

How the Church Fails Businesspeople (and what can be done about it)

by John C. Knapp

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John Knapp is a professor at Samford University in Alabama and Director of their Marlin Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership. Before joining academia he was president of a corporate communication consulting firm. His previous books include *For the Common Good: Leadership in the 21st Century* and *Leaders on Ethics: Real-World Perspectives on Today's Business Challenges*. *How the Church Fails Businesspeople* was based not just on Knapp's own insight and experience but a survey of some 230 Christians in a wide variety of jobs from CEO and US Senator to mail carrier, grocer, and child care worker. His appendices list all the occupations represented in the survey along with the survey questions and a list of ethical issues these folk reported.

The vast majority of Knapp's respondents reported (a) significant ethical challenges faced at work and (b) little or no help from their church on how to live faithfully at work. The general attitude in business seems to be "park-it-at-the-door" when it comes to personal faith – and Christians usually go along. Business schools and business ethics education tend to be owned by a narrow "self-interest-maximizer" view of human nature and the reigning capitalist consensus. So ethics is little more than a protective, negative, litigation-avoidance affair. Meanwhile the church focuses on spiritual, doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and familial matters --- having nothing to say about the work lives of congregants. Seminaries do little or nothing to change this approach to church. In addition, Knapp writes, churches often could use some help from their business folk in better managing their own affairs!

After a thoughtful chapter on "Uneasy Bedfellows: Money and the Church" Knapp completes Part One mourning "Divided Worlds – Divided Lives." In Part Two he proposes a way out. First, we need a renewed, biblical understanding of Christian vocation and then a more robust moral theology or ethics. This means seeing our work in light of God's calling on our lives to follow and serve him at all times, all through the week. For ethics, Knapp unpacks Micah's summary of God's requirements to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. He discusses the essential role of the church as a community of moral discernment, discourse, influence, encouragement, and example. This chapter (6) is one of the best contributions of the book because of the way Knapp's ethics follow the distinctive contours of Scripture. So many essays on business ethics for Christians are little more than worldly, secular, Enlightenment moral philosophy "plus Bible verses" – they unwittingly support the individualism, rationalism, and sterility of Modernity. Knapp plays it completely differently, biblically, in a profound sense. He doesn't just pour holy water over secular ethics as many of our brothers seem content to do.

Knapp closes with a review of hopeful signs of awakening --- in marketplace organizations, an explosion of literature, conferences, and training programs, including at some seminaries. He challenges churches to get on board in their teaching and preaching and in their worship and prayer, including one of my long time hobby horses: commissioning workers for going out into health care, technology, education, etc, --- not just doing that for clergy and traditional missionaries. Knapp has written a winner. Read it, buy copies for your pastoral staff and elder boards as Christmas gifts this month. Have a daylong discussion in January! Bravo John Knapp.