



BUSINESS IN A TIME OF ESCALATING LAWLESSNESS

And because lawlessness
will abound, the love of many
will grow cold.

MATTHEW 24:12

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ABSTRACT

The escalation of spiritual lawlessness in American society, as well as in many parts of the world, fosters an increase in poverty, crime, and disrespect for other human beings. This rebellion is particularly serious as it is directed toward God Himself, but its detrimental effects inevitably extend to every domain of life, including economies. As a result, effective business communication, planning, projects, and supply chains become disrupted and inefficient. Costs rise, performance deteriorates, and people are less and less civil in their public discourse and interpersonal interactions. Christian businesspeople are uniquely qualified to address many of the business and social ills brought on by such lawlessness if they are willing to consciously stand against it and implement redemptive strategies to alleviate the effects of lawlessness. Whether in marketing communications, financial matters, or employee and supplier relationships, Christians can bring to bear the mind of Christ and love for those that oppose them in ways that are not common in the world system. Christian businesspeople, wherever they work, can have a positive influence on their environment and a dampening effect on lawlessness.

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"

(Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

▶ INTRODUCTION

Such is the essence of spiritual lawlessness. If everyone does what is right in his own eyes, then people have made themselves their own gods, unrestrained by accountability to an all-powerful deity. In a society dominated by such lawlessness, men and women claim unlimited self-determination strictly as a function of their own predispositions and preferences; they grant no one else the moral authority to dictate otherwise, including the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Not only is such belief destructive to the individual, if pervasive, it signals escalating decline and ruin throughout a culture via a variety of symptomatic manifestations. We can expect the deleterious effects of this spiritual lawlessness and impoverishment to be felt in every domain of human endeavor: family, law, government, medicine, education, religion, and others. One such symptom of spiritual lawlessness is the deterioration of factors conducive to a prosperous economy. As this condition escalates, it leads to losses that threaten the very basis for capitalism. Freedom under God creates opportunities that—in varied forms—reduced poverty and brought higher standards of living through enhanced economic success and productivity to many countries around the world. Freedom apart from God inevitably moves toward anarchy.

In this article, I first examine the biblical perspective on spiritual lawlessness, which results—both in the case of the lawless individual and in the case of a society made up of a critical mass of spiritually lawless citizens—in a variety of undesirable effects across all human domains. I then briefly cite some evidence that spiritual lawlessness is an increasing threat to US society. Finally, I discuss some possible ways that Christian businesspeople might frame their responses to mitigate the damage inflicted by rampant lawlessness and to advance redemptive measures for customers, suppliers, and employees as well as the culture at large.

▶ BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF LAWLESSNESS

LAWLESSNESS DEFINED

The concept of lawlessness is expressed in the Old Testament by more than 20 different Hebrew words. However, the notion of unbelief and disobedience toward God pervades the underlying thrust of these words, demonstrated in that the Septuagint (LXX) uses only one Greek word, and in each case the word is the same word for lawlessness as used in the New Testament.¹ That word (Gr. ἀνομία) means a "state or condition of being disposed to what is lawless" or "a lawless deed."² It is important to note that necessarily a dependency exists between spiritual lawlessness and overt acts of lawlessness: A spiritually lawless mind produces overtly lawless deeds.

However, biblical teaching on lawlessness is more all-encompassing than merely cases of breaking civil or criminal law. Lawlessness, which makes its first appearance in the garden, is, at its core, the condition of the human heart, which acts both in unbelief toward the word of God (Eve) and in conscious disobedience to God's instruction (Adam) (1 Tim 2:14).³ As the Lord himself said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45).

Scripture gives us more detail about the nature of lawlessness. For example, John tells us that "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3:4), so we do not have to look very far to find lawlessness. It thrives in each of us, barring a faith commitment to Jesus Christ and the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit within each believer. Thus, lawlessness as defined biblically does not merely refer to obvious overt transgressions, although it certainly includes those. Rather, lawlessness is the manifestation of a sinful heart and mind that rejects God's word and instruction to pursue independence and disobedience instead.

In contrast, believers in Christ, who are also his ambassadors to a world that increasingly advocates and portrays lawlessness, should present a completely different character and orientation to all aspects of life, including how they

do business. Paul in Rom 12:2 commands a renewal of the mind; the natural tendency of the flesh is toward lawlessness apart from the renovation work of the Holy Spirit. This is especially true if we seek to be conformed to the image of Christ in every area of life. As Heb 1:9a says in highlighting our Savior's antipathy toward lawlessness, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness."

EVIDENCE OF ESCALATING LAWLESSNESS

The thesis of this paper is that escalating lawlessness will increasingly impact the health of businesses and the economic prosperity that Americans have come to enjoy and expect. This thesis in no way claims that lawlessness is worse now than it has ever been throughout history nor that it is yet as bad as it could be. But it is the contention of this paper that we are seeing an increasing departure from the knowledge of God in our culture as well as an increasing rejection of human responsibility to know and heed his precepts and commands. These departures portend increasing overt manifestations of lawless minds, which appear to this author to be obvious to anyone who engages with the culture. However, that contention is merely anecdotal; there is also research that supports the ongoing rejection of biblical truth, which results in lawless beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

In contrast to operating under the assumption that we as human beings are at least somewhat accountable to God, the influence of religion in general and Christianity in particular appears to be waning in modern western societies.⁴ In contrast to the prevalence of the Protestant Ethic bestowing considerable advantage on the economies of western society⁵, countervailing opinions increasingly question the positive influence of religion, notably, for our purposes herein, throughout the domains of economics and business. Callum Brown documents how in the span of less than forty years Britain sent "organized Christianity into a downward

spiral to the margins of social significance."⁶ Hugh McLeod documents a similarly precipitous decline in Canada.⁷

Although the trend toward secularization in the United States, especially in the South, has been slower than in Canada and Europe, by the early 1990s, the overall percentage of declared secularists in the United States virtually mirrored the percentages of secularists in Canada and Britain and shows no sign of abating.⁸ Such a trajectory does not bode well for economic prosperity, which depends on a moral and ethical populace for its long-term viability.

In George Barna's *American Worldview Inventory 2021-22*, a variety of trends indicate an increasing rejection of God and his truth.⁹ Integrated Disciples is Barna's term for those that believe "the Bible is the accurate and reliable words of God"; believe that an omnipotent, omniscient, and holy God rules the universe; and recognize God's personal purpose for them as well as their obligation to make moral choices that honor God.¹⁰ This is Barna's definition of a biblical worldview, and, though one might quibble about the details, Barna's definition

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is certainly a minimum for a genuinely "Christian" worldview. Unfortunately, only six percent of Americans evidence these characteristics. Additionally, a biblical worldview shows consistent downward trends by younger age cohorts, lending credence to an escalating departure from

adherence to biblical truth over time.¹¹ An absence of these beliefs indicates not just a lack of biblical orientation but also the intrusion of an orientation toward lawlessness in belief and practice.

Among those that self-identify as born-again Christians—28% or more than 1 in 4 Americans—56% say that having faith matters more than which faith you pursue, and 51% say that all religious faiths are of equal value. Such belief logically implies that the substitutionary atonement of Christ for sin is unnecessary for relationship with God. More than half, 54%, accept feelings, experience and the input of friends and family as their most trusted sources of moral guidance rather than the Scriptures as ultimately authoritative.¹²

We have ample evidence that a mindset of lawlessness is increasingly manifest even within the Christian community. A LifeWay Research study found only 45 percent of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week, and almost 20 percent of these churchgoers admit they never read the Bible.¹³ If one is not familiar with the word of God, one can hardly be expected to obey it, and biblical illiteracy hampers the exercise of discernment and godly skill for living, again leaving the door open for the intrusion of lawless thinking.

▶ SOME PERVASIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF LAWLESSNESS

LAWLESSNESS MEANS NO FEAR OF GOD

One defining characteristic of lawlessness is a lack of healthy fear of God. Although to “fear” in the Old Testament can simply mean a visceral fright that is unconnected to true faith, these instances number fewer than a dozen, and some of those are disputed. However, according to Albert N. Martin, there are between 150 to 175 explicit references to the fear of God in the Old Testament. Coupled with instances in which the fear of God is illustrated, though not explicitly stated, these examples can be counted in the hundreds.¹⁴ In each case the idea is one of faith and obedience toward God, as, for example, in the case of the Israelite midwives in Egypt (Exod 1:17, 20) or when Nehemiah promotes Hananiah (Neh 7:2), because he demonstrated fear of God. Similar usage can be found in the Second Temple literature and in the New Testament up to and including Acts 13.¹⁵ Thus, Scripture gives unequivocal testimony that a spiritually healthy person and society will exhibit the fear of God by adhering to his commands and respecting his moral authority to govern all human institutions.

The fear of God is the opposite of each person doing what is right in her own eyes. Instead of being accountable to no one, people who fear God recognize their accountability to the transcendent judge, whose rule is both authoritative and essential for human well-being. The fear of God thus constrains behavior and, at a minimum, causes people to curb their worst impulses, deeming it foolhardy to run afoul of the Judge of the universe and suffer the consequences he dis-

penses. In practice, then, the fear of God reflects an understanding of Paul’s warning in Gal 6:7, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a [person] sows, this [he or she] will also reap.” Rather than reap the consequences, those who fear God will often (but not always) choose to adhere to his moral standards and norms, even when under pressure to do otherwise.

By coupling lawlessness with impurity (or uncleanness) in Rom 6:19¹⁶, the Apostle Paul verifies the linkage between a state of individual sin and widespread moral corruption. He also portrays the repetitive choice to be a slave to impurity and lawlessness as a recipe for an escalating downward spiral in terms of more and more lawlessness. That uncleanness is associated with lawlessness shows that moral impurity has consequences beyond the corruption of the individual alone. Rather, moral impurity is associated with the lawlessness that tears away at the fabric of society, ripping apart God’s established institutions and provisions for human flourishing. Impurity or uncleanness and lawlessness are contrasted by Paul in Rom 6:19 with righteousness leading to sanctification, which is the desired end-state of Christ’s work in believers.

Therefore, in view of these very real pitfalls, Christian businesspeople do well to cultivate honest messaging to consumers, honoring their promises as well as ensuring good value in the products they produce and market. If Christians in the business community mislead their customers and suppliers and cannot be trusted, they have bowed to cultural lawlessness, because research shows that trust and cooperative behavior is essential for business relationships to prosper.¹⁷

LAWLESSNESS RESULTS IN CHAOS

A general axiom is that God is not a god of confusion and chaos (1Cor 14:33). Wherever we find genuine fear of God and respect for God’s rule, we also find God’s people at work restoring peace and order. Lawlessness fomented chaos, darkness, and hopelessness. From an economic perspective its presence also thwarts order, stability, and efficient production processes as well as reliable delivery and scheduling. Many of the current disruptions in supply chains are the result of chaos, bottlenecks, and lawless disruptions.¹⁸ Businesses cannot thrive under conditions of chaos; in fact, virtually no human enterprise thrives in the presence of lawlessness and its accompanying disruptions in order, productivity, and logistics. The Christian’s redemptive role in

response to lawlessness is partly to restore order, reliability, and improved functionality to various entities that have been contaminated by the destructive effects of lawlessness and rebellion against God's order. As an example, Christian businesspeople who have been trained to assess disruptions in the supply chain, reduce the variability and uncertainty of supply chain performance, and improve coordination and cooperation are doing a great service.

LAWLESSNESS AND NO COMPASSION FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

Proverbs 21:10 reads, "The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no favor in his eyes." Lawlessness does not deal in compassion and sacrifice for others. Its every expression reflects self-seeking and personal agenda, even evil intent. That, of course, is one of the reasons lawlessness is so deceptive and persuasive to the naïve and those without spiritual discernment. The plans of the lawless often sound reasonable, rational, and positive in a utilitarian sense. But as Isaiah declares, the lawless one is disposed to keep the hungry person unsatisfied and to deprive the thirsty person of drink (Isa 32:6). Therefore, Christian businesspeople need to exercise godly wisdom in choosing their business associates that they may not become caught up in a web of selfishness and exploitation. Christian businesspeople can also use their well-honed business skills to organize efforts to afford the disadvantaged genuine hope and assistance.

LAWLESSNESS AND POOR DECISION-MAKING

In Romans 1, Paul delineates a process by which rejection of God and moral corruption begets a downward spiral in both spiritual sensitivity and in mental acuity. First is the suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (v. 18); next is the conscious rejection of what human beings naturally know about God (v. 21), which leads to those becoming fools who believe they are wise (v. 22); and finally results in believing a lie (v. 25) and having a depraved mind (v. 28). Under such conditions, human beings are incapable of seeing situations clearly and rationally; they are also impaired in everyday decision-making, including business decisions, because they have rejected reality to embrace that which is not real.

Faulty decision-making is the inevitable consequence. One of the more humorous examples of inability to foresee the logical conclusions of action initiatives is Seattle's recent

soda tax. In 2018, Seattle mandated a tax on soft drinks and other sugary drinks. The intent was to improve the health of Seattle residents. Within two years, it became evident that many residents had forsaken sugary drinks for beer. Alcohol consumption, as we know, contributes to a wide range of health problems, not to mention the social problems fostered by excessive beer consumption. But the problem of obesity, which the tax was originally intended to address remained unaffected.¹⁹ This situation, although trivial, illustrates the flaws in using utilitarian objectives as the criteria for action. Apart from the omniscient hand of God directing human planning and solutions, the consequences are often "unintended" and more destructive than the initial problem.

When human beings reject what they know to be true about God and embrace instead lawlessness and sin, the solutions they propose are likely to lead to even more disruption in business, government, medicine, and every other human endeavor. In contrast, Psalm 119:98-100 offers these encouraging words, "Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts."

▶ HOW CHRISTIAN BUSINESSPEOPLE CAN RESPOND

RESPONSES THAT REFLECT THE LORD'S COMMANDS

As a first step toward responding to lawlessness in the business community, Christian businesspeople might take personal inventory and check their response to perceived injustice and unethical behaviors. A good place to test oneself for godly response is in the context of daily business activities, where cooperation and mutual respect are essential for success, but where many disagreements and complaints are aired. Incivility in the workplace is on the rise²⁰ and has been shown to have numerous deleterious effects. For example, nurses report incivility can even impact patient care in a medical setting.²¹ Incivility is one symptom of escalating lawless predisposition in society, since it conveys disrespect for others made in the image of God and ignores God's mandates for doing unto others as we would have others do unto

us. Incivility is a classic example of violation of the second commandment and thus qualifies as an overt expression of lawlessness. The workplace with its tensions and pressures can be an open opportunity for believers to exhibit graciousness and kindness (Gal 5:22-23) amidst these disruptions.

Unfortunately, many Christians respond in anger and frustration to various aspects of lawlessness, which is an understandable human response. However, the Lord's people are called to evince a demeanor that owes its self-control to Someone greater than ourselves. We must go well beyond the natural human responses to external threats. Regrettably, the emotional tenor of discourse from Christians in many business settings is frustration, aggression, and even retaliation, which constitute overt acts of lawlessness.

In contrast, Paul writes in 2 Tim 2:24-26, "And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

The Lord himself tells us in Matt 5:44-45 to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. This is God's clear command, that Christians should not take a page from the lawlessness handbook, but rather than retaliating in kind, we should be sufficiently countercultural that the contrast is noticeable and appreciated.

In cases where Christian businesspeople are criticized for their beliefs and ethical stands on various issues, there are ways to address lawlessness that does not inflame opposition and that shows the immense contributions that Christianity makes to a culture. As an example, in the early days of the church, Christians were often accused of terrible sins, such as gross immorality and incest, cannibalism, and engaging in traitorous acts against Caesar, to name but a few. The early apologists were those who spoke out and careful-

ly presented true Christian beliefs and practices to a pagan world that not only misunderstood them but was disposed to persecute them for those "practices." Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria, for example, earnestly presented alternatives to the prevailing misinformation about Christians, carefully reasoned and respectful towards the audiences to which these treatises were directed.

The conduct of those early Christians was also testimony to their superior contributions to the Roman Empire, as, for example, the extent to which Christians cared for the sick. Devastating epidemics swept the Roman Empire in CD 165 and again in 251. We can only speculate as to what diseases these were, although many suggest smallpox and measles. Estimates vary, but it is likely that a quarter to a third of the population died in the first epidemic and as many as 5,000

a day were dying in Rome at the height of the latter epidemic.²² Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius,²³ states that Christians at the time viewed the epidemic as a time of "schooling and testing." While many pagans fled the scene, the Christians "heedless of danger," took charge of nursing the sick and ministering to them in the

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name of Christ. Thus, the early Christians inspire us with their articulate defense of the faith and their unselfish response to the needs of their pagan neighbors. Christian healthcare organizations, which today are primarily run as for-profit businesses, can offer similar efforts to alleviate suffering in addition to their for-profit products and services. This is the sort of mindset and sacrifice needed to offset spiritual lawlessness and to bring the healing and redemptive message of Christ to a world that views Christians with increasing antipathy.

CONTEMPORARY RESPONSES THAT REFLECT GODLY SACRIFICE

Christian businesspeople have much to contribute to curbing lawlessness in ways that reflect their ambassadorship

for Christ. Following are some examples of positive contributions to society for which businesspeople are especially skilled and experienced. These are only a few ideas, some of which are already being enacted and others that hold much potential for good.

Christian businesspeople can be strong role models to business students, testifying that it is possible to act both redemptively and unselfishly if one's business and/or career are wholly submitted to Christ's lordship. This would be a positive message for Christian young people today who may sometimes feel overwhelmed by the forces arrayed against the Lord and his people.

Christian businesspeople can individually or cooperatively collaborate to fund mission trips that provide business assistance and a Christian orientation to indigenous entrepreneurs. Often groups that struggle with poverty are receptive and thankful for help from Christian business groups that are formed to act redemptively—and without personal gain and advantage—in disadvantaged regions of the world.

Within one's own country, it is possible to form co-ops of Christian businesspeople to address problems among disadvantaged and struggling local neighborhoods. Some examples would be to organize projects to address the problem of food deserts or programs to upgrade the skillsets of unskilled workers, so that they can qualify for better jobs.

Shortages of skilled trade workers have recently emerged in such critical fields as construction, heating and air conditioning, plumbing, and others.²⁴ To address the shortage of welders, a heavy-metal band has initiated a program to substantially subsidize community college programs and students who gain hands-on career training in welding.²⁵ Certainly the band has no known Christian affiliation. However, the support of much-needed vocational programs to train skilled workers for successful careers in the name of Christ is a model that Christian businesses and Christian businesspeople could adapt and sponsor.

Christian businesspeople may volunteer to teach business skills to those who are incarcerated, thus decreasing recidivism rates and increasing the likelihood that inmates will be able to thrive and prosper when they are released. Personal involvement may be one contribution; another could be organizing funds to support these programs to show the love of Christ in a particularly dismal place.

In the wake of the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a number of secular companies instituted policies to pay employees' expenses to travel to states that allow abortion and to pay the cost of this procedure. In stark

contrast, Buffer Insurance in Southlake, Texas instituted a policy of its own for employees. Buffer vowed to pay medical bills for its employees who want to have their babies and see the pregnancy to full term.²⁶ Such initiatives are possible when Christian businesspeople dedicate themselves to sharing the message of redemption in ways that are positive, caring, organized, and self-sacrificing.

► CONCLUSION

Christian businesspeople have much to contribute to initiatives that combat lawlessness. Some are good at forging persuasive promotional messages; others at conceiving creative strategies to advance redemptive projects; and still others at implementing plans or raising funds to support those plans. Instead of raging at the world system, Christian businesspeople can offer solutions that solve many of the problems that lawlessness creates. In this way, they demonstrate the love of Christ to a world living in increasing hopelessness.



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NOTES

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