

## Ethics In The Workplace

Don Underwood

There is certainly a need within the business affairs of life for people to know and understand ethics. Like all issues of life, we must be taught ethics in order to practice ethics. The word *ethics* in the Greek is *ethos* and means a custom or manner or habit. Webster defines ethics to mean “a system of moral values.” To be ethical means “conforming to accepted professional standards of conduct.” As Christians, we must conform to God’s professional standard—*the word!* Hence, when Paul told the church at Rome, *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God* (Romans 12:2). Paul is telling the church they must conform to the ways of God. In doing so, our mind or inward man or spiritual man is changed. This ethical change is good!

Furthermore, ethics is a word that assumes within the very definition of its meaning that one has a system of moral values that the individual has accepted as a standard of conduct. Unfortunately, if one does not have an ethical approach to life, then people are free to do whatever they desire. Thus, God makes the difference in the business affairs of people and our work places.

### **In the Work Place One must Be Trusted and Dependable.**

First of all, work place ethics implies that we ought to be trusted and dependable in our work.

In Genesis 39:1-6 and 41:38-41 we read of the trust and dependability of Joseph.

And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and all that he had, that the Lord, blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph’s hand: and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and wellfavoured. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.

In the eyes of the Potiphar, Joseph had *found grace in his sight*. Simply put, Joseph was trusted. From this account of the Pharaoh, Joseph was entrusted with all the wealth in the land. The Pharaoh trusted him completely. Where did Joseph learn to be ethical? From God. Joseph lived his life in view of the eyes of the Lord. We too live our lives before the eyes of God. Like Joseph, we cannot hide anything from God.

In 2 Kings 12:15 we read of honesty, “Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully.”

The *men* in this verse has reference to those men who delivered the money unto the workmen. These *men* did not need to be followed up to see if the workmen received their wages. Why?

Because these *men* were trusted. There was no question as to their honesty. We too must be of the same mold and character.

Nehemiah wrote of faithful men,

And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren (Nehemiah 13:13).

These men were counted trustworthy. In other words, they had ethics. In having ethics, they held to a standard of conduct—the word of God! The bottom line, it is ethical to pay people promptly. In doing so, we practice in a simple way ethics.

The young servant Daniel was a man of ethics. In Daniel 6:1-6 we read of his ethical standard.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. The presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against him concerning the law of his God. Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever.

Daniel, as a result of being faithful unto the Lord received preference in the Babylonian kingdom. He was a man who held to an ethical code of conduct. It was this higher standard that separated him from all others. Ethics is a great divider of people. Daniel serves as a great example for all to follow in their work places. He is an excellent role model for each of us.

Paul told the Corinthian church, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

The context addresses the responsibilities of ministers and their work as faithful stewards. As stewards of the Living God, ministers have the responsibility to preach and then practice what they preach. In other words, they must walk the talk. A requirement of stewards is faithfulness. Thus, if we apply the principle of faithfulness, as found within the stewards of God to our business ethics; our earthly work would be blessed and enhanced. It behooves all business owners and all laborers to use faithfully ethics in all their earthly affairs.

From these verses, we see that ethics involves trust to do the work at hand. The Lord expects His people to be faithful in practicing ethics and establishing a reputation of being ethical. May we always work to this end in our places of work.

### **Work Place Ethics Involves Honesty**

At one time in our nation’s history a person’s word or hand shake sealed a business deal. Unfortunately, the world has changed considerably, including the aspect of honesty. The Christian in the work place must immerse him or herself in *honesty*. Honesty is an integral part of being ethical. Honesty is a quality of ethics.

In the book of Deuteronomy we read of being honest in our business dealings,

Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that their days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto thy Lord thy God<sup>16</sup> (25:13-16).

The context of speaks of honesty. We cannot hold to two different standards in the business world and be accepted of the Lord Almighty! Those who are dishonest, are an abomination unto the Lord, but those who are just, honest and ethical in the work place, God will bless. God has always required and expected His servants to be honest.

The wise man said, *A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight* (Proverbs 11:1).

- The just weight is God's standard, His measurement.

God is pleased with those who are just, i.e. honest in their work place. When we are honest in our work, then God is pleased with our actions and others appreciate our integrity.

*Divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord* (Proverbs 20:10).

The emphasis of both passages of scriptures is the moral high ground in our work place. May we always strive to be honest in all things (Romans 12:17).

The prophet Isaiah spoke how the righteous must walk and their reward for doing that which is right, *He that walketh righteously, speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;<sup>15</sup> He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure<sup>16</sup>* (Isaiah 33:15-16).

The honest businessperson acts in a certain way...*a righteous way!* This righteous way is established upon a code of conduct, a standard of ethics, the word of God. In following the word of God as a light to guide us in the work place (Psalm 119:105), we walk and talk right before men and God. *We Abstain from all appearances of evil* (I Thessalonians 5:22). Thus, we become a people who shun evil and do the good. Paul stressed honesty to the church at Rome, *Recompence to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men* (Romans 12:17).

-- In Romans 12:17 God commands Christians to be honest unto all, and this would include our business dealings and our work relationships. Ethics must be applied to all aspects of our labors, not just some aspects of our work.

-- Hence, our honesty becomes those things that we do before people. It behooves us to confirm the habit of honesty as second nature. Then, we will practice all things good and decent in our business affairs.

Peter addressed honesty this way, *Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation* (I Peter 2:12).

- The honest worker, via their behavior, i.e. their *conversation* will bring glory unto the Lord. As a result, God will honor those who serve Him in such a way (John 12:26).

The bottom line, ethics and honesty go hand in hand, they compliment one another in life. May we always hold to the moral high ground of ethics in our work place.

### **In the Work Place, We must Do the Will of God.**

Work place ethics involves doing things in accordance to the will of God. This means that we strive to conform all aspects of our work to what God commands in His word, the Bible.

In Proverbs 27:23 we read, *Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.*

Our work place needs to be filled with diligence. As the shepherd's flocks needs daily care, our work needs to be approached in like manner. Thus, we need to approach our earthly activities in conjunction with the word of God and not separate ourselves from His will.

*The words of the Preacher...*(Ecclesiastes 1:1) tells us this wisdom in Ecclesiastes 9:10, *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

In the work place, we need to give our work our all! This is what God expects and this is inclusive of business ethics. Hence, it is God's will that we give it our all. That is, put all our heart into our work.

In addition to putting our all into whatever we do, we need to put God first. In Acts 16:14-15 we read, *And a certain woman named Lydia, seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 14 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. 15*

From this account, we see that Lydia put the Lord *first!* Though she was on a business trip, she still made time for God. Remember, God wants His people to profit and prosper, but He commands His people to NEVER forget who He is (Deuteronomy 8:18). May we never forget God.

Thus, business ethics involves placing God first, even if we are on a business trip and at some distant location.

Paul told Titus, *In all things shewing thy self a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing incorruptness, gravity, sincerity* (Titus 2:7).

"The expression *good work* or *good works* is used six times in the three chapters of Titus. The *good works* of the book are not just benevolent in nature, but they refer to all that is upright and good – to an honest and holy life." (Curtis A. Cates, The Epistles of I and II Timothy, Titus, Arnold Sexton, Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1986, p 237).

A further point, our *good works* become a pattern in our lives.

Thus, in all things, which would include by principle our earthly labors, we must develop a pattern of doing good works that includes and not excludes God. If our lives are absent and void of God, we are most miserable.

As we establish a pattern of doing good works in our lives and especially in our business affairs, we will do the will of God.

As we conclude this section, James spoke directly to all with regards to God's will and our earthly plans. *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:13 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.14 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.15 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.16 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin17* (James 4:13-17).

Our work place ethics are governed by the will of God. These ethics are built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 3:11). Thus, God needs to be the center of our life and our work. We build our lives and work around God. In doing so, our work places will be influenced by the will of God and not our will.

May we always strive to do the will of God and place God first in the work place. As a result of doing this simple action, we will avoid the temptation of sin.

God's will for us in our work places is to work diligently and never put Him second! Remember, never forget God. Biblical ethics demand that we put God first! If we place our Lord second, He will place us second on the day of judgment.

### **Our Work Places must Be Moral, Ethical, Legal and Biblical**

The Christian must not be in a work place contrary to the nature of God. Whatever business or work or profession a Christian is involved with, must be moral, ethical, legal and Biblical. Without these aspects or principles, the Christian must abstain from such work.

The wise man said in Proverbs 16:8, "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right." The focus of this verse is righteousness. A little righteousness is far better than great profits.

There are many work places that reap great revenues, but are wrong and sinful within themselves. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry, and so is abortion, prostitution, and illegal drugs, and all of these industries are wrong! It is better to have little revenues, than suffer the condemnation from God because of what we gain financially from certain businesses that are immoral, unethical or illegal. As a Christian, we have the responsibility to do that, which is right in the sight of God. Hence, do those things that are right! Never give up righteousness for something in this world.

The book of Proverbs continues to instruct us in the right way of doing business, *The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death* (Proverbs 21:6).

Unjust and unethical gain or profit is wrong! All of our profit or wealth must be acquired ethically.

The *lying tongue* in the work place is sinful and unethical. It is sinful in that God commands His people to be truthful and it is unethical in that it is contrary to the standard of God. But, how many times will employees or workers lie or deceive others for the employer? The Christian must be careful not to allow themselves to be used in unethical ways and means within the work place.

We further learn from Proverbs, *He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor* (Proverbs 28:8).

Certain businesses involve their employees in work that take advantage of debtors to their detriment. In the past, we would call these employers *loan sharks*. They certainly use their unscrupulous means as they oppress the borrower. In certain situations, this would be called extortion, while the extortioner labels this as profit. Thus, it would be ethically unacceptable for a Christian to make financial gain through these means, or to enable the boss to profit accordingly due to your effort in the work place.

Furthermore, this kind of profit making goes against the Lord Almighty. Thus, those people who practice such profit making and work in such an environment need to take heed!

In Acts 19:24-27 we read of a business that made its profit in contrast to Biblical principles. Hence, it was an industry in opposition to our Lord. *For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, who all Asia and the world worshippeth."*

These silversmiths were losing money due to the preaching of truth. The people were giving up the idols that the silversmiths were making. Bottom line, they were losing money! There was no need to worship something made by man, and this is still true today. In this particular example, it is scripturally wrong to be a partaker of this kind of business. In light of how they were using their trade for the cause of idolatry! To clarify this comment, there is nothing wrong in making things out of silver or other precious metals, but what they made was contrary to the word of God.

This situation serves as a great example for Christians not to align themselves to those industries that make their profit against clear Bible teachings.

These examples are only a representation of immoral, unethical, illegal or un-Biblical ways in which people can work and make money. When money or profit is made at the loss of others, this is wrong! Profit that is ethical, is made at the exchange of some service or product. May we always abstain from that which is evil and hold to that which is good (I Thessalonians 5:22).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, to be ethical means to apply God's word to our lives and this includes our work and labor. Basically, we must live what God commands.

Isaiah the prophet wrote, *Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them* (Isaiah 34:16).

The command for all people including Christians in the work place, is to seek out the book and once we find it, read it and apply what we read to our work. In doing so, we will find that God's word will only enhance our productivity and our treatment of others.

Thus, by making God's will an everyday ingredient in our work places, we will enhance our work and make our place of employment better.

God's ethical standard is never old fashioned nor outdated! God expects workers to rise to His level of ethics and not to apply their own manmade ethical standards.

If we mold our lives after an ethical standard and live by a code of ethics, then let that standard and code be the word of God. We need His will in all of our work places. May our attitude be as John so clearly taught, *If any man will do His will...*(John 7:17). May it be our will, to do God's will.

In this particular lesson we have seen the urgency for Christians to apply Biblical ethics in their places of labor.

- First of all, the Christian in the work place needs to be trusted and dependable, this is ethical and right.
- Secondly, we must be honest in all things, and this includes our work places.
- Furthermore, in the work place the Christian must fulfill the will of God. In doing so, we please God in our industry.
- Finally, the Christian must not place themselves in a work place environment that is immoral, unethical, illegal or un-Biblical. We must guard ourselves from evil associations (1 Corinthians 15:33).

As Christians, we must bring the word of God into our daily lives. We must live by what is written and not by what may seem right unto us (Proverbs 14:12). For it is God that directs our steps (Jeremiah 10:23, and Psalm 199:105).