

Business for the Glory of God



HOW IMITATING GOD DEFINES THE TRUE PURPOSE OF BUSINESS

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► A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

What is the purpose of business? The answer to this question transcends missions or ideals that project economic value or even social responsibility. A focus on these purposes, as what all secular pursuits would entail, seeks to please man instead of God (Gal. 1:10). The power of higher organizational purpose is in its being aspirational, which inevitably translates into meaning and joy for all those involved. In this *CBR* issue where we invite examination of business practices that glorify God, it is critical that we set the stage for why glorifying God is the all-consuming purpose of business. Dr. Wayne Grudem, arguably one of the most prominent evangelical theologians of today, has laid out a simple case for the real purpose of business—to glorify God, in his book *Business for the Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003). We are, therefore, excited to reprint excerpts from the Introduction Chapter of Dr. Grudem's book to help set the tone for the discussions in this issue. We greatly appreciate the author and Crossway for the permission to reprint this material.

Is business basically good or evil? Words like “profit,” “competition,” “money,” and even “business” carry negative moral connotations for many people today. And some people who work in the business world even labor under a faint cloud of guilt, thinking that their work may be necessary, but that, from a moral perspective, it is probably “neutral” at best. Very few people instinctively think of business as morally good in itself.

Recent business scandals regarding dishonest and illegal activities by giant companies such as Enron and by formerly revered accounting firms such as Arthur Andersen have made it more likely that people will suspect that there must be something in business that *inherently* tends to wrongdoing. Therefore, the idea of business itself comes under a dark cloud of suspicion. But is that right?

As for the relationship of business to serving God, when people ask how their lives can “glorify God,” they aren’t usually told, “Go into business.”

When students ask, “How can I serve God with my life?” they don’t often hear the answer, “Go into business.”

When someone explains to a new acquaintance, “I work in such-and-such a business,” he doesn’t usually hear the response, “What a great way to glorify God!”

But I am going to argue that many aspects of business activity are morally good *in themselves*, and that, *in themselves*, they bring glory to God—though they also have great potential for misuse and wrongdoing.

I realize that to many people, the expression “glorifying God” sounds like—well, it just sounds like it belongs *in church*, not in the business world. When people hear the phrase “glorifying God,” it probably first implies *worship*—singing praise to God and giving thanks to Him. Then it might suggest evangelism—glorifying God by telling others about Him. It might even suggest *giving*—glorifying God by contributing money to evangelism, to building up the church, and to the needs of the poor. Or it might suggest *moral living*—acting in a way that honors God. Finally, the expression “glorifying God” might suggest a life of *faith*—depending on God in prayer and in our daily attitudes of the heart. These five—*worship*, *evangelism*, *giving*, *moral living*, and *faith*—are certainly appropriate ways to glorify God. But they are not the focus here.

Instead, I want to look at business in itself—not just the ways business can contribute to work the church is already doing. Specifically, I want to look at the following aspects of business activity:

1. Ownership
2. Productivity
3. Employment
4. Commercial transactions (buying and selling)
5. Profit
6. Money
7. Inequality of possessions
8. Competition
9. Borrowing and lending
10. Attitudes of the heart
11. Effect on world poverty.

But first, we need to consider two introductory points, the first dealing with the imitation of God, and the second dealing with moral wrongdoing, or sin.

▶ IMITATION: GOD ENJOYS SEEING HIS CHARACTER REFLECTED IN OUR LIVES

One way we can glorify God is often overlooked and is the key to understanding why God made the world the way he did. It is also the key to understanding why God gave us the moral commands he did. And it is the key to understanding why human beings have an instinctive drive to work, to be productive, to invent, to earn and save and give, and to do the thousands of specific activities that fill our days. This additional way to glorify God is *imitation*—imitation of the attributes of God.

God created us so that we would imitate him and so that he could look at us and see something of his wonderful attributes reflected in us. The first chapter of the Bible tells us,

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27 ESV)

To be in God’s image means to be like God and to represent God on the earth. This means that God created us to be more like him than anything else he made. He delights to look at us and see in us a reflection of his excellence. After God had created Adam and Eve,

God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good. (Gen. 1:31)

He looked at his creation and took delight in it—yes, in all of it, but especially in human beings made in his image. This is why Paul commands us,

Be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph. 5:1)

If you are a parent, you know the special joy that comes when you see your children imitating your good qualities and following the moral standards you have tried to model. When we feel that joy as parents, it is just a faint echo of what God feels when he sees us, as his children, imitating *his* excellent qualities. “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

This idea of imitating God explains many of the commands in the Bible. For instance, “We love *because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). We imitate God’s love when we act in love. Or, “You

shall be holy, *for I am holy*" (1 Pet. 1:16, quoting Lev. 11:44). Similarly, Jesus taught, "Be merciful, *even as your Father is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). And he also said, "You therefore must be perfect, *as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). God wants us to be like him.

The idea of imitating God's character so that he will take delight in us explains other moral commands in the Bible as well. For example, God wants us to tell the truth and not lie because he is the God "who never lies" (Titus 1:2). He commands us not to commit adultery because he is a God who is faithful to his covenant commitments and he delights in seeing us be faithful to the covenant of marriage (see Mal. 2:14). And God commands children to "honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12; quoted in Eph. 6:2), as a reflection of the honor that the Son gives to the Father in the Trinity.

God created us in such a way that we would *want* to imitate his character. He created us in such a way that we would take spontaneous *delight* in seeing reflections of his character in our own actions and in the actions of others. Though this process is now marred by sin, we will see it happening to some extent. We feel a deep, fulfilling kind of joy and satisfaction in telling the truth (because God is truthful), treating others fairly (because God is fair and just), acting in love toward other people (because God is love), being faithful to our marriages and keeping our word in other commitments (because God is faithful), and so forth. We also enjoy seeing other people act in these ways because, in those actions, we catch a glimpse of the character of God. In this way, we can begin to understand how to fulfill the command, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

to harm him, I would not be glorifying God by imitating his truthfulness, because God's truthfulness is always consistent with all his other attributes, including his attribute of love. And when we read about a thief who robbed a bank through an intricate and skillful plan, we should not praise God for this thief's imitation of divine wisdom and skill, for God's wisdom is always manifested in ways that are consistent with his moral character, which cannot do evil, and consistent with attributes of love and truthfulness. Thus, we must be careful

never to try to imitate God's character in ways that contradict his moral law in the Bible.

Before considering the complex challenges in business ethics, it is immensely valuable to

understand some of the *fundamental components of business in themselves*. Are things like profits, competition, money, and ownership of possessions *always* tainted with evil? Or are they merely *morally neutral* things that can be used for good or for evil? In contrast to those two views, [this book] will argue that they are all *fundamentally good* things that God has given to the human race, but that they all carry many temptations to misuse and wrongdoing.

With this background, we ...consider specific aspects of business activity and ask how they provide unique opportunities for glorifying God. We will find that in every aspect of business, there are multiple layers of opportunities to give glory to God as well as multiple temptations to sin.

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... many aspects of business activity are morally good in themselves, and that in themselves they bring glory to God ...

▶ BUT SIN DOES NOT GLORIFY GOD

However, it is absolutely important to realize that we should never attempt to glorify God by acting in ways that disobey his Word. For example, if I were to speak the truth about my neighbor out of a malicious desire

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Dr. Wayne Grudem is Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary in Arizona. He is a graduate of Harvard (BA), Westminster Seminary-Philadelphia (MDiv, DD), and the University of Cambridge (PhD). He has served as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society (1999), as a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version of the Bible, and was the General Editor for the *ESV Study Bible* (2008). He has written more than 20 books, including *Systematic Theology*, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, *Business for the Glory of God*, *Politics According to the Bible*, and (with Barry Asmus) *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution*. He also co-edited (with John Piper) *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.