

## **BUSINESS**

The opening line 'Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor' referred to honest business. In my day most children passed through a *tinkering* stage. Some days we spent more time mending our bikes than riding them. Even when we did not succeed, it was often profitable because we were learning life skills. The 'throw-away' society that followed robbed many children of a wealth of experience valuable for the world of work, everyday living and personal survival. Modern tinkering can be electronic. One 15-year old boy has probably successfully predicted and located an undiscovered great Mayan city in dense jungle. This was done with available maps and satellite imagery applying the theory that almost 2000 years ago the Mayans reproduced star constellations on earth by locating their temple cities with the same positioning, even to the point of building bigger cities for the brighter stars. You can see from this that modern tinkering can be exciting as well as educational. Not a few successful businesses begin with the imagination, experiences and self-learned skills of childhood tinkering. Is the Christian faith relevant to tinkering and business? We start by looking at the life of Christ.

### **I. 'I must be about my Father's business'**

#### **A. Jesus the child**

'I must be about my Father's business' (Luke 2.49) are the words of the boy Jesus. He was only 12 years old at the time but had a very decided sense of purpose about life. He did not see childhood as being about trivial play. Even in childhood there is a sense of purpose and destiny when God is known as one's heavenly Father. Even in childhood, belief in God will bring with it significance, fulfilment and a sense of direction. God's love to us, known and appreciated, begets a love to God and desire to please him.

#### **B. Jesus the Carpenter**

For most of his short adult life our Lord was in business. The family business was carpentry. It might seem astonishing to us that God's

business for his Son should be woodworking. Still today, manual work is viewed as somewhat inferior. It was, however, man's first work in Paradise where mind, eye, and muscle could unite in enhancing divinely bestowed beauty and utility as Christian gardeners know. The work itself is character building and under God fits for higher things here or hereafter. I am sure that the tent making of the Apostle Paul not only produced good tents but also a better preacher as his brilliant mind reflected upon his customers and their needs. Christ, Peter, Paul and others were firmly rooted in the everyday world of work and we see from the New Testament the value of this in their concrete teaching and personal approach. In Christ's life the carpentry business and his Father's business were inseparably intertwined. He was the same man as carpenter and preacher.

### **C. Jesus the Christ**

From his conception and birth, Jesus was the Christ. Angels praised God for him and wise men sought for him. During his ministry, however, he was more publicly revealed as he went about doing good, preaching and healing. The crowning aspect of the Father's business for the Saviour was redemption and this culminated at Calvary. It was there that he gave himself, the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

## **II. 'Study to be quiet, and do your own business'**

These are Paul's words to the Christians at Thessalonica. The full quote is, 'we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing' (1 Thessalonians 4.10-12).

### **A. Here is a purpose beyond riches**

The Psalmist observes the way of this world, 'Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them' (Psalm

39.6). The way of the godly is to be different. You are to get on with what God has given you to do and 'mind your own business' as our common saying is. God will see to it that you have everything needful despite the problems.

## **B. There are difficulties in the business of life**

Three difficulties are obvious.

(a) *Risk*. We read in Psalm 107.23-28, 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end'. Enterprise involves risk. It is a factor to be considered. For those who will launch out into the deep, expertise in seamanship is indispensable but it is true that any business launch involves risk. Verse 28 of the Psalm is apposite in every life venture: 'Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses'.

(b) *Worry*. Many a businessman has sleepless nights. Ecclesiastes 5.12 is to the point, 'The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep'. We have the saying, 'Worry is a sin' and so it is. Christ's counsel is apposite, 'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' (Matthew 31-34).

(c) *Failure*. We do not like failure. We want to succeed but failure is a fact of life. Even when we do well, others might squander all our gains as the wise man found. 'I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that

shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun' (Ecclesiastes 2.18-20). It is not that the Preacher would have us despair at failure but rather learn to benefit from it by having a spiritual outlook. We live 'under the sun' but can know the God who made the heavens.

### **III. 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings'**

This proverb (Proverbs 22.29) refers to virtue in business. These days we refer to business *values*. These are the standards that *people* appreciate. The proverb speaks of diligence as a *virtue*, that which corresponds to God's character and standards. Life is best when social values match God's standards but we are drifting further and further away from this at present. Three specific virtues are mentioned in connection with the word 'business in our AV Bibles: diligence, integrity and fidelity.

#### **A. 'Diligence' and 'industry'**

Diligence and industry are the opposite of laziness and carelessness. They are illustrated from the insect world in Proverbs 6.6, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise'. The ants' nest is full of purposeful activity. God has given the ant its instinct for diligent activity in building its city from tiny twigs. You can do no more than follow a small section of the activity at a time. All is in lively motion as though there is not a second to waste. Diligence is essential in the spiritual life. We read in Hebrews 6, 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (verses 10-12). So it must also be in the workplaces of the city of man that constitute the human world of work. In Proverbs 22.29 we read, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his

business? he shall stand before kings'. In the normal way of things providence rewards our persistence but, if not, God still approves of the godly effort expended. Paul's counsel is of universal and generational applicability, 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord' (Romans 12.11). Such was the Saviour's example.

## **B. Integrity and honesty**

Integrity and honesty in all things were the example of Christ and must be the stamp of godly men. It was so with *Joseph*. Potiphar 'left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat' (Genesis 39.6). It was so with *Samuel*. When he challenged the people they had to agree concerning his integrity. Consider Samuel's words, 'Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you' (1 Samuel 12.3). The people responded, 'Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand' (1 Samuel 12.4). It was so with *Daniel*. We read in Daniel 6.4, 'Then 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'. They longed to find some small nail to hang up some huge accusation but there was none. When you read such examples you should remember Christ's words at the end of the parable of the Good Samaritan, 'Go, and do thou likewise' (Luke 10.37).

## **C. Fidelity in stewardship**

In 1 Corinthians 4.1-2, Paul writes, 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful'. This is our lens to look through regarding everything in life. Joseph was exemplary as Potiphar's steward because he recognized that he served his earthly master as God's steward. In all of life's activities, do all things as unto the Lord. He was faithful even unto

death and believers know they are bought with the highest price. The conclusion is obvious, 'glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's' (1 Corinthians 6.20).

## **Conclusion**

Corruption in business now demands international conferences. Our Prime Minister spoke to Her Majesty the Queen of two nation states as being 'fantastically corrupt'. In the final decline of our modern age the effort is being made in Britain to exclude vocal Christianity from the workplace but Christian truth belongs in the workplace. As the witness of the Quaker's showed, Christianity endows enterprise with the Saviour's business ethics blending industry, profit, integrity and compassion. The dignity of the carpenter's bench in Nazareth is exported worldwide. What blessings will ensue when Christ's business ethics prevail!

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