and, even worse, above the counsel and authority of Scripture, enthrones a false god. It causes us to miss the true God's good reasons for placing business under rather than above the authority of government. Of those, two are paramount.

Business Excess

Our greatest strength is (very often) our greatest weakness. This is certainly true for business. The great strength of business is that it brings all sorts of compelling products and services to the world *and in the process creates wealth (profit)*. This ability to create wealth sets business apart from every other arena of human endeavor. And it conveys great power. It gives business the unique capacity to fund its own growth, in turn creating still more wealth — what business people refer to as the ability to scale.

ally — that's the stuff that creates smog and acid rain and acute respiratory infections and premature deaths. Also it hasn't been long since congressional hearings spotlighted that General Motors kept secret, *and kept installing*, for more than a decade a defective ignition switch it knew to be causing fatal accidents. Unfortunately, the list goes on and on.

Jeff Van Duzer observes in his book, *Why Business Matters to God*, that "... there is an even deeper reason that Christians in business should embrace a more healthy partnership with government. Put simply, left to its own devices, business will fail. It simply lacks the internal mechanisms needed to keep it away from destructive excesses."²²

A deeply chagrined Alan Greenspan came to this very conclusion following the financial meltdown. Several years earlier, Greenspan as head of the Federal Reserve had resisted efforts to bring the booming CDO market under

regulatory control. He argued that market competition would effectively police investment bank behavior. Testifying before Congress in October, 2008, Greenspan admitted that “I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interest of organizations, specifically banks and others, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms.”²³ Translation: ‘I am stunned to realize that senior management greed could be so egregious as to bring their own institutions to the point of failure, while wiping out hundreds of millions of dollars in shareholder equity.’ He expressed shock that this “central pillar to market competition”²⁴ (i.e., the belief that the market effectively self-regulates) had proven false.

One reason God places business under the authority of government is, therefore, to protect it — *and all the rest of us* — from destructive behaviors driven by a too-zealous pursuit of profit. Advocates for an unfettered market misunderstand this to their peril . . . and ours.

Wealth Creation . . . for the Common Good

Capitalism is great at wealth creation. Provided that wealth is not created in ways that are harmful, God is ‘thumbs up’ on (this key aspect of) capitalism. But God never sees wealth creation as an appropriate end in itself. Rather, he sees it as contributing to what he really cares about — full human flourishing. This is what the Old Testament calls *shalom*, and what Jesus was referring to when he said that he had come to bring abundant life (John 10:10). God cares about wealth creation, therefore, not for its own sake, but as a means to broad prosperity, including appropriate provision for the poor. From God’s perspective, wealth creation that fails this objective fails badly.

Unfortunately capitalism, left to its own devices, is much better at wealth creation than at God-pleasing wealth deployment. It seeks to maximize economic output, but is indifferent if its rewards go only to a fortunate few. For God, the determined intent is just the opposite: provision and prosperity for everyone. This is the other key reason why God gives government authority over business — he expects government to ensure not only that the *products* and *practices* of business serve the common good, but that its *rewards* do as well. In a world where the top 1% own more of the world’s wealth than does the other 99%, it’s not hard to guess how God views the current distribution of capitalism’s rewards.

Ardent free-market devotees appropriately appreciate capitalism’s ability to create wealth. Yet in arguing that The Market is sacrosanct, that it should operate above the authority divinely delegated to government for the common good, they set themselves against the clear counsel

of Scripture. In turn, they miss the beauty of Scripture’s more balanced economic wisdom — a wisdom we can summarize in three key principles:

Principle 1: It is always legitimate, even imperative, to ask how to increase the wealth and prosperity of an organization, a community, or a society.

Principle 2: It is always legitimate, even imperative, to ask how economic wealth and rewards can be distributed more equitably (fairly).

Principle 3: It is never legitimate to ask one question without the other.

Capitalism has a laser focus on Principle 1. It cares greatly about maximizing production, and very little about equitable distribution. Anti-capitalists tend to concentrate narrowly on Principle 2. They concern themselves with equitable distribution, but offer naive and inefficient answers to the need for production. God’s view, however, is that Principle 3 is essential. He does not favor the selfish materialism, the tendency to concentrate wealth, and the disregard for the poor, that so often come part and parcel with capitalism. Neither does he favor the naiveté and inefficiency that seem inextricably infused in anti-capitalism (socialism, communism). Instead, he cares greatly, and equally, about wealth creation and wealth distribution.

This duality is embodied in a passage of great significance for business, Deuteronomy 8:17-18, especially in these two key clauses: “*...it is he [God] who gives you the ability to create wealth, and so confirms his covenant...*” Here God, through Moses, marries the unique wealth-creating dynamic of business to the foundational ‘blessed to be a blessing’ dynamic of his covenants, and his kingdom. In other words, God unites the production of wealth with its broad deployment for blessing . . . because he knows that both are required to bring about the widespread provision and prosperity he intends.

Any economic system that fails to pursue both these objectives eventually proves toxic. This is what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had in mind when he said, “Untouched by the breath of God, unrestricted by human conscience, both capitalism and socialism are repulsive.”²⁵

To idealize The Market because of a too-narrow preoccupation with wealth creation is not just idolatry. Nor is it simply a failure to grasp the full economic wisdom of Scripture. Rather, as Pope Francis observes, it is to worship in modern garb the ancient deity Mammon. To which Jesus offers a pointed directive (Matthew 6:24, NIV): “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

We are forewarned.

Notes

- ¹ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York, NY: Dutton), xiv
- ² *Ibid.*, xvii
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About the Author



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CHRISTIAN LEADERS ON FAITH AND WORK:

AN EMPIRICAL INQUIRY

BY HALLQVIST ALBERTSON



Abstract

A survey of a small group of Christian CEOs was employed to examine the meaning and implications of the First Commandment in the modern marketplace. The study illustrates the difficulties for business leaders to integrate faith in everyday business practices. The paper offers some practical insights for Christian business leaders who desire to integrate their faith at work but must battle competing interests, even "idolatry" in the secular business environment.

Introduction

George, an older man, was a successful Christian businessman who wanted to mentor people in life, business, and the Christian faith. He was self-made, amassing a net worth of hundreds of millions of dollars. He lived modestly in a home that he had purchased forty years earlier; drove stock Fords for a decade before trading them in; gave generously of his time to all who asked and to some who did not, and spent most of his wealth during his lifetime helping his church and other Kingdom-enriching causes. In most respects, George was a modern-day exemplar of how the Christian businessperson should live. One thing curious about George, however, was that he would often proclaim: “Don’t do business with Christians. They are idolaters!”

Over the last several decades as I have studied faith and business as both a practitioner and an academic, George’s admonitions have grown faint in my thoughts, being replaced by more practical ideas of faith-work integration in the marketplace — that is, until recently, when I read Kyle Idleman’s *Gods at War*.¹ Idleman’s thesis is that idolatry is very much alive today in the post-modern era. While humans, at least in the modern day West, rarely make statues or other images and bow down to them, we do elevate people, ideas, and objects to the place of God in our lives. This paper is an attempt to probe further the meaning and implications of “idolaters,” as brought forth by Idleman and George, in the context of the First Commandment and the twenty-first century marketplace.

Biblical View of Work

The earliest biblical reference to work appears in Genesis 1:1, in which God began the work of creating the heavens and the earth. This reference concludes in Genesis 2:2 with completion of that work on the seventh day, when God rested.

The biblical narrative continues the concept of work by stating that Adam had a vocation before the Fall: he was a worker in and keeper of the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Adam’s task is described by the Hebrew word *Avodah*, used elsewhere in the Old Testament over one hundred times to mean “work and worship.”² Therefore, from the beginning of biblical history, human vocational endeavors correlate with worshipping God.

Various vocations are recorded in the New Testament as well. Mark 6:3 reports that Jesus’s vocation was that of a carpenter. Joseph, and possibly also Mary, worked as a tradesperson (Matt 13:55). Matthew 4:18 calls Andrew and Peter fishermen. Acts 9 tells that Dorcas made clothing, while Lydia was a trader in purple cloth (Acts 16:14). Acts 18:3 indicates that Paul was a tentmaker. The biblical text stresses the importance of working well, as if the worker were working for God (Col 3:23-24; Eph 6:7).

God uses work as part of his plan to spread the gospel message throughout history. Although Christianity spread initially through dedicated evangelists and missionaries, it also spread organically through trade and commerce, as people working in business vocations encountered their non-Christian business partners and shared the faith in that process.³ Prophetically, Isaiah 65:22-23a tells us that in the New Jerusalem we will worship God through our work and enjoy the fruit of our labor.

Work is also used biblically to give cautionary tales against idolatry. For example, in Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells the story of what has often been called “The Rich Fool.” It could equally as accurately be called “The Doom of the Materialist.” In the text, Jesus warns about the dangers of a life lived without God - a life that worships self, work, and personal comfort. The parable’s foolish main character lived a life as if God did not exist. When he perished, he left all his worldly accomplishments behind. Work had become his idol.⁴

In accordance with this theme, Colossians 3:5 calls greed idolatry. Greed causes us to trust in things rather than in the God who gave us those things. The Epistle to the Romans was written to a Christian audience and the Acts of the Apostles was written to non-Christians. Wright asserts that Romans portrays idolatry as rebellion against God and spawning wickedness, while Acts portrays idolatry simply as ignorance and valueless.⁵ This certainly implies that God will judge believers more harshly than non-believers on the issue of idolatry.

Consequently, it appears that from a biblical perspective, there is a link between work and serving God. Veith argues that Ephesians 2:10 expresses how the Christian worker is “God’s workman” and is to do “good works” in order to serve others, as commanded by Matthew 20:28.⁶ Sherman and Hendricks argue that God created work for five reasons, i.e., (1) serve humanity; (2) provide for humanity’s own material needs; (3) provide for the family’s needs; (4) create wealth to give to others; and (5) love God.⁷

Faith at Work: A Historical Survey

Sometime between the early New Testament period and the Reformation, the idea of vocation as secular work became subjugated to a calling in the Church in terms of honor and holiness.⁸ With the advent of the Reformation and the notion of the priesthood of all believers, both Martin Luther and John Calvin advocated for more intensive Scriptural education and training for persons in secular vocations, as well the adoption of theology in which secular work was once again viewed as equally important as clerical work.⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, the minister Charles M. Sheldon introduced the idea of, “What would Jesus do?” and suggested that this question should be considered in the context of the political, social, and

cultural changes occurring in America at the time, including in the workplace.¹⁰

In the early twentieth century, when Christianity was still the dominant religion in North America, it was considered inappropriate to pray or discuss faith at work.¹¹ This was often called the “Sunday-Monday gap.”¹² Yet many companies, particularly assembly line manufacturers on the East Coast, scheduled work hours for their employees so that they could attend a weekday Mass or special religious services without missing work.¹³

Beginning in the 1960s and continued into the nineties, a number of factors brought about the breakdown of the separation between faith and work.¹⁴ In this time period, literally hundreds of books were published that dealt with a biblical view of work.¹⁵

In the last fifteen years, there have been a plethora of books published on the subject of biblical work, faith and work, tent-making, and business as mission (BAM).¹⁶ The literature tends to be predictably formulaic, usually divided into four parts. The first part begins with an argument that business is an actual calling from God as much as, if not more than, a paid fulltime Christian ministry position.¹⁷ The second part is commonly a manifesto for collapsing the sacred and secular and living as Christians every day at work and not just on Sundays, truly applying beliefs in the marketplace.¹⁸ The third part usually includes a how-to guide for integrating faith and business, based on the author’s personal experiences in the marketplace.¹⁹ The texts often finish with glowing stories of individuals and companies who applied biblical principles to the marketplace, how they prospered and changed the world for Christ.²⁰

It is important to note that the idea of “integration of faith at work” potentially means different things to different people at different times and in different places. To some, integration of faith at work might mean praying before a meal. To others, it might mean personal evangelization in the workplace. To still others, it might mean pursuing Christ-like conduct in business transactions.²¹ For this paper what is important is whether the study participants tried to integrate their faith at work in some fashion, and not what that specifically meant to them.

We examine the following hypothesis in this essay: there would be a recognizable level of integration between a Christian business leader’s faith and praxis, and those who consciously attempt to integrate faith at work would demonstrate consistently proactive effort and success. In this study, a small survey was conducted to shed light on this hypothesis.

The Empirical Study

The study looked at the experiences of sixteen business leaders and CEOs.²² Four questions were administered in personal interviews.

1. “Do you try to integrate your faith at work?” – answer yes/no
2. “How successful do you think you are at integrating your faith at work?” - answer on a scale of zero to ten, with zero being the lowest and ten being the highest.
3. “Why are you not fully integrating your faith at work?” – answer open-ended
4. “What is the meaning of a God-centered enterprise?” - answer open-ended

A summary of the answers is provided in the box **The Survey**.

Observations

The response to the first question, in which all the respondents indicated that they do try to integrate their faith at work, is expected. Since these business leaders were all self-professed Christians and volunteered their time to help with this research, it would follow that they are conscious in their effort in integrating their faith at work, albeit to varying degrees of success.

It was a bit of a surprise to find that, in response to the second question, more respondents did not report a higher degree of success at the integration effort. It has been the author’s experience that people tend to overestimate their achievements in matters of faith, so the fact that only half of the interviewees rated their success as at least 7 out of 10 (a “C” or better) is disappointing.

There could be a variety of explanations for this result. For example, because the respondents were leaders who regularly make difficult judgments on performance, they might be hyper-self-critical. Another possible (if ironic) explanation may be related to their personal faith. These individuals may presumably see themselves, as the Bible asserts: “humans as sinners.” This perspective echoes Paul when he wrote “What a wretched man I am!” (Rom 7:24 NIV). In light of the answers from the following open-ended questions, the first explanation is perhaps more likely (see discussion below)

Questions three and four were the most interesting with regards to the intent of this research: exploring the meaning and implications of the First Commandment in the context of the twenty-first century marketplace.

Seven of the sixteen (43%) interviewees reported that they are not currently fully integrating their faith at work because of “competitive” reasons, meaning they feel they would be at a competitive disadvantage by integrating their faith more fully. Another four (25%) reported that they do not integrate their faith and work because of legal and/or regulatory concerns. Two of the sixteen (13%) were ideologically opposed to integrating faith and work. They believe in the Sunday-Monday gap, in which the faith one practices on Sunday at church should not influence what they do in the office on Monday. Two more (13%) reported being afraid that integrating their faith and

THE SURVEY

Sixteen owner/chief executive officers of businesses encompassing different industries and firm sizes were interviewed for this study during the period Jan. 5-22, 2016. Subjects were selected based on personal relationship and referrals. The interviews were administered either in person, via telephone, Skype or FaceTime, and in a manner consistent with the National Institute of Health's "Human Research Protection Program."

The interviewees represent firm sizes defined as: (1) Sole Proprietorship, (2) Small Business, with 50 or fewer employees; (3) Medium-sized Business, with 51 to 1,000 employees; and (4) Large-sized Business, with 1,001 or more employees. All firms represented are secular for-profit entities. BAM (Business-as-Mission) enterprises were purposely excluded from this research because BAM companies usually do not face the same competitive market forces as for-profit enterprises.

Four questions were administered:

1. "Do you try to integrate your faith at work?" (Yes/No)
2. "How successful do you think you are at integrating your faith at work?" (Scale from 0 to 10, the highest)
3. "Why are you not fully integrating your faith at work?" (Open-ended)
4. "What is the meaning of a God-centered enterprise?" (Open-ended)

INDUSTRY	FIRM SIZE	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Consulting	Sole	Yes	7	Competitive	Ethical Practices
Entertainment	Sole	Yes	5	Competitive	Quiet Evangelism
Financial Services	Sole	Yes	8	Competitive	Servant Leader
Technology	Sole	Yes	5	Financial	Ethical Practices
Basic Materials	Small	Yes	8	Competitive	Quiet Evangelism
Consumer Goods	Small	Yes	9	Competitive	Ethical Practices
Financial Services	Small	Yes	9	Legal	Profits to Charity
Technology	Small	Yes	4	Reputation	Ethical Practices
Consumer Goods	Med	Yes	10	Competitive	Evangelism
Entertainment	Med	Yes	6	Reputation	Ethical Practices
Industrial Goods	Med	Yes	6	Competitive	Servant Leader
Utilities	Med	Yes	2	Regulatory	Quiet Evangelism
Aerospace	Large	Yes	10	Legal	Ethical Practices
Financial Services	Large	Yes	4	Regulatory	Profits to Charity
Hospitality	Large	Yes	10	Ideological	Ethical Practices
Technology	Large	Yes	4	Ideological	Ethical Practices

work would hurt their reputation and that they would be thought of as the "type of Christians one sees on television and the movies," being mocked by mainstream culture, or as a "Bible-thumper." Finally, a single individual (6%) reported that he did not integrate his faith at work because of "financial" reasons.

In summary, a majority (88%) of the survey participants failed to integrate their faith at work because of fear: fear concerning competitive advantage, personal reputation, legal and regulatory ramifications, and financial consequences.

Fear is a powerful motivator and can be God-given. For example, if a child has ever touched a hot stove with her hand and been burnt, she is unlikely to repeat this behavior because of healthy fear. Mature Christians who succumb to fear of personal loss in contrary to the biblical narrative can fall into idolatry, however.²³

Mouw tells how, when he was President of Fuller Theological Seminary, had dispensed with pastoral and biblical niceties when terminating employees because he had to instead focus on the “legal considerations” of termination.²⁴ His fear over legal consequences overshadows proper conduct in accordance with biblical principles. When a Christian business professional operates out of fear, he is worshipping fear, rather than God.

Ethical behavior is important in business, but secular ethics is not necessarily biblical. Half of the respondents felt that a God-centered enterprise implies behaviors that are ethical. However, ethics is often perceived to be relative, meaning different things to different people. To the survey participants, the meaning encompasses concerns for the environment and creation care, providing employees with living wages and benefits, having integrity in paying bills and taxes on time, advocating for LGBT and civil rights, and giving back to the community. Two participants consider it important to give a portion of profits to charity and another two indicate that a God-centered enterprise means that they should be servant leaders, using their businesses to advance a higher cause generically defined as promoting human prosperity.

Three of the respondents also felt that a God-centered enterprise should involve “quiet evangelism,” which one of them defined as (mistakenly attributed to St. Francis of Assisi) “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.” Another considers “evangelism” as the use of the company’s resources to preach the gospel and fund missionaries.

The difficulty with the ethics-centric view for a God-centered enterprise is that ethics, without the grounding of a biblical worldview, is merely a human-construct based on secular values (see box **Biblical vs. Secular Business Ethics**). Dedicated pursuits of secular ethics could indeed lead to idolatrous practices.

The survey responses are handicapped by the preliminary nature of this study. To provide a better understanding of the reasons behind many of the interview responses, additional research is required, such as interviews with the subjects’ employees and colleagues to determine if the

interviewees’ valuation of their abilities align with others’ perceptions.

Idolatry in the Marketplace – Further Thoughts

This study brings forth some thoughts on how business professionals might attempt to reconcile God’s and their business priorities.

Resist the Idol of Fear

As human beings, we all have different degrees of pride, envy, jealousy, and greed in our hearts. We desire success. We want to be liked. We are willing to tell a “white lie” if it seals the deal, makes things go smoother, or reduces workplace drama. The survey indicates most of us also worship an idol called fear; this is an idol bigger than the 420-foot Spring Temple Buddha in China that people physically bow to in worship.²⁵ Christian businesspeople, including myself, often bow to and worship fear, rather than worshipping the God of the Bible and his admonition to trust him and not fear (Pslm 56:3-4; Matt 6:33; 2 Cor 3:4-6; 1 Tim 6:17).

Had the Ten Commandments begun just with moral teachings, designed to regulate human behavior toward one and another, such as do not lie, steal, or commit adultery, that text would not be significantly different than the moral teachings found in other religions, such as the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, the Smritis of Hinduism, and the Adj Granth of Sikhism. But these commandments begin with a prohibition of other gods before God. One could obey all the other nine commandments meticulously, yet still betray God’s covenant by having other gods at heart.²⁶

The First Commandment, therefore, is just that: the primary commandment. It is not a suggestion, a good idea, or a mere philosophical construct. It is an absolute. We must repent from worshipping these other gods in the marketplace in order to exhibit obedience to the First Commandment. And we need to remember that repentance is more than just saying we are sorry for worshipping idols; repentance involves a change in current and future behavior.

Integration Follows Mission

Integration follows a clearly defined mission. Christian business professionals need to define their concept of

Mature Christians who succumb to fear of personal loss in contrary to the biblical narrative can fall into idolatry.

mission in order to clarify what God-centered enterprise actually means.

Charles Van Engen sees mission in terms of “sentness,” sending the people of God to intentionally cross barriers from church to non-church, faith to non-faith, to proclaim by word and deed the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.²⁷ We see this in Ephesians 4:11, in which Paul writes about unity in the body. The apostles had a different mission than the prophets. Christian business professionals have a different mission than each other, but that each does have a mission.

Neill asserts that “If everything is mission, then nothing is mission.”²⁸ When Neill made this statement nearly fifty years ago, the problem he saw in the church was that mission was being defined so broadly that it was increasingly difficult to offer focus. How one perceives mission dictates how one engages in mission.

For example, historically, the church has spoken of God the Father sending the Son, and the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit.²⁹ In 1934, Karl Hartenstein, a German missiologist, coined the term *Missio Dei* based on the work of Karl Barth and his perception of a different movement: one of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit together sending the Church.³⁰ Others see mission as just “followers of Jesus...seeking harmony by modeling their lives after his.”³¹ And then there are those who hold that Christian mission is “to know Christ and to make him known.”³²

In business how Christian business professionals perceive mission will dictate their actions in the marketplace. If, for example, mission means making Christ known to the nations, then the business leader will ensure that the business operations are set up for that purpose. This model would be different than that of a business whose mission was to make as much money as possible in order to donate a percentage of profits to charity, or if mission was considered to be synonymous with ecological creation care. And all of these approaches would likewise be different from mission as increasing shareholder value. It is not possible to begin the process of integrating faith at work until one knows what the mission is.

God’s Way Is Also Good Business

Christians need to break the conventional wisdom that the world’s ways of doing business are more “successful” or “better” than God’s ways. We tend to believe a lie

that being Christian or applying biblical principles in the marketplace is somehow bad for business. Research has shown that ethical business conduct can be a source of competitive advantage because it reduces transaction costs of litigation through its trust-building activities and social capital preservation.³³ As Christians in the marketplace, modeling biblical ethical behavior could be good for business.

A lady I know is a supplier to the entertainment industry. She applies biblical principles diligently in her personal and professional lives. While she is honest, trustworthy, reliable, competent, and in high demand, she declines lucrative contracts if the project mocks God, is violent, pornographic, or profane, or in some other way violates what she sees as redemptive activity. One would think that this

woman would have difficulty surviving professionally in Hollywood. In fact, the opposite is true; she is so sought-after that she raised her rates several times last year because she had too much work!

This is the case as well, in examples like Arthur Guinness and his mission to

create a highly successful beer business that benefits the kingdom.³⁴ More recently, the Christian business leaders at Tyson Foods,³⁵ Aflac,³⁶ and Marriott³⁷ enjoy successful careers while striving to follow the biblical narrative in the marketplace.

Let Our Faith Shine

We need to apply our faith more in our spheres of influence, whether as an entry-level intern or a seasoned CEO. We must actively trust God, his promises, and his word by putting away the idols, especially the idol of fear, and worshipping him alone in the marketplace. Business leaders need to make it easier for their employees, coworkers, bosses, friends, and family members to put away idols as well. By word and deeds, they should exhibit God-fearing behaviors.

God is always faithful, and he will not let us down if we honor him as our first priority in the marketplace. In doing so, we will see successes in business, in life, and be a living testimony to others about God’s faithfulness.

Conclusion

In many respects, this research invites more questions than it provides answers. However, it shows many Christian professionals do desire to live integrated and holistic

Christian business professionals need to define their concept of mission in order to clarify what God-centered enterprise actually means.

Biblical vs. Secular Business Ethics

Business ethics are defined as “a set of [moral principles relating to business principles] conceived of as forming a code of conduct in business.”³⁸ The idea that business ethics even exists is not universally agreed upon. For example, John C. Maxwell, writing from a biblical perspective, argues that there is no such thing as business ethics, only personal ethics.³⁹ Peter F. Drucker, writing from a secular perspective, arrives at the same conclusion and asserts that there is only one set of behavior that applies to business and humanity alike.⁴⁰

The following table attempts to lay out some commonly recognized contrasts between business ethics from a biblical (taken from Alexander Hill) and from a secular (taken from Andrew Crane & Dirk Matten) viewpoint:

	BIBLICAL BUSINESS ETHICS	SECULAR BUSINESS ETHICS
Focus	Study of “shoulds” (absolutes) based on biblical values	Study of “rights and wrongs” based largely on existing laws, where answers to many morally contestable issues are equivocal
Source	Biblical theology; the study of God’s character	Ethical theories – (humanistic) rules and principles that determine right and wrong for a given situation.
Basis	Holiness, justice and love	Varies – Absolutism where right and wrong are objective qualities that can be rationally determined; Relativism where there are no universal rights and wrongs; Other considerations - character and integrity; relationships and responsibility; emotional and moral impulse towards others, etc.
Drivers	Holiness – zeal for God, purity, accountability, and humility Justice – reciprocal rights and duties for members of business community; anchor of order Love - empathy, mercy, and sacrifice; cements the virtues of holiness and justice in relationship.	Morality is a social phenomenon based on harm and benefit Goal of business ethics is to instill decision makers with knowledge of the different moralities that they are likely to be faced with, in order to make better business decisions
Process	A balanced approach using all three drivers, averting harsh or legalistic actions	A four-stage model – recognize a moral issue; determine a moral judgment about the issue; applies normative theories; act on the proper judgment.

Sources: Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (IVP, 2008) and Andrew Crane & Dirk Matten, *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

As Hill would argue, in order to have biblical business ethics in the marketplace Christians must “behave in a manner consistent with God’s character.”⁴¹ Therefore, character affirming behaviors such as telling the truth, keeping promises, making restitution, respecting legitimate governmental authority, and valuing the rights of others would be good starts. Ultimately, the challenge is to know God’s character well enough so that we can correctly apply it in our lives in general, and the marketplace in particular.

lives. It also appears to confirm that it is easier for the Christian business professional to follow the ways of the world in the marketplace, as it seems to offer more “success” than following God’s way as revealed in the Bible.

The First Commandment is unambiguous: “And God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:1-3 NIV).

About the Author



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This commandment is equally relevant for the twenty-first century marketplace as it was for the ancient Israelites. When we put fear or success or secular concerns in a place of more importance than our worship of God of the Bible, we commit idolatry. The challenges of the First Commandment offers great opportunities for business professionals to lead as faithful witnesses to God’s wisdom and truth.

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¹⁴ Miller, *God at Work*, 1499-1546.

¹⁵ Some examples: William Diehl, *Christianity and Real Life* (Fortress, 1976); Richard Mouw, *Called to Holy Worldliness* (Fortress, 1980); Wally Armbruster, *Let Me Out! I’m a Prisoner in a Stained-Glass Jail* (Multnomah, 1985); Doug Sherman, *Your Work Matters to God* (NavPress, 1987); Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford, 1991); William Diehl, *The Monday Connection: A Spirituality of Competence, Affirmation, and Support in the Workplace* (Wipf & Stock, 1991); Mark Greene, *Thank God It’s Monday: Ministry in the Workplace* (Scripture Union, 1994); Max Stackhouse, et.al. (eds), *On Moral Business: Classical and Contemporary Resources for Ethics in Economic Life* (Eerdmans, 1995); James Childs, *Ethics in Business: Faith at Work* (Fortress, 1995); Thomas Smith, *God on the Job: Finding God Who Waits at Work* (Paulist Press, 1995); William Pollard, *The Soul of the Firm* (Zondervan, 1996); Michael Novak, *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life* (Free Press, 1996); Alan Cox and Julie Liesse, *Redefining the Corporate Soul: Linking Purpose and People* (Irwin, 1996); and Stephen Graves and Thomas Addington, *The Cornerstones for Life at Work* (B&H Publishing, 1997).

¹⁶ Some examples: Laura Nash & Ken Blanchard, *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life, a Guide to Reflection* (Jossey-Bass, 2001); Michael Budde & Robert Brimlow, *Christianity, Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church* (Brazos Press, 2002); Thierry

Pauchant, *Ethics and Spirituality at Work: Hopes and Pitfalls of the Search for Meaning in Organizations* (Praeger, 2002); Wayne Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible's Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business* (Crossway, 2003); John Maxwell, *Life@Work: Marketplace Success for People of Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 2005); Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (IVP Academic, 2010); Mark Russell, *The Missional Entrepreneur* (New Hope Pub., 2009); and Steven Rundle & Tom Steffen, *Great Commission Companies* (IVP, 2011).

¹⁷ See, for example: Thomas Addington & Stephen Graves, *A Case for Calling* (Life@work) (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), and Gary Badcock, *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁸ See, for example: William Diehl, *The Monday Connection: A Spirituality of Competence, Affirmation, and Support in the Workplace* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), and Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

¹⁹ See, for example: Ken Eldred, *The Integrated Life: Experience the Powerful Advantage of Integrating your Faith and Work* (Montrose, CO: Manna Ventures, 2010), and Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

²⁰ See, for example: William Goheen, *The Galtronics Story* (Portland, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), and Jeri Little, *Merchant to Romania: Business as Missions in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (Leominster, MA: Day One, 2009).

²¹ See Michael Cafferky, "Religious Beliefs and Models of Faith Integration at Work," KnowledgeExchange @ Southern, accessed at http://knowledge.e.southern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=facworks_bus, for a preliminary empirical inquiry on this subject.

²² While it might appear difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from this research with such a small sample size, current anthropological research methodologies indicate that validity begins at twelve subjects and is best between twelve and twenty interviews for qualitative research. See Bernard, H. Russell, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2011).

²³ Idolatry can take many forms. The biblical narrative discusses idol worship, worshiping a false god instead of the God of the Bible (Galatians 4:8; 2 Kings 17:7-18). It also tells how some presume to know and worship the true God but at the same time worship one or more other gods (2 Kings 17:33; Isaiah 42:8, 48:11). In addition, the Bible explains that fear is indeed a form of idolatry (Matthew 10:28, 37; Proverbs 3:5). For additional biblical references on fear see, Deuteronomy 3:22, 31:6; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 23:4, 27:1, 34:4, 34:7, 55:22, 56:3, 91:1-16, 94:19, 118:6-7; Proverbs 12:25, 29:25; Isaiah 35:4, 41:10, 13-14, 43:1; Zephaniah 3:17; Matthew 6:34; Mark 4:39-40, 5:36, 6:50; Luke 12:22-26; John 14:27; Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 4:6-7; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Peter 3:14, 5:6-7; 1 John 4:18; and Revelation 1:17.

²⁴ Richard Mouw, "Leadership and Bearing Pain." *Faith & Leadership* (January 27, 2015). Accessed February 3, 2016. <http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/richard-j-mouw-leadership-and-bearing-pain?page=full&print=true>.

²⁵ <http://www.springtemplebuddha.com/statue>.

²⁶ See Bruce McCormack, *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008). Also John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003).

²⁷ David Hesselgrave, et.al. *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 27.

²⁸ Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London, Edinburgh House Press, 1959), 81.

²⁹ Tormod Engelsen, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* (92(4), 2003), 481-497.

³⁰ James Scherer, "Missiology as a Discipline and What It Includes." *Missiology: An International Review* (15(4), 1987), 507-522. The author personally rejects the idea that Missio Dei originated from the Trinitarian ideas of Karl Hartenstein and Karl Barth and instead argues that it originates in God's being itself; therefore, mission is not a question of secondary significance to the Church, but rather is, or should be, a core theology of it.

³¹ Peter Boyer, "Frat House for Jesus," *The New Yorker Magazine* (86(25), 2010), 52-61.

³² Leon van Rooyen, *Theology and Life: The Study of God* (Tampa, FL: Global Ministries and Relief, 2012), 7.

³³ Scott Rae & Kenman Wong, *Beyond Integrity: A Judeo-Christian Approach to Business Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

³⁴ Stephen Mansfield, *The Search for God and Guinness: A Biography of the Beer that Changed the World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009).

³⁵ Scott Kilman, "Tyson CEO Counts Chickens, Hatches Plan." *Wall Street Journal* (9/7/2010). Accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703431604575468041244773052>.

³⁶ Chuck Williams, "Sunday Interview with Aflac CEO Dan Amos." *Ledger Enquirer* (3/1/2014). Accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/news/local/article29322955.html>.

³⁷ "Stop over-taxing tourists, says Marriott boss Arne Sorenson as he eyes global growth," *Evening Standard* (4/12/2013). Accessed February 3, 2016, <http://www.standard.co.uk/business/markets/stop-over-taxing-tourists-says-marriott-boss-arne-sorenson-as-he-eyes-global-growth-8569958.html>.

³⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, "Business Ethics, n." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Accessed May 20, 2016. <http://0-www.oed.com.patris.apu.edu/view/Entry/25229?redirectedFrom=%22business+ethics%22#eid257220298>.

³⁹ John C. Maxwell, *There's No Such Thing as Business Ethics: There's Only One Rule for Making Decisions* (New York: Warner Books, 2003).

⁴⁰ Peter Drucker, "What is Business Ethics?" *The Public Interest* (63, 1981), 18-36.

⁴¹ Hill, *Just Business*, 14.



IN HUMANS WE TRUST

FROM THE IMAGE OF GOD TO “WE ARE GOD”: BABEL REVISITED

BY RICHARD J. MARTINEZ

Abstract

As was demonstrated at the Tower of Babel, God may choose to intervene in human affairs when humans treat their own knowledge and capabilities as a god, rather than choosing to give glory to the God who enables us. In this paper, we will see that the rise of human capabilities in the modern molecular economy creates the temptation for some to “marvel at an extraordinary participation in our own evolutionary futures.” How do we protect ourselves from revisiting Babel – and its consequences – in light of modern and future human technological and scientific development?

Introduction

What an awesome thing it is to consider who we are in the light of our Creator God. How humbling it is to picture ourselves as image bearers of Christ. The greatest wonder of all is that such a God willed some of His earthly creatures to be created in His own image. As heirs of God's image, it seems only natural that we should accept God's First Commandment as an obvious reminder of our place in His family:

"And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.'"
(Exodus 20: 1-3 NIV)

Yet we know that the human story includes continual attempts to elevate our own status to that which is rightly held only by God. This quest began with the first humans' attempt to claim knowledge that was reserved to God by decree (Gen. 3: 2-7), and continues to this day, as we shall see. Further, it seems that the particular temptation to usurp God's glory applies to some other created beings as well, as demonstrated by Lucifer's fall from grace (e.g. Ezekiel 28: 11-19; Isaiah 14: 12-15).

The temptation for the *created* to ignore the *Creator* and consider himself to be equal to God, or to BE God, has found a voice and a hope in all human generations. In the modern world, the worldview represented by Darwinian evolution and secular humanism has rejoiced in the technological and economic advances that have increasingly glorified human destiny.

This essay will explore briefly the historical struggle against adhering to the First Commandment, culminating in a discussion of the modern manifestation of that struggle. The essay first examines the meaning of the First Commandment. The discussion moves next to the meaning of the First Commandment in light of humans being created in the image of God. Next, historical examples of human self-glorification (self-worship) are discussed. Moving into the modern context, we will then look at the role that Darwinian evolutionary models might play in (falsely) elevating humans above God. Finally, we will discuss the modern economic developments that represent a culmination of humanistic thinking in terms of humanity's diminishing "need" for a god apart from themselves. All in all, in this paper I will explore the interesting evolution of human economic and business progress as it reflects a human quest toward godhood.

The First Commandment

As has been discussed by others in this issue, we recognize the seriousness of God's first commandment given to Moses as the foundation of God's intended relationship

with His chosen people. It is, in fact, the foundation of understanding creation. This commandment applies to all people at all times, and upon deep reflection seems an unnecessary command, given the logic of the premise. *Of course* we shall have no other gods besides the one and only God. *Of course* we can place no one and nothing before the God Who has created us!

The reminder in the Commandment as spoken to Moses refers to a specific audience: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). We know that, whether or not we are children of Israel, we are indeed children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), and each of us, through Christ, has been delivered from our own Egypt, our own bondage and slavery to sin. We are to have no other gods besides Jehovah, our Deliverer.

And yet, the experience of humanity has been one of frequent and continuous forays into forgetfulness, laying aside our humility, seeking to be the masters of our own lives and destiny. It has been a rebellious journey, a headlong run toward establishing the godhood of created man. It has been a sad journey from having been created *imago dei* to falsely claiming "we are God". Let us look next at the importance of the *imago dei* in understanding the First Commandment.

Imago dei

Given the hierarchical relationship between humans and the God who created them, it is still very clear from Scripture that humans have been created in the image of God, or *imago dei*. This is especially important for understanding the impact of modern economic evolution on the human condition and, ultimately, on the human understanding of God's role in human affairs. Simply put, the creation account in the Book of Genesis indicates that:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
(Genesis 1:26-7)

The image of God in man is a major theological premise of Christianity. While stated explicitly in Scripture only a very few times¹, the *imago dei* illustrates the fundamental parent-child relationship that exists between humans and their Creator. The *imago dei* provides a part of the rationale for a motive of redemption on God's part and an explanation for many of the characteristics observed in created man.² There are at least three different ways to view this aspect of revelation, including the substantive view, the relational view, and the functional view³ (see box **Three Perspectives on *Imago dei***).

Three Perspectives on *Imago dei*

Relational view

Man created in the image of God is held by some to mean that *the special relational capabilities that humans possess are especially reflective of the nature of our Creator*. In this relational view, God imparted at the time of creation only to those who bear His image the unique ability to relate to him in presence (pre-fall), thought, prayer, and communion. The relational view of the *imago dei* thus helps us to understand that God created us to be relational creatures, just as He is relational. And yet our most selfish tendency is to treat our relationships with others as an avenue to self-glorification.

Functional view

A second perspective holds that *God's image is reflected in the things that created man does, especially insofar as man lives and acts according to the divine mandate* (i.e. rule over other creatures, exercise dominion over the earth). Man reflects God's image to the extent that he obeys the very commands of God and exercises dominion over the rest of creation.⁴ Those who are called to marketplace ministries are especially attuned to this perspective as it gives meaning and purpose to their God-glorifying work. And yet, when our work becomes a means of self-glorification, or an idol in itself⁵, we cease to be co-laborers with God in the ongoing work of creation, as we will see was the case for the builders of the Tower of Babel.

Substantive view

This third perspective of the *imago dei* is particularly helpful in analyzing human nature. From this perspective, *we consider the various attributes or characteristics of God the Creator that are reflected in the human creature*. While few would consider the *physical* make-up of humans to reflect God's own manifestation, humans are more likely to reflect the psychological and spiritual image of their creator.⁶ Among these divinely-imparted attributes are a sense of morality, fairness or justice; creativity and innovativeness; reason, intelligence and rationality; efficiency, order, and stewardship; and even love.⁷

The great problem is that, having been created in the image of God, fallen, sinful humans corrupt this image every day. Our relationships – with God, with others, even with ourselves – do not reflect God's image and expectations. Our work and vocations are aimed more at our own glory than at God's glory. Our characteristics reflect more our own self-centeredness than God's image. It is this *imago dei* that God has set about to restore through the redemptive work of Christ. Along the way, however, the human assault on the image of God continues, as in the example of the Tower of Babel. The curious and critical biblical account of the Tower of Babel helps us to see the connection between human work, the image of God, and humans' continuing quest to set themselves up beside/before God, contrary to the First Commandment.

Tower of Babel⁸

Genesis 11 contains for us the postdiluvian account of the people in the Plain of Shinar. After the flood, this enterprising people employed technological innovations to build a city, and the great Tower:

They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of

stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:3-4).

This effort, in and of itself is not problematic, of course. In fact, such enterprise can be a great use of God's gifts and provision. Nonetheless, God judged their efforts to be sinful, and He thwarted their project through confusion of language and scattering of the people (Gen. 11:6-8). We do not know the specific mechanisms by which this confusion and scattering were accomplished, but we do know that the people "stopped building the city" (Gen. 11:8).

Why did God interfere with their work? Why was the building of this tower judged to be sinful? We are not provided with the entirety of this people's thinking, and motivations. We do know, however, that our efforts should always be aimed at declaring God's glory. In the case of Babel, God understood their hearts, and their motives. Their efforts were aimed at building a Tower that "reaches the heavens" and their purpose was to "make a name for ourselves." It is likely that the builders were seeking their own glory, at the expense of God's rightful claims to recognition for His provision. And this so soon after God's deliverance of their Noahic ancestors. Hodge suggests

that construction on the Tower began slightly more than 100 years (or four generations) after the flood⁹, although it may have been later to allow for sufficient population and technology to build cities and towers.

Did the people who remained, and grew, after the Great Flood usurp God's glory? Did they intend to set themselves up before – or besides – God? Is this one of the first great acts of technology and enterprise leading humans to believe that they could reach the heavens (or heaven, or glory) by their own effort? As John T. Strong states,

...when the humans state that their motive for building the city and the tall tower is “to make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4...), it would be clear to an ancient reader that the humans were defacing the image of God and were, in essence, scratching off the name of God and replacing it with their own name. This was not a neutral act, though this may be lost on modern readers; it was an act of h[u]bris. (p. 632)¹⁰

That is, Strong is suggesting that the act of building the city and the tower was born out of the peoples' hubris and self-glorifying aspirations. Because they were the embodiment of God's image, to set up a monument to themselves was to replace God's image with their own. God understood their motives, and worked to intervene in such a way that future efforts at idolatry would be hampered. Strong also suggests that there is a connection between God's expectations of those created in His image (on the one hand) and His intervention at the Tower of Babel (on the other hand):

The story of the tower of Babel, then, narrates the tale of the humans in essence scratching the name of Yahweh off of his boundary stele [inscription-bearing monument] and writing their own name in its stead. God came down, saw what was going on, and shattered his own stele, that is to say, shattered his own image. It had been defiled. Indeed, God's image, humankind, acted with h[u]bris, seeking the place of God. Whether one wants to call it punishment or, more neutrally, a countermove on the part of God, in any case the scattering of humankind was the narrative equivalent of shattering the image of God.¹¹

As we have seen, humans seek to create (and thus control) gods, cut God out of the picture, or become gods or god-like. But we will turn now to the modern era in which our own struggles with the First Commandment are more familiar, especially as technological and economic advances make building our own Tower of Babel more tempting.

Modern Economic Ages

Those who labor in the modern arena of business and economics do so in the context of three separate but overlapping “economies.” In this case, any new economy refers to the business and marketplace opportunities that are made possible by a specific set of scientific and technological discoveries. History tells of many of these “ages,” including (but not limited to):

Stone Age – early humans up to approx. 3500 B.C.

Bronze Age – approx. 3500 B.C. – 1200 B.C.

Iron Age – approx. 1200 B.C. – 700 A.D.

Agrarian Age – approx. 700 A.D. – 1750 A.D.

Industrial Age – approx. 1750 A.D. – present

Information Age – approx. 1950 A.D. – present

Molecular Age – approx. 1970s to present

It is the last three overlapping economies with which we are concerned here. This approach is useful in allowing us to explore how the most recent, emerging economic age presents special temptations in terms of the First Commandment. We will call this new economic age, which beginning at approx. 1970, the Molecular Age, or Molecular Economy. As elaborated below, the Molecular Age is defined as “an economy based on the commercialization of scientific and technological breakthroughs at the molecular level.”¹² Before exploring this new economic age and its implications for understanding the First Commandment, we note that Meyer and Davis also presented, more broadly, the essence of any economy to be the collection of institutions by which “resources are used to fulfill desires.”¹³

Resources, Desires, and Idols

Businesses operate and succeed (or fail) in the context of how well they use available resources – and the means they create – to fulfill desires (meet demand). Naturally, economies change over time because resources change, and desires change. The ability humans have had to “fulfill desires” changed dramatically over time as scientific and technological discoveries allowed newly-accessible materials and resources to be employed in meeting human needs (see box **Materials and Resources in Successive Economic Ages**).

The “modern” resources in each of these various ages solved problems, met needs, and fulfilled desires in new ways. While most human needs are natural and universal – e.g. those represented by Maslow's hierarchy – human desires are (to some extent) subject to the whims of culture, social norms, fad, and fashion. Philosopher James K. A. Smith reminds us that, natural or not, there are right desires and wrong desires.¹⁴ There are desires that represent the Kingdom of God, and desires that represent the kingdom of self. Some of our desires reflect God's image and mind, and some reflect our pursuit of self-glory, as was the case with the Tower of Babel. Smith notes that,

Materials and Resources in Successive Economic Ages

The evolution of human engineering as it relates to problem-solving through resource employment:

Stone Age	Stone, brick, wood
Bronze Age	Bronze, copper, tin
Iron Age	Iron, nickel
Agrarian Age	Agricultural techniques and tools
Industrial Age	Steam, electricity, oil, steel
Information Age	Silicon, semiconductors, software

“We are what we love, and our love is shaped, primed, and aimed at liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends.”¹⁵ In other words, humans are created in the image of God, and as such they are loving creatures. Humans desire what they love, and what they love is a reflection of what is in their hearts. Smith further makes the point that the human heart, and its attendant loves and desires, can change, for both better and for worse. It is these desires that are the great concern of the First Commandment.

The Molecular Economy and the Road to Babel

In the modern world, and the modern marketplace, our desires, loves, needs, are fulfilled by means of resources developed in the Industrial, Information, and Molecular economies. It is likely that most of us work or serve in some organization, vocation, or role that has been created through the advancements of industrial, information, and molecular technologies. We can better understand the evolutionary development of a specific “economy” according to the following sequence of events:

- Scientific Discovery →
- Technological Development →
- Business Distribution →
- Organizational Extension

That is, a new economic age can emerge from major scientific discoveries that are successfully developed into technological innovations. These innovations impact the lives of people through business and commercial distribution efforts, and the life cycle of the economy is extended through efficiency-inducing organizational efforts (e.g.

consolidation, consulting, reorganization, etc.). In this context, three modern economies may be differentiated:

The Industrial Economy

The industrial economy arose in the late 18th century from the exciting discoveries spurred by Enlightenment thinkers, scientists, and explorers. The major catalyst for this economic explosion was the discovery of methods for storing, directing, and utilizing steam to power activities that previously required human or animal power. Steam power changed the world, including business and manufacturing opportunities and methods.¹⁶ At the same time, discoveries in the electrical sciences led to the ability to capture, store, distribute, and generate power from electricity, further feeding the economic expansion from industrial resources. Add to these innovations the discovery of the potential of oil and steel, and we can see the amazing amount and level of resources that were added to the quest to meet humanity’s needs and fulfill their desires.

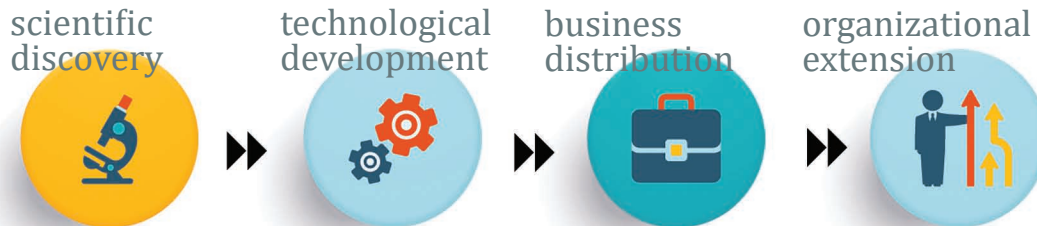
While much can be (and has been) written on the impact of the industrial age on human desires, relationships, and life¹⁷, our focus in this paper is on the impact of the molecular economy, so we will reserve that analysis. However, we can note that the Industrial Economy has had an especially significant impact on one specific element of the human experience – physical work. Industrial Economy discoveries and innovations have created opportunities to exploit the power and strength of natural resources in ways rarely imagined.¹⁸ The work necessary for humans to have their needs met and desires fulfilled was suddenly shifted from existing technologies – human labor, domesticated animals, rudimentary Agricultural Age tools and machinery – to extracted, directed, and concentrated natural resources. We cannot overestimate the importance of this shifting of physical work to natural resources. The human condition was made better in many ways, even if the costs have proven to be high.¹⁹ Fulfillment of human desires and needs was suddenly possible in greater volume and at lower costs for most people, at least in the Western world.

It is easy to imagine the excitement felt by many at the marvel of human industrial capability.²⁰ Yet if humans began in this age of Darwin, invention, and discovery to elevate their self-estimation, they had not yet reached the point of building towers to heaven. And at maturity stage of the Industrial Economy, we encounter the advent of the Information Economy that would have an equally astounding impact on the human condition, but for a very different reason.

The Information Economy

The information economy arose in the mid-20th century from innovations and discoveries related to electronics, information theory, and silicon semiconductors.²¹ These advances created a new ability to translate human ideas into storable, retrievable electrical and electronic signals.

ECONOMIC EVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT



We are better acquainted with the machines with which we interact, manifest as hardware and software. The evolution of Information Economy resources has led to development of computers, supercomputers, personal computers, the World Wide Web (internet), smartphones, and every other tool and device that uses input from these technologies to communicate and distribute information.

With regard to the impact of Information Economy advances in general society, information resources are readily available to solve problems, meet needs, and fulfill desires. Modern societies have so much information available that it has been commoditized. Information resources and technologies have made it possible for all elements of society to be connected in ways previously unimagined. And just as we saw that Industrial Economy advances transferred physical work to machines and other resources, Information Economy advances have transferred much of human work to machines and information resources. But in this case, the work that has been transferred is mental and cognitive work. This is a significant advance in the human experience. Information Economy resources provide calculations and simulations, store data and other information sources, and facilitate research processes. Much of the mental and cognitive work that previously had to be performed by individuals, or facilitated through interaction with far-flung written sources, can now be transferred to Information Economy resources. The combined impact of Industrial and Information Economy technologies and

discoveries has been to transfer human physical and mental work to machines and other resources. Human desires and needs are both easier to fulfill, and turned toward new horizons, now possible through human flourishing. And still, the greatest danger of revisiting Babel remains in the impact of the Molecular Economy, as we now discuss.

The Molecular Economy

As we have noted earlier, the Molecular Economy has arisen from scientific and technological breakthroughs at the molecular level.²² These breakthroughs were born in the 1950s, with the discovery and definition of the DNA molecule by Watson and Crick. But the real acceleration of the Molecular Economy occurred through advances in biotechnology, miniaturization, microscopy capabilities, and the application of these advances to nanotechnologies and genetics research. Much of this work was begun in the 1980s and 1990s, and the successful mapping of human genome through the efforts of the Human Genome Project in 2003 represents a defining moment in the growth stage of the Molecular Economy. The evolution from Science-to-Technology-to-Business-to-Organization finds us in the midst of amazing scientific discoveries, such as genetics and the biosciences, and promising technological developments related to those discoveries, such as genetic testing, nanotechnology, and bioengineering. What remains to be developed, then, are the business and commercial

IF INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY ADVANCES IMPACTED HUMAN PHYSICAL WORK, AND INFORMATION ECONOMY ADVANCES IMPACTED HUMAN COGNITIVE WORK, THE MOST PROFOUNDLY HOPEFUL OUTCOME OF MOLECULAR ECONOMY ADVANCES FOR SECULAR HUMANISTS IS THE IMPACT THEY WILL HAVE ON HUMAN EVOLUTIONARY WORK.

distribution opportunities that take advantage of new Molecular Economy resources and capabilities.

Human problems can be solved, and human needs and desires are fulfilled in new ways through the resources and capabilities created in the Molecular Economy. This, of course, is a good thing. Recall, however, that we have said that new economies impact not only resources, but also desires. Human needs are fairly stable, but human *desires* are affected by what is possible. The Industrial Economy eliminated much of the physical work that humans and animals needed to perform, transferring this work to industrially-powered machines. This transference allowed

humans to focus more of their efforts on high-value mental and cognitive work. Later, the Information Economy eliminated much of the mental and cognitive work required of humans, transferring this work to information-processing machines and systems. It is not yet entirely clear what this alleviation of time and effort promises for humans. It is possible that human effort may now turn

to more existential and aesthetic desires. Human needs haven't changed, but it is a fact that daily life is easier in today's Industrial-Information-Molecular Age than it was 200 years ago. As the new Molecular Economy continues to increasingly impact available resources and capabilities, what will humans desire, and how will it affect the human experience as the image of God?

The real danger of the Molecular Economy is in the false hope that it provides to those who seek human glory. Even through the grind of daily life, humans are better able to meet physical and cognitive needs than at any point in human history. That being the case, human desires naturally turn to that which is made possible through the new Molecular Economy. There is a temptation to seek solutions to existential problems in these new capabilities. What do these discoveries offer for human life? Longevity? Beauty? Perfection?

Consider two dynamics related to the rise of Molecular Economy capabilities. First, note that the rise of the Industrial Age established businesses and corporations as the most significant, dominant social institutions in the Western world, especially with the evolution of the capitalist, consumeristic societies of the late 19th and 20th

centuries. As a consequence, businesses and corporations have had a dominant role in establishing and influencing social values (typically for their own benefit) for over 100 years.

In the new Molecular Economy, however, there is evidence that there will be a shift in the dominant social institutions that significantly influence social values and rhetoric. Because of the possibilities that molecular science and technology seem to offer, humans may shift in their desires toward the new influence flowing from the healthcare field. It is possible, even likely, that healthcare organizations will become the dominant social institutions

in the Molecular Economy. In the United States, healthcare expenditures represented 17.7% of GDP in 2014, up from 12% a decade earlier, and this number is expected to rise to 20% of GDP by 2025.²³ This is not simply a reflection of rising healthcare costs and a somewhat dysfunctional healthcare system. It is also a reflection of the buffet of health-related opportunities being

created through Molecular Economy discoveries. Such a powerful presence (20% of GDP) is indicative of a likely dominant social institution.

Genetic, biological, and medical resources/capabilities have increased human longevity, and have increased what is possible in terms of human health and well-being. In other words, it is not just the quantity (longevity) of life that is being affected, but also the quality of life. Molecular Economy-fueled healthcare organizations are not simply healing people from medical afflictions – that is, fixing what is broken – but they are also redefining what it means to be “healthy”. While hospitals will always remain essential institutions (remember, needs don't change much), healthcare organizations will become “health and life care” organizations. They will move from sustaining life and health to re-defining the quality of life in terms of the new resources and possibilities created in the Molecular Economy. As the new dominant social institutions, Life-care organizations will be able to control the conversation surrounding the meaning and value of life. How will beauty be defined? What will be acceptable physical imperfections? What is a “quality” human life? How will

THE INTERSECTION OF MOLECULAR ECONOMY CAPABILITIES; SHIFTING VALUES AND DESIRES RELATED TO EMERGING MOLECULAR ECONOMY INSTITUTIONS; AND SOCIAL PRESSURES TOWARD DARWINIAN SECULAR HUMANISM – ARE LEADING TO A NEW CORRUPTION AND DEFILEMENT OF THE IMAGO DEI THAT THREATENS THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT, JUST AS THE WORLD OF THE BABEL TOWER BUILDERS WAS SHATTERED.

these changes influence human desires? How will they influence the image of God in humans?

The second dynamic is the excitement that Molecular Economy changes bring to the Darwinian, secular humanist camp. If Industrial Economy advances impacted human *physical* work, and Information Economy advances impacted human *cognitive* work, the most profoundly hopeful outcome of Molecular Economy advances for secular humanists is the impact they will have on human *evolutionary* work.²⁴ The Molecular Economy capacity to better understand, and even to manipulate, genetic and other biological materials raises obvious ethical challenges.²⁵ But for those whose worldview is centered around evolutionary forces of natural selection, the ability to have any influence over genetic processes represents an opportunity to influence the evolution of the species.²⁶ There is much work ahead as the Molecular Economy unfolds, and the genetic technologies that exist are limited. For example, there is no evidence that any successful human cloning has yet occurred. However, the ability to significantly influence human genetics at the embryonic level seems not far off. This trajectory is an especially exciting one for secular humanists who have understood the human experience to be one subject to random, uncaring evolutionary forces over which humans have no control.

Meyer and Davis, in their exuberance over the emergence of the Molecular Economy, celebrate the newfound control humans will have over evolution through genetic manipulation. They encourage us to “marvel at an extraordinary participation in our own evolutionary futures.”²⁷ They wonder if, given Molecular Economy capabilities:

...might not humans evolve forms more intelligent than themselves? We believe the apes did it. Aren't we at least as capable as they were of such creative, connective evolution? Of course, we may be more capable of stopping it but what would be the ethics of that?²⁸

Molecular Economy businesses will have a significant role in guiding the conversations about the meaning and definition of modern life, and in shaping values and desires. Such conversations are not likely to focus on God as the center of life. Rather, the ability to impact “our own evolutionary futures” changes the narrative to one in which humans play the central role. On this trajectory, we move closer to building a foundation for a new Tower of Babel.

Since the age of Darwinian ideas began – in the midst of the Industrial Economy – followers of Darwin have had two major intellectual problems in building the new Tower of Babel. The first is on the front end of the evolutionary process – the origins of life. Noted Darwinian apologist Richard Dawkins states that, “Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”²⁹

Noted evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala claims that Darwin's greatest achievement was to show that “the directive organization of living beings can be explained as the result of a natural process, natural selection, without any need to resort to a Creator or other external agent.”³⁰ Dembski and Wells respond to Ayala's claim, pointing out that, “...Darwin...left out the one thing that most needed to be explained, namely, how blind material forces could organize the first cell. An intellectually fulfilled atheist must answer this question satisfactorily.”³¹

While debate remains over whether Darwinian theory can account for the origins of life, the problem on the back end of the evolutionary cycle seems more within reach, at least as far as secular humanists are concerned. As Molecular Economy capabilities advance, humans may indeed have more control over genetic and biological manipulations. Meyer and Davis point out that, “Living cells have been assembling the products and by-products of life, without external manipulation, for billions of years.”³² With the advent of Molecular Economy capabilities, however, humans have a better capacity to define and shape life according to intentional selection, as opposed to random natural selection. Again Meyer and Davis weigh in, “If we can see and touch molecules, the next step in extracting value is to assess whether manipulation – whether by man or molecule – has achieved a desired result.”³³

What is that desired result? That depends on how Molecular Economy institutions define the meaning and value of life. According to Meyer and Davis, “We are not trying to settle the definition of life, only to point out that it, like our other ethical concepts, [is] about to evolve.”³⁴ But (from this perspective) the great glory, the great crowning achievement of humanity is the god-like capacity we have to influence these outcomes, these desired results. While “...it is evolution...that is in charge... we have a unique ability to consciously intervene in evolutionary processes.”³⁵ “At the molecular level...the barriers between the born and the made are vanishing.”³⁶ In other words, there is no small amount of excitement at the prospect that the Molecular Economy allows some to claim, finally, that “We are God.”

Babel Revisited

The impact of Molecular Economy advances is valuable for all people, and there is legitimate reason to be excited about what God has allowed through these breakthroughs in human understanding. God's mercy and grace toward His image bearers is seen in the scientific and technological advances to which He leads us. But humans have a sad history of defiling God's image within us by usurping His glory for ourselves. Just as God punitively thwarted the self-glorifying efforts of the tower builders in the Plains of Shinar, so we must wonder whether the shifting human desires and actions in the midst of the Molecular Economy will bring catastrophic judgment. Will human efforts be

increasingly aimed at replacing the Creator God with genetic manipulations foolishly aimed at influencing human evolution? Has human progress in the Molecular Economy become the god we are warned to not place before/beside God in the First Commandment?

As noted earlier, humans created in the image of God are relationally, functionally, and characteristically like the God Who created them. It is the author's belief that the intersection of three forces discussed here – Molecular Economy capabilities; shifting values and desires related to emerging Molecular Economy institutions; and social pressures toward Darwinian secular humanism – are leading to a new corruption and defilement of the *imago dei* that threatens the world as we know it, just as the world of the Babel Tower builders was shattered. Most obviously, the functional, co-laboring element of the *imago dei* is threatened as Molecular Economy societies work against God's designs to create humans in their own image, according to their own devices. Have human desires changed irreversibly with the capabilities of the new economy?

Conclusion and Implications

This paper presents a cautionary tale about the First Commandment implications of emerging Molecular Economy resources and capabilities. The builders of the ill-fated Tower of Babel sought to replace God's glory and image with their own glory and image, in clear violation of the injunction against setting up anyone or anything before the Creator God. While human economic and social development has marched on since that time, we find ourselves at the advent of a new economic age – the Molecular Economy. In this age, scientific discovery and technological development are increasingly enabling humans to redefine and impact life at the genetic and molecular level. Many people see this as a glorious opportunity to, once and for all, eliminate the "need" for God in the human narrative. They also arrogantly see it as the first steps in the establishment of human control over biological evolutionary forces. Will such a perspective become the norm in culture, society, and business? Are we soon to see God's judgment, or is there yet time to rightly direct the path from science to technology to business to organization? Is there yet time to intervene in the emerging conversations related to the meaning and value of life?

Practical Implications – What shall we do now?

If we accept that technological and scientific discovery and advancement is a blessing from God, in and of itself, then business people should be committed to supporting and advancing this good work. However, in the case that such discovery tempts us to promote our own glory, certain precautions may be in order:

Become a part of the conversation

Molecular Economy advances create previously unimaginable opportunities. Christian perspectives must be part of the conversations that emerge related to these opportunities. There are already emerging debates over how genetic advancement should be pursued and employed.³⁷ Believers must maintain a seat at the table, delivering credible contributions and wisdom to the conversations about how best to incorporate new discoveries into society and the marketplace. We must be informed, relevant, and distinctive in our contributions. Christian, scientists, philosophers, theologians, manufacturers, financiers, doctors, teachers, marketers, and others must all be a part of these conversations.

Glory to God

As human innovation unlocks ever-deeper genetic knowledge, we must never miss an opportunity to point to the true Source of our discoveries and advancements. The temptation to declare ourselves (humans) as the true gods of science and nature will produce scientific and medical heroes. The participation of believers in the molecular marketplace provides the best opportunities to declare God's glory with each advancement.

Guard your hearts

If, in fact, advancements in molecular, genetic, and medical sciences lead an increasingly secular society to glorify human achievement, those of us in the Christian community must guard our hearts to avoid being swept along in the tide of adulation. There is no God but Yahweh, and He alone directs our paths. However powerful STEM advancements make us feel, we must guard against the temptation to ignore God's role in our discoveries. Whatever the molecular economy brings – good and bad, great and terrible – we must have no other gods besides Him.

About the Author



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Notes

¹ Three times in the Old Testament – Genesis 1: 26-27; Genesis 5: 1-3; Genesis 9: 5-6 – and less than a dozen (direct and indirect) references in the New Testament – e.g. Romans 8: 28-30; Colossians 1: 13-20. See David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: Fontana, 1973; Revised edition).

² Cairns, 1973

³ J. R. Middleton. *The Liberating Image: the imago dei in Genesis 1*. (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2005).

⁴ Millard Erickson. *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998).

⁵ For example, Kyle Idleman. *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2013).

⁶ S. G. Murphy. *On the doctrine of the imago dei*. Online article (2002) last accessed at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/698208/posts>, June, 2016.

⁷ See I John 4: 7-21, especially.

⁸ See Bodie Hodge, *Tower of Babel*, esp. Ch.7. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013).

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ John T. Strong, “Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert’s Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, (2008), 127:4 pp. 625-634.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 633.

¹² Christopher Meyer and Stan Davis, *It’s Alive: The Coming Convergence of Information, Biology, and Business*, (Boston: Crown Business, 2003, esp. Ch. 1). There are, of course, other possible economic typologies, but I have chosen Meyer and Davis’ typology as best representing the critical, historical relationship between scientific discovery and business organization.

¹³ Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer, *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*. (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1999).

¹⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Cultural Liturgies), (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁶ William Rosen, *The Most Powerful Idea in the World: A Story of Steam, Industry, and Invention*, (New York: Random House Publishing, 2010).

¹⁷ For example, see Bruno Dyck & David Schroeder, “Management, theology and moral points of view: Towards an alternative to the conventional materialist-individualist ideal-type of management,” *Journal of Management Studies* (2005) 42 (4), pp. 705-735; as well as Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991).

¹⁸ Rosen (2010).

¹⁹ Volf (1991).

²⁰ For example, see Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America*. (New York: Vintage Publishing, 2004); and David McCullough, *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

²¹ Meyer and Davis (2003).

²² *ibid.*

²³ CMS. Gov. (2016). <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-reports/NationalHealthExpendData/NationalHealthAccountsProjected.html>. Last accessed in June, 2016.

²⁴ Meyer and Davis (2003).

²⁵ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*. (3rd edition), (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

²⁶ Meyer and Davis (2003).

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁹ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*. (New York: Norton, 1987, p. 6).

³⁰ Francisco Ayala, “Darwin’s revolution.” *In Creative Evolution?!*, J. H. Campbell and J. W. Schopf (Eds.) (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 1994, p. 4).

³¹ William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells, *How to be an Intellectually Fulfilled Atheist (or not)*, (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008).

³² Meyer and Davis (2003), p. 58.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 245.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁷ For example, see Dennis M. Sullivan and Tyler M. John – “Human Embryo Metaphysics and the New Biotechnologies.” *Christian Scholars Review*, XLV (No. 4, Summer, 2016).

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