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WORD STUDY: RIGHTEOUSNESS

Righteousness (Old English, *rihtwise*) is the state of being right with God. The biblical concept of righteousness is not primarily a legal matter, but has to do with being in right relationship with God and other persons—and hence, acting rightly in relation to them. Ultimately righteousness is established for us in Christ, and worked out in us as we “keep in step” with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Various Psalms echo the wisdom of living righteously (cf. 5:8, 7:17, 9:8, & 33:5), as do Proverbs (cf. 13:6 & 15:9). Jesus also assures his listeners that those are blessed who “hunger and thirst” for righteousness, for they will be filled (Matt 5:6). Likewise, even those who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:10). May this be an encouragement to us to search out how to be “right-wised” in all our relationships, pursuing the kind of win-win dealings which cause all involved to praise the goodness of God. ◇

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WHAT DO YOUR ONLINE CUSTOMERS WANT?

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What can you do to make your business online work harder? How can you make more sales, keep more customers and better insulate yourself from the competition? And how can you move forward and make immediate improvements to your online business without running the risk of making some horrendous, high-tech, doomed-to-failure investment?

These are questions Nick Osborne's book, *Net Words—Creating High-Impact Online Copy* provides answers to. Specifically, his book makes the case for paying serious attention to the craft of copywriting online. And it gives explicit directions on how to make words work harder on your site, in your emails and in your newsletters.

His advice can be summarized in three words: listen, listen and listen. Our customers want something that most companies find hard to deliver. They want us to listen. They want us to tune in and hear what is on their minds. Mr. Osborne provides a number of ways we can listen, three of which are provided here.

1. Listen to your customers as they interact elsewhere on the Web.

This involves being aware of where your prospects and customers interact on the Web, which probably is not on your web site. If, for example, you are in the software business, there are numerous discussion lists, newsgroups and forums through which you can listen to what people are saying about your products. Or you can go to sites that aggregate customer experiences and reviews, like epinions.com.

In the book Mr. Osborne discusses Lawson Software, a company that created and nurtured a number of discussion lists at Topica.com. The results were excellent. Their users had a place to share their problems, and solutions. And Lawson had a place where they could listen to their customers and REALLY find out what they wanted.

Even without a list devoted to your product or company, there are still many places online where you can listen in to what your customers are saying, thinking and feeling.

2. Listen to what people say to your customer service agents.

Many managers don't know where their company's customer service agents are located. In large companies those people may work in a different building, town or even country. This is truly unfortunate, since customer service agents are probably the only group of people who get to speak with customers one on one. If you ever have the opportunity, spend some time sitting next to a few customer service people. Listen to what your customers are saying and listen to how your agents respond. Also, read inbound customer service emails and go through the logs of recent instant messaging communications.

CHRISTIAN BUSINESS ETHICS: EXAMPLES FROM

Virgil O. Smith, Ph.D.

The following is an excerpt from Dr. Smith's article published in the journal Faith in Business. A copy of the article can be obtained from Dr. S.

The Puritans were a practical as well as a godly people, and as such, believed that all of life was to be lived to the glory of God (Packer, 1990; Ryken, 1986). They attempted to integrate their saving faith in God with every part of life, and since, in their day as in ours, work and the pursuit of a living made up a major part of life, they had a great deal to say about the ethics of commerce.

The age of English Puritanism spanned the years of 1550 to 1700. This was a time when structural change was happening in the world of commerce. Commerce was expanding from a community affair, individuals who had usually known each other most of their lives, to the much less personal, increasingly complex, and radically enlarged scope of commerce that was rapidly taking over the known world. Tawney explains it this way:

No one can read the discussions which took place between 1500 and 1550 on three burning issues—the rise in prices, capital and interest, and the land question in England—without being struck by the constant appeal from the new and clamorous economic interests of the day to the traditional Christian morality, which in social organization, as in the relations of individuals is still conceived to be the final authority. . . . By the middle of the seventeenth century all that is altered. After the Restoration, we are in a new world of economic, as well as of political, thought. (Tawney, 1926:9)

Tawney goes on to say that the next two hundred years were dominated by the “new science of Political Arithmetic” which asserted that there are no rules to commerce beyond the letter of the law (Tawney, 1926:10). Over this time period, the predominate view changed from one

which regarded [economic activity] as one among other kinds of moral conduct, to the view of it as dependent upon impersonal and almost automatic forces. . . . [The] struggle of individualism, in the face of restrictions imposed in the name of religion by the Church and of public policy by the State, [was] first denounced, then palliated, then triumphantly justified in the name of economic liberty. (Tawney, 1926:13)

Today, such reasoning is a normal fixture in the day-to-day work life of modern business people, believers or unbelievers alike.

In essence, the problem that faced Christian business people in the mid-1500's is still with us today: Does the Bible provide sufficient direction to adequately control economic exchange, or are the social systems (the economic, legal, and monetary systems) the appropriate modern means by which to control economic exchange? If the social systems are in control then the Biblical message is not considered seriously as a source for developing a business ethic, with all the complexities involved. Thus, if we follow this reasoning, Christian rules of life end up having little to offer the practical world of business. From a theological perspective, the question is whether a social system can cause col-

lective righteousness to result from individually selfish actions.

This issue has many practical considerations. If the rules of Christian Godly living are inappropriate to the world of commerce, how can a Christian business person live by them and still survive in the marketplace? A continuation of this reasoning has led some Christian scholars to argue that Christians should remove themselves from the marketplace (how it is possible to do this, they do not say), since being involved in it is either to fail, or to sin.

The Puritans were, arguably, the only Christian body that took on the task of rethinking Scripture in light of its application to the commercial realities of their day. Present-day Christians in business should therefore consider the Puritan conceptions of living biblically in commercial settings.

The Puritans applied scriptural principles to the commercial world in the form of teaching they called ‘casuistry,’ by which they meant the ‘cases and problems of conscience’ (Packer, 1995).

Richard Baxter, a Puritan pastor, was one of the primary writers on this topic. Baxter’s work is a rethinking of scripture in its application to the new situations in the workplace of the Christian. He dealt with many practical issues of his day and ours, as a look at some of the subjects he dealt with show.

Must I in all cases do as I would be done by? . . . Is one obliged by a contract made in ignorance or mistake of the matter? . . . Am I obliged by covenanting words without a covenanting intent? . . . Must I keep a promise which I was drawn into by deceit? . . . May I dispraise another’s commodity to draw the buyer to my own? . . . May I buy as cheap as I can, or below the worth?

The Puritans argued that it is necessary for the Christian to only participate in, what we today call, win-win market situations. Baxter stated it this way:

[The Christian in commerce] must not desire “to get another’s goods or labour for less than it is worth.” He must not secure a good price for his own wares “by extortion working upon men’s ignorance, error, or necessity.” . . . If he finds a buyer who is willing to give more [than his wares are worth], he “must not make too great advantage of his convenience or desire, but be glad that [he] can pleasure him upon equal, fair, and honest terms,” for “it is a false rule of them that think their commodity is worth as much as any one will give.” (222-223)

Baxter explicitly recognized the biblical duties of the Christian, and yet also recognized the realities of the marketplace within which his parishioners worked. One aspect of this reality was the increasing complexity of the marketplace. The impact of an economic action upon employees, shareholders, debt-holders, suppliers, and society at large had to be considered. No longer could one

THE PURITANS

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only think about the individual transaction without placing it in the larger web of activity.

The fact that Baxter recognized these complexities and distinctions of a modern marketplace can be most easily seen in his instructions regarding the relationships between landlords and tenants. Baxter recognized that this type of an association often was not a pure market transaction, but also encompassed a power relationship. Regarding this, he said

It is too common a sort of oppression for the rich in all places to domineer too insolently over the poor, and force them to follow their wills and to serve their interest, be it right or wrong. . . . Especially unmerciful landlords are the common and sore oppressors of the countrymen. If a few men can but get money enough to purchase all the land in a county, they think that they may do with their own as they list [wish], and set such hard bargains of it to their tenants, that they are all but as their servants. . . . An oppressor is an Anti-Christ and Anti-God . . . not only the agent of the Devil, but his image. (Baxter, 1990[1625]:846)

The landlords of the day had an unopposed power position since the market rent tended to be held artificially high in England, by law.

Likewise, the landlord should not improve his land without considering the effect on the tenants, or discharge his tenants without compensating them. The landlord should not do things that would cause the rural population to fall, and a new tenant must not take over a tenancy over the existing tenant's head by paying more rent than the existing tenant can give or than the landlord can justly ask for. Thus, a Christian ethic in the marketplace takes account of changing situations and multiple parties affected by any decisions made. It also considers the power relationships created as responsibilities to be accounted for.

This article has very briefly shown how one of the leading Puritan thinkers attempted to grapple with the realities of modern commercial settings reapplying scripture to the market world of his day. It is important for today's Christian business person to reclaim lost ground, applying the teachings of Scripture to business dealings. One way to do this is through a study of the teachings of the Puritans, which are remarkably insightful, and remain immanently applicable today. ◇

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EXTERNAL OR INTERNAL?

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“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth” Col. 3:1-2.

These verses identify the choices we must make each day as we engage in ministry with our family, profession, and in our church. The base for our choices is to be reminded of our former self (vs. 5-7). We must choose to put aside immorality, impurity, evil desire and greed and instead put on the new self. The identity of the new self includes a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (vs. 12-14).

This issue of *The Mentor* provides a reminder of the Biblical definition of righteousness, and the article by Dr. Virgil Smith (MBA faculty) provides the Puritans' historical development of “living biblically in commercial settings.” The Biblical call is to obey the Word, which is our mandate to live and work with righteousness. The same portion of Scripture reminds us to “let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another” (v. 16). This is our guide for living righteously in the marketplace.

The final instruction in this passage sums up the Biblical view for each of us. “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (v. 17). We need to be reminded that man judges from the external appearance, while God judges from the internal (heart). ◇



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"GO TO" RESOURCES

This space will provide website, article, and book reviews to help build the character necessary for the ministry for which you are called. If you come across a resource you think is worth sharing, please let us know (mentor@biola.edu).

International Coalition for Workplace Ministries www.icwm.net

Established in 1997, the International Coalition of Workplace Ministries is "a group of very different people with one common goal—to transform the workplace for Christ." Specifically, it is concerned with more than how a person lives by Christian principles. Rather, ICWM is a "fellowship of individuals involved in businesses and organizations, non-profit workplace ministries, and churches who desire to live by the power of the Holy Spirit and to see real transformation in the place where people spend most of their time—at work." It exists to help transform the workplace for Jesus Christ and to provide resources, information and networking to other organizations that will help one fulfill one's calling in the workplace.

Some of the valuable resources include a bookstore, toolbox, article hyperlinks and training opportunities. The toolbox consists of several tools or resources that will help you succeed in your workplace calling. Some of these are direct services from ICWM while others are affiliate partners. One resource is for those who need capital for a new business and for investors looking for new projects to invest in. Two others are their co-branding and affiliate programs. A very affordable website design and hosting partner (NetMinistry.com) resource is available, and Christianjobs.com is not only a place for job recruiters and seekers, but also for entrepreneurs who are seeking to network with other Christian entrepreneurs. ◇

ONLINE CUSTOMERS continued

Granted, customer service communications tend to provide a view of customers when they are unhappy and dissatisfied. However, you're better off listening to your customers when they are complaining than not listening at all.

3. Encourage feedback from your site, emails and newsletters.

This is the big one. This is where the online environment provides an incredible opportunity to benefit from customer participation in the evolution of your company, products and services. With just a few clicks invaluable information can be collected from visitors to your site and readers of your outbound emails. The trouble is, in common with the vast majority of businesses online, you probably don't collect any feedback at all.

OpinionLab.com is one of the few companies that help online businesses collect direct, online customer feedback. In a white paper they published last year, all but one of the Media Metrix Top 50 websites accepted feedback. However, the way in which feedback was collected indicated that most websites were not gathering feedback to provide comprehensive insights into user satisfaction. For example, 92% required the user to leave the web page to provide feedback. On average, feedback systems were 2.2 clicks away and some were as many as 6 clicks deep. Furthermore, forty-one websites required personal information before they accepted feedback. The problem is that by not allowing anonymous feedback these sites were effectively eliminating potential respondents.

Mr. Osborne states that companies aren't encouraging a large inflow of customer commentary because they don't want to allocate the necessary money and resources to handle it. The Web is the only marketing environment in which you can encourage direct and immediate feedback from your customers 24 hours a day. But we don't do it.

As he correctly points out, if we don't listen to our customers and prospects, if we don't know what our online customers want—how on earth do we know what to say to them? So encourage customer feedback—through your website, email programs and newsletters.

Listen, listen and listen. ◇

The
Mentor

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