

Stewardship of Marketplace Relationships

Stewardship Changes How We See People. Ultimately, biblical marketplace ethics is not simply a list of rules. It flows from a different understanding of ownership. **If everything belongs to God, then the people whose paths intersect with mine ultimately belong to Him too.**

I therefore cannot exploit people God has called me to serve. I cannot dishonour people made in His image. I cannot use authority entrusted to me simply for my own benefit. I cannot separate my marketplace conduct from my worship. **How I steward people is part of how I steward what belongs to God.**

So as we consider the stewardship of marketplace relationships, we will look at three important dimensions:

1. How employers and managers should steward those entrusted to their leadership.
2. How employees should steward their relationship with their employers and their work.
3. How we should steward our wider business relationships — colleagues, partners, suppliers, customers and competitors.

Because ultimately: The marketplace is not only a place where we make a living. It is a place where we live out our stewardship. And one day God will not only ask us what we built, what we earned, or what we achieved. He will also be interested in how we treated the people He entrusted to us along the way. God sees relationships as two-way. He gives instructions to both the shepherd and the flock, parents and children, husbands and wives, and today we will see how this works between employers, employees and customers.

1. What are some stewardship considerations with regards to employers and managers?

A. Both management and staff should be a blessing to each other

Ruth 2:4 *“Now behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, ‘May the Lord be with you.’ And they said to him, ‘May the Lord be with you.’”*

Proverbs 3:27 — “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.”

This is a very strong stewardship text for people with organisational power. It can apply to **recognition, promotion, payment, development opportunities, recommendations and giving people credit.**

B. We should generate our business by just means.

Proverbs 28:16 *“A leader who is a great oppressor lacks understanding, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days.”*

C. Employers should practise equity knowing they are accountable to God.

Colossians 4:1 *“Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”*

D. Employers should not lead by threatening their workers.

Ephesians 6:9 *"And masters **do the same things to them**, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."*

E. Employers should be willing to serve their employees.

John 13:14-17 *"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, **you are blessed if you do them.**"*

F. Employers should not withhold wages.

James 5:1-6 *"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, **cries out against you**; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the **Lord of Sabaoth**. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wonton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you."*

G. Employers should pay wages on time.

Leviticus 19:13 *"...The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning."*

Deuteronomy 24:14,15 *"You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of **your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns**. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, **for he is poor and sets his heart on it**; so that he may not cry against you to the Lord and it become sin against you."*

Worldly leadership asks: "What can my authority make people do for me?"

Stewardship leadership asks: "What has God given me the power to do for the people entrusted to me?"

2. What are some stewardship considerations with regards to duties of workers?

A. We should do all our work "as unto the Lord".

Colossians 3:22-25 *"Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; **knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance**. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."*

The quality of my contribution cannot always be dependent upon the quality of somebody else's leadership.

My employer may determine my salary, but they don't determine my standard.

My manager may assess my performance, but ultimately my work is offered to God. When this truth becomes deeply rooted within us, excellence becomes an expression of worship rather than merely a strategy for promotion.

Would the quality of my work change if I consciously saw Jesus as the One I was serving?

B. We should operate from a place of contentment.

Luke 3:14 *“Don’t take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages”.*

If you are working “as unto the Lord” He will fill the gap when it comes to your salary.

C. We should honour and respect our employers.

1 Timothy 6:1, 2 *“Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of double honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against. And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved...”*

D. We should be careful who we partner with.

Proverbs 29:24 *“He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; he hears the oath but tells nothing.”*

“he hears the oath but tells nothing” means that when the opportunity or legal obligation comes to expose the truth, **he protects the wrongdoer by remaining silent.** *“If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.” — Leviticus 5:1 (NIV)*

E. We should not steal from our workplace, suppliers, or customers.

Exodus 20:15 *“Thou shalt not steal.”*

There is a mindset behind stealing. I learnt a few things when I asked a former gangster some questions regarding the driving forces behind stealing.

F. We should be submissive to our supervisors in the workplace.

1 Samuel 15:23 *“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and insubordination is an iniquity and idolatry...”*

G. We should not make room for offence and bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15-17 *“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; **that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled**, that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.”*

Have workplace wounds caused you to become bitter? **Anger is usually an emotional response to a perceived wrong, while bitterness is what can develop when that anger is retained, rehearsed, and rooted over time.** Begins to colour many events. You can still remember something painful without being bitter. Forgiveness does not require amnesia. The issue is whether the wound has become a **root system through which you now interpret the person and perhaps other people as well.** E.g. a woman refusing to work with men because she thinks “all men are dogs”.

H. We should all operate in the spirit of truth.

Proverbs 26:20-28 *“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer the fire quiets down. Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body. Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross, are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.”*

Flattery is also lying.

I. We should be wise in judging of disputes.

1 Corinthians 6:2-5 *“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?...Is it that there is no wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?”*

Pray Isaiah 11 over yourself for the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, Counsel and Might, the Spirit of Knowledge and the Fear of the Lord.

J. Don't devalue people whose contribution is different

1 Corinthians 12:21 *“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’”*

Although Paul is speaking about the body of Christ, the principle of interdependence can be carefully applied to teams: different people bring different contributions. **Difference does not mean inferiority.**

This principle challenges both arrogance and insecurity.

Arrogance says, “My contribution is more important than yours.”

Insecurity says, “Because your contribution is different from mine, mine must be less valuable.”

Stewardship says: “God has entrusted different gifts, roles and responsibilities to different people. Let us honour each contribution.”

The healthiest workplaces are not places where everybody is the same. They are places where difference can contribute without being diminished.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ***Life Together***, where he applies Paul’s words in **1 Timothy 1:15**—“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”

Bonhoeffer writes along these lines: **“If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all.”** He then makes the relational point even more strongly: the person who wants to serve another in genuine humility cannot seriously regard the other person’s sin as worse than his own.

Paraphrased: “We can only enter into authentic fellowship with other believers when we see ourselves as the greatest sinner in the room.”

“Relationships flourish when each person is more conscious of their own need for grace than of the other person’s need for correction.”

K. We should be peace-makers promoting unity in the workplace.

Psalm 133:1 *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!...God command a blessing”*

Bring back love to the workplace. Workplace prayer meetings can be very powerful opportunities to pray in agreement.

3. What are some stewardship considerations with regards to business relationships?

A. We should not work in isolation.

Proverbs 18:1 *“He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom.”*

Interdependency is healthy.

B. We should strengthen and challenge each other.

Proverbs 27:17 *“Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”*

C. We should maintain a humble, forgiving disposition as true children of God.

Romans 12:16-21 *“Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, ‘but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

The goal is not simply to be able to say:

“I have forgiven.”

The deeper goal is to become increasingly free—free from bitterness, free from vengeance, free from the need to punish, and free from allowing yesterday's wounds to dictate today's relationships.

John 8:36 “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

What does forgiveness mean and not mean?

Forgiveness releases the debt.

Healing treats the wound.

Trust is rebuilt through evidence.

Reconciliation rebuilds the relationship.

Boundaries protect what is healthy.

I refuse to allow yesterday's pain to control tomorrow's relationships.

D. We should embrace kindness and gentleness.

2 Timothy 2:24,25 *“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, **but be kind to all**, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition...”*

E. We should have a godly attitude toward our competitors in business.

Proverbs 24:17,18 *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; **lest the Lord see it and be displeased**, and He turn away His anger from Him.”*

We are not good punishers. It’s not a burden for us to carry. It’s better to leave things in God’s hands.