

# **PROFIT WITH A HIGHER PURPOSE**

*A Christian Guide to Business Leadership*

Peet van Biljon  
with James C Sprouse

*We dedicate this book to everyone working for the rule of God in their daily business and professional lives.*

*I dedicate this book to my loving mother, Ria, the first person who taught me right from wrong; my wonderful wife, Liesel, who has been so supportive of this project from the start; and our dear sons, Stefan and Benjamin, who are very excited about their dad publishing his first book. My sons, you have both been given great talents to use on your life journeys. May you always walk in the Light.*

*Peet van Biljon, McLean, Virginia, June 20th, 2016*

*I dedicate this book to my loving wife Molly, our two daughters Catherine and Emily, and our son, Patrick. They and their spouses have encouraged me in this grand communication adventure. I give a special nod of appreciation and gratitude to the congregation at Trinity Church for their constant love and support of our shared mission and ministry together.*

*James C Sprouse, McLean, Virginia, June 20th, 2016*

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ISBN: 1543117678

ISBN 13: 9781543117677

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017902371

CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform

North Charleston, South Carolina

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## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to several friends and family members who commented on various drafts of this work and encouraged us throughout the process. Our heartfelt thanks go to Jenn Callaway, Molly de Marcellus, Roland de Marcellus, Andrew Dorrington, Rick King, Laurence Klotz, Ursula Lotz, Catherine Sprouse, Molly Sprouse, Patrick Sprouse and Liesel van Biljon. All of your feedback helped us write a better book.

## Foreword to the Second Edition

**E**ach of us has our own God-given purpose. If we live out this purpose in our work lives and work hard to do the right thing every day, it will not only add up across the entire economy, but powerful network effects will come into play, reinforcing and accelerating our individual efforts for the greater good. This is because people who see us will act on our good example, and yet more others will act on their example, and so on. The metaphor that Jesus used in his day was that of yeast: “And again he said, ‘To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’” (Luke 13:20-21)

The first edition of this book was published in 2016 under the title “Business Ethics for Executives – a Christian Decision Guide”. The book had a warm reception from most everyone who read it. However, we realized after a while that the original title was limiting our potential readership to those interested in the rather narrow genre of business-ethics books. While the book indeed covers business ethics quite extensively, it is more than another ethics book. It is a book advocating ethical business leadership based on time-tested Judeo-Christian principles. In the pages that follow we challenge business leaders – especially those of faith – to embark on a journey of personal and professional growth. That makes it a leadership and personal growth book, maybe even more so than an ethics book.

In this second edition we have added references to some of the latest ethics-related news stories, as well as to noteworthy new research

on economic topics like executive compensation and the impact of automation.

We hope and pray that this book will help our readers align their daily business decisions more closely with their faith and thereby contribute to a transformation of the business world into one that is more people-centric than profit-centric. After publishing the first edition, we were greatly encouraged by meeting so many people of faith in the business world who already share this purpose and live it every day. If you are one of them, we hope this book will be a resource for you as we travel the road together, following in the Way of Jesus. And if you are new to this journey, you should know that you will not be alone and that there are many others who will walk with you. We invite you to join us!

The authors, March 2017

## Preface

*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

—MATTHEW 6:24(KJV)

Traditional Christian teachings are just as relevant to the globalized business world of today as they were to the business world of two thousand years ago. In this book, we look at modern business issues from a Christian perspective. Our goal is to provide our readers with a decision-making framework that is simple and practical—but not necessarily easy—to follow.

This book will challenge Christians to be truer to their faiths when they make decisions at work. We hope it will also be a useful reference for those who want to live moral lives at work, even if they do not necessarily identify as Christians and even if they come from different faith traditions.

If you are a Christian, how you *talk* about your Christian faith with colleagues is beyond the scope of this book. Not all people are comfortable talking about their faith to others, and not all work situations may be conducive to that. We are, however, challenging Christians to let their faith *actively guide*—and that means *change*—the business decisions that they make. It is even more important that Christians do this if they also like to talk about their faith at work; otherwise, they bring their faith into



disrepute because their actions belie their words. As Paul said in Romans, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.”<sup>1</sup> And he also said, “You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?”<sup>2</sup>

So whether you talk about your faith frequently or rarely, our focus will be on helping you make faith-guided decisions at work. The latter is not an easier path. Fundamentally changing your business decisions can be an even tougher test for your faith than giving verbal testimony.

So why is a book like this even necessary at this time?

There is obviously nothing wrong with owning or managing a for-profit business. There is nothing wrong with being successful and making money. Companies that serve the needs of their customers by providing good products and services and treat their workers and stakeholders fairly add value to the economy and serve society at large. And thankfully, there are many Christians in business who are guided by their faith every day.

But good intentions are not enough. Thinking of yourself as a moral person who always tries to do the right thing is not enough. There are powerful forces in the business world that will push us “off our game” if we are not vigilant. We all need to be aware of the world we live in and the tough decisions we are required to make from time to time. It is not supposed to be easy. If you never sail against the wind, but always with the wind, you may well end up serving Mammon, even though that was not your intention.

Those of us who live in the economically developed countries of the West are fortunate in many ways. Christians often feel assured that though business is conducted in a secular way, the moral principles of the Judeo-Christian heritage are largely enshrined within the jurisprudence of our countries. The most egregious moral violations also tend to be highly illegal, such as literally killing off your competitors, enslaving workers, paying bribes, or stealing someone else’s property. When such misdeeds are reported as occurring in less developed countries, Westerners feel a mix of

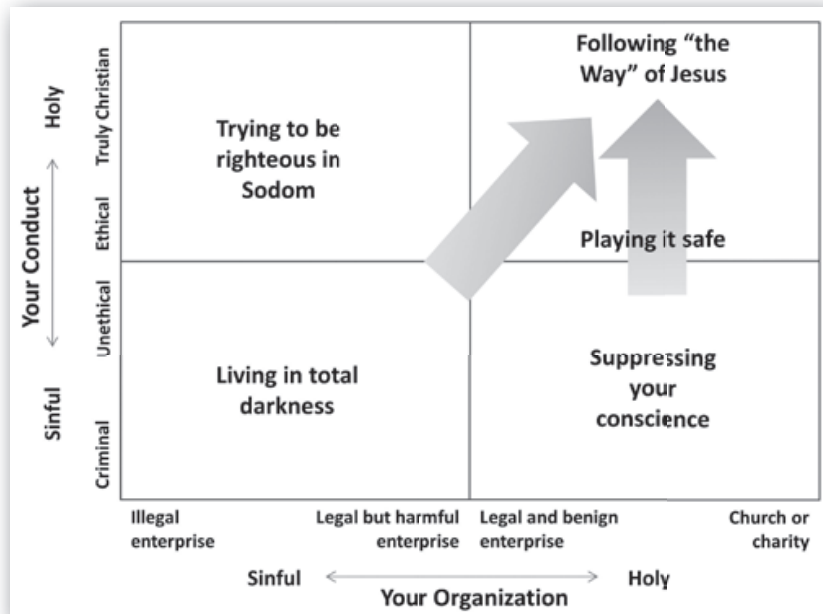
moral outrage, pity for the victims and self-satisfaction that those things could not happen in their countries.

In the United States—the seemingly most Christian of developed countries—religious observance, though kept mostly private and separate from business, is so pervasive that it is a safe bet to assume that most of our corporate colleagues are Christians, Jews, or Muslims, at least by family heritage. According to the Pew Research Center, 53 percent of US adults with a household income of \$100,000 or more believe in God with absolute certainty; a further 22 percent are fairly certain.<sup>3</sup> In total, three out of four US adults in this higher income category believe in God. However, only a quarter (26 percent) of people in this group say they look most to religion for guidance on right or wrong. Almost half (45 percent) prefer their own common sense, and the other quarter (26 percent) use either philosophy or science. If you work in a managerial or executive position in a company in the United States, the views above are representative of most of your colleagues.

Though our colleagues and bosses may not all be pious—some may be agnostic or even atheist—many expect them to be at least versed in the ethical strictures of the Abrahamic religious traditions. Employees and other stakeholders have a tacit assumption that the behavior of business executives is implicitly governed by moral imperatives rooted in religious beliefs.

It is our belief that this optimistic assumption is a fallacy. We should expect to encounter many situations in which we are conflicted between our faith and making money above all else. In the Bible Jesus tells us that it will be so and that our first duty and loyalty must always be to God. If we never experience any such conflict in our working lives, and if we do not make the tough choices our faith demands of us from time to time, we are suppressing our Christianity while at work.

Since this book is aimed at leaders in the business community, we will explain the scope of the book in terms businesspeople can relate to well—that is, with a two-by-two matrix.



**Figure 1 - Your Business Conduct in Context**

In figure 1, the horizontal axis shows the *nature of your organization*, with a scale going from sinful to holy. On the far left are enterprises, like organized crime, that are both illegal and sinful. On the far right are organizations dedicated to doing God’s work, like churches and charities. In between are legal and for-profit enterprises that offer harmful (left side) or benign (right side) products and services.

The vertical axis in figure 1 shows the *nature of your conduct*, with a scale going from sinful to holy. At the bottom is conduct that is clearly illegal and sinful, such as murdering people in pursuit of business objectives. At the top is following “the Way” of Jesus as it is explained to us in the Bible. The horizontal dividing line is drawn between conduct that is unethical and ethical in a secular sense. Ethical conduct may be of a higher standard than barely legal conduct, but barely ethical is not a sufficiently

high standard for practicing Christians or for anyone else who likes to think that he or she lives according to a strong moral code.

*This book is primarily written for people just inside or close to the top-right quadrant.* You could be a manager or executive in a legitimate for-profit business or even in a nonprofit or governmental agency. Vertically, you operate just above or even below the horizontal ethical line. Horizontally, you find yourself mostly to the right of the middle vertical line. However, there are legal enterprises that sell products or services that are inherently harmful, so those businesses are placed over to the left side.

People who live in the *bottom-left quadrant* are typically engaged in crime and willingly commit the illegal and sinful deeds required by their business models on a daily basis. They are clearly in need of repentance and redemption, but this book does not address their situations.

At the *top left* are people who may try to live a moral life but participate—by choice or not—in fundamentally sinful organizations. It is nearly impossible to lead a holy life in a depraved organization. Despite Abraham’s persistent bargaining with and pleas to God, Sodom was destroyed because not even ten righteous people could be found there, and angels led Lot and his family from the city.<sup>4</sup> Anyone in a similar situation must get out and not look back!

People at the *bottom right* are conducting legal business in illegal ways and are subject to criminal sanction. Insider trading is one example. As people move higher up on the right, they may still be worried about things they are required to do that feel unethical even though they are assured everything is completely legal.

We expect the majority of our readers to be in the *middle right*. If you are in that position you are likely satisfied that your job never requires you to do anything unethical, and you probably know how to make the right ethical choices. But you may still be playing it safe and not holding yourself to the high standard a Christian should aspire to—doing everything as if for Jesus. That soft voice inside you that occasionally makes you question what you are doing or wonder if there might not be a better way may be the Holy Spirit challenging you to act differently.

Even by secular ethical standards, there is still much opportunity for improvement close to home. Forty-one percent of US workers reported misconduct at work in the 2013 National Business Ethics Survey.<sup>5</sup> Put in our framework in figure 1, this number is indicative of conduct below the horizontal line separating the top and bottom quadrants.

In business, it is all about the numbers. You get no credit if your actions do not move the numbers in the right direction. In each of the chapters, we will take a good look at numbers as well as what moves them. We will cover core business activities—such as how to make money, how to contain costs, and how to treat people in the process. The right choices may not always be obvious and will depend on your own unique context. Therefore, we will also give you questions to ask yourself and your colleagues.

We want to stress that this book is *not* about public policy or about what government, society, or others *should* do. However, as part of their business activities, many organizations and virtually all large public corporations actively lobby different levels of government to enact or amend various laws, regulations, and taxes. The motives and methods of corporate management when lobbying the government to further a corporation's objectives are worth examining and are in scope.

This book is about the daily business decisions we make in our boardrooms, in our offices, and in teleconferences. Our business decisions have consequences for people near and far. The higher up we are, the greater our reach and the impact of our decisions—and the greater the magnitude of our responsibility. We hope and pray that this book will encourage and enable individuals to have a higher level of ethical conduct that will benefit many. The applicable metaphor is that of yeast making dough rise with executives acting on their faith being the yeast. Jesus said in Matthew: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”<sup>6</sup>

Let us all do our part on this day that we have been given.

## Notes

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1 Rom. 2:14.

2 Rom. 2:24.

3 “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”, May 12, 2015, accessed April 8, 2016, Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-god/>

4 Gen. 18–19.

5 “National Business Ethics Survey of the U.S Workforce: Key Findings,” National Business Ethics Survey, accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.ethics.org/research/eci-research/nbes/nbes-reports/nbes-2013>.

6 Matt. 13:33.