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Gleanings

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What Does a Christian Business Look Like?

Many would argue that there is no such entity as a “Christian” business since the appellation “Christian” should only be used in reference to people who profess to be followers of Christ. These people argue that businesses are inanimate objects and should not, therefore, be referred to as Christian.

For the purpose of this article, a “Christian business” refers to a for-profit organization that, to some degree, is seeking to follow biblical principles.

Throughout the years I have been involved with many organizations that would fit this definition. There are always varying degrees of understanding and application of biblical principles. And, as you would expect, there are varying levels of results.

Recently I met with the management team of a twelve-year-old privately held company with annual revenues slightly less than ten million dollars. Given that the company professed to be a Christian business, I was interested in how aligned they were with biblical principles. Following are some of the salient points that I discovered about the management and their philosophy.

First, the management team was not knowledgeable about management theory. Noted management theorist W. Edwards Deming taught that learning to manage requires understanding wise management theory. Deming’s teaching is consistent with the Creation mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, which charges man to rule God’s physical universe through multiplication and mastery. My experience with teams that are weak in understanding management theory is that they tend to focus on tactical issues, not strategic issues. This means that they tend to be shortsighted. Such was the case with this team.

Second, when I asked the management team their philosophy of business—in particular, the purpose of business—the answer was typical of worldly thinking. They mused that business was about making money. Matthew 6:33, teaches that the primary agenda of business should be to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” then money will be one of the by-products—not the primary purpose. When money becomes the driving agenda of business, excellence is sacrificed in some way.

Third, the management team could not adroitly answer the question, What is your business?—the famous question posed by management pundit Peter

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Drucker. The question reflects the truth expressed in James 4:13–17, which clearly states that God has a will or purpose for each business. A key role, therefore, of management is to discern God's will for the company and to do it. Furthermore, when money is the driving agenda of a company, management can easily miss what God is really seeking to do through the organization.

Fourth, the management team was content with the current state of the company. Several times the owner asked if it was necessary for his company to grow. From his perspective he was making more money than he ever expected to make, so why rock the boat by growing? As I explained to him, there is no standing still or marking time. The world is changing and every organization has to be constantly adjusting to this reality. Furthermore, if business is a vehicle for fulfilling the Creation mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, then growth and mastery are necessary components of the process.

Fifth, the management team was convinced of the quality of their product with little customer validation to support their belief. Often such perspective is more a wish than a reality and is frequently rooted in a denial system designed to protect the ego of the management team. Matthew 7:3 admonishes us that, though we may be skillful at finding the faults of others, we should be aware that we are frequently blind to our own issues. From what I saw, this management team made only token efforts to determine the truth of their value proposition.

And sixth, the industry served by the company is dramatically changing because of technology. Unlike the men of Issachar, who knew the times and understood what they were to do (1 Chron. 12:32), the management team showed little awareness of the trends and almost no interest in better positioning the company for the future.

As I reflected on the meeting with this management team, I realized that they were well-meaning Christians. But they were running the company based mostly on secular principles, because of their lack of understanding of biblical principles of business.

The six management errors noted above are all ultimately connected to one issue: the worship of money. As Christians, we know that we cannot worship God and money—they are mutually exclusive (Matt. 6:24).

So if this company is really worshiping money more than God, why are they successful?

The success that this management currently enjoys is similar to the success enjoyed by the sponsors of the Tower of Babel. The Babel project enjoyed a modicum of success for a season because they did practice some basic biblical principles. For example, they found the right location, used the right technology, worked strategically, demonstrated deft leadership, etc. But in the end, the project was judged. They were judged because they had the wrong motive.

The current management team is having a small degree of success, like the Tower of Babel project, and for largely the same reason. The team is following some basic biblical principles. But this is not enough to release long-term blessing in the organization, because God is always looking at the heart, the seat of our motives (Prov. 21:2).

Least they end up like the Tower of Babel, this team would be wise to examine their motives. Are they truly seeking the will of God or is their goal simply to

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make money?

Granted the management team may be totally unaware of their motive issue. But regardless of the awareness of their heart, we know that alignment with God's purpose brings blessings and that disobedience to God brings judgment.

So what does a Christian business look like? A true Christian business is one with the right motive: alignment with the will of God, which means that the real bottomline and measure of success is obedience to God, not how much money is made.

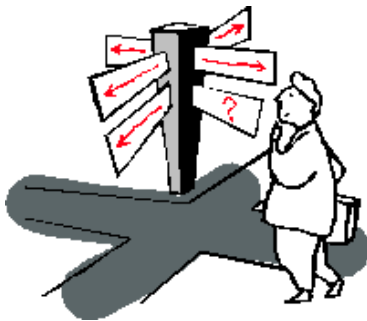
Now wouldn't it be wonderful to begin the New Year with a new resolution—to examine your motives? Is your organization simply seeking to make money or is it truly seeking the will of God? Is success denominated in terms of money or in obedience to God?

Here is a New Year's resolution for you: if money has been the main agenda of your organization, repent and resolve to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." And if obedience to God's will is already the focus of your organization, resolve to never sway from that perspective.

May the Lord increase His favor in your work and bring honor and glory to Himself.

Happy New Year!

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