

Job 31: Living With Integrity

Adapted from a series of studies by Brian Haines



Job 31:13-15, 38-40

Business Ethics

"If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant When they complained against me, What then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?" Job 31:13-15

"If my land cries out against me, And its furrows weep together; If I have eaten its fruit without money, Or caused its owners to lose their lives; Then let thistles grow instead of wheat, And weeds instead of barley." The words of Job are ended." Job 31:38-40

How does a rich man get rich? Job chapter 1 indicate that he was a man of great wealth. In the time he lived, wealth was not as easily accumulated as in our day. Without a government to protect him, he was (like Abraham) a warlord businessman in many ways. In these two passages we see that Job is opening his accounts to these witnesses that his wealth was not made at the cost of others.

Even today, to become wealthy much must be sacrificed many times. Even when acquired legally, sometimes wealth is not made ethically. Many companies profit by unfair treatment of their employees. Others over-use their resources. This is nothing new; these are the very complaints that Job says cannot be made against him.

How we conduct ourselves in our business or work is a large part of our perception by the world and its scrutiny of Christ. Let us consider Ephesians 6:5-9: *"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."* In this passage two perspectives are shown by Paul: that of the boss/supervisor/master, and that of the worker/employee/servant. Each has an obligation to God to keep.

God has always despised unfair business practices. Consider that He called dishonest scales an abomination repeatedly (Leviticus 19:35-36, Deuteronomy 25:13-16, Proverbs 11:1, Proverbs 20:23), a word reserved for more deplorable practices. It was a sin to hold wages overnight (Leviticus 19:13, Deuteronomy 24:15), even if the worker was an alien. God has more often than not spoken in defense of the employee than the employer; *"Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter."* (James 5:4-5).

Job's integrity was not based only on the fear of the wrath of God. He states that he sees his workers as equal to him. Both were made by the same God, and therefore Job sees a form of equality before God that was unknown in the ancient world, and even into our day today. Job says that if they complain, he listened. Of course we all know that many times complaints are unrealistic or imaginative, but Job knew that God was watching, and that the danger of ignoring a false claim was greater than that of time wasted with illegitimate claims.

In the second passage, split from this and sitting at the end of the chapter, Job makes another plea to be judged based on his business practices regarding his capitol, which was in his day his land. We live in a time where "environmental" issues overwhelm us, not based on the desire for good stewardship, but because of a neo-pagan worship of the creation rather than the creator. We should not be derailed in our understanding that God has always insisted that we be good stewards of the creation.

God commanded the Israelites to observe a Sabbath year of rest for their land (Leviticus 25:24-25). The seriousness of this commandment (or more directly, the failure of the Israelites to observe it) is found in the period of captivity; the 70 year time period was determined to "pay back" what had not been given to the land in these Sabbaths (II Chronicles 36:21).

The purpose and intent in this commandment was not meant to "honor the land" as though it were some deity or personality that desires such. The land was given to mankind for our use and dominion (Genesis 1:28). We can discern that God's desire was to contain our avarice, to reign in our covetousness, and to cause us to be self-restrained in our pursuit of wealth.

Questions to consider:

1. Can you think of business practices that are common today that lack integrity in the eyes of God?
2. How do you think that the world views a Christian businessman who is ruthless in his business practices? How would you define "ruthless"?
3. How did Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9) embody Job's integrity? Is this example one we must follow?
4. What job's might a Christian be compelled to avoid because of this idea?
5. How does the boss/supervisor/master show integrity?
6. How does the worker/employee/servant show integrity?
7. What do the "boss" and the "worker" have in common?