

## ABSTRACT

Christian Virtues in Business: Why It's Better to Not Sell Your Soul

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Discussions about Christian virtues and the good life rarely occur within or in relation to the business world. Rather, businesspeople are often typecast as being selfish, greedy and prideful. It is true that in many ways the business sphere encourages and rewards immoral behavior. However, in my thesis I will argue that it is not only possible to be a successful businessperson and a faithful Christian simultaneously, but that the Christian virtues help people find more success as a business professional. I will define and examine three vices: pride, greed, and selfish ambition, and discuss where and why they show up in the business world, what their opposing virtues are, and ultimately why faithful and virtuous Christians in business will find more success than the cliché greedy businessman.

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CHRISTIAN VIRTUES IN BUSINESS: WHY IT'S BETTER TO NOT SELL YOUR  
SOUL

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1
Chapter 2: Pride	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5
Chapter 3: Ambition	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	19
Chapter 4: Greed	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	33
Chapter 5: Conclusion.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	47
Bibliography	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	54

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

There is a disconnect between business morality and Christian morality. Robert Jackall wrote a book examining this disconnect, saying people “bracket, while at work, the moralities that they might hold outside the workplace or that they might adhere to privately and follow instead the prevailing morality of their particular organizational situation.” According to a former vice-president of a large firm that Jackall interviewed, “what is right in the corporation is not what is right in a man’s home or in his church” (4). Why is this? What causes people to operate according to a different set of rules while at work compared to while at home? This is the guiding question of this thesis.

Modern pop culture and the general trends of social sentiment have made and perpetuated several unfair assumptions about people in the world of business. For example, it is accepted as common knowledge and almost cliché that making money is the main goal of businessmen, and crimes such as lying, cheating, and stealing are rampant in the world of business. The past several generations have ingrained ideas like these in the subtlest ways. Many movies, from *Avatar* to *Soylent Green*, feature “Big Business” as the antagonist; classic literature, such as Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*, often features money grubbing businessmen as the bad guy; many documentaries that desire to bring light to injustices, like *Blackfish* and *Supersize Me*, cast CEOs as selfish bureaucrats in it for the money and completely ignorant or uncaring of the plight of their employees, customers and killer whales. The Green Movement has decided that

Agribusiness is out to destroy the planet. In the same way that some other professionals, like soldiers, doctors, and teachers, are held up in society as shining pillars of morality and self-sacrifice, the generic “businessman” tends to be the go-to bad guy. It is easy to incriminate “businessmen” or “corporate America” because doing so is an accepted trend.

These negative views of businessmen have not emerged from nothing. The world of business boasts some of the most infamous and well-known scandals and bad guys of the last 200 years, from the collapse of Enron, to the robber barons of the late 1800’s, to the 2008 economic crisis. But are events such as these enough to justify the assumption that the average businessman is morally reprehensible?

Christian businesspeople face a dilemma. They probably want to succeed in their careers, and God calls his people to do their very best in everything, as if they were doing it for Him (Colossians 3:23). But is it possible for them to succeed in their careers in a way that imitates Christ? Or must they choose one or the other – career success or Christian faithfulness?

The mindset of business develops a different set of virtues than the Christian mindset, just like playing football results in a different set of skills than playing soccer. Those skills overlap and complement each other to a certain extent. But if someone who has only ever played football tries to play soccer for the first time, he will not be very good at it. Similarly, Christian businesspeople that spend the majority of their time developing business virtues will struggle when faced with moral challenges because their Christian virtues are underdeveloped. They may develop good, worthwhile virtues such as diligence, fortitude, and prudence. But they may lack other virtues that are not emphasized as often in the work place, such as honesty, kindness and humility. It is when

business virtues are overdeveloped and Christian virtues are underdeveloped that problems emerge, such as greed, pride and selfish ambition.

David Brooks, in his book “The Road to Character,” makes the distinction between the business virtues, which he calls the “resume virtues,” which are the character traits valued by employers and which lead to material success; and the Christian virtues, which he calls “eulogy virtues,” which is a slightly different set of character traits spoken of about people at their funerals, traits that made them a “good person.” These two categories of virtues are not opposed, but, like soccer and football, they are still slightly different. Society in general claims that the Christian virtues are more important, but most people will spend more time focusing on improving their business virtues. Indeed, it is much easier and more straightforward to work on the business virtues. Modern educational systems, like college, tend to focus on improving the virtues that improve peoples’ job prospects, as opposed to lives.

These two types of virtues require different attitudes and environments for their development. Business virtues are outward focused – they are all about travelling forth and conquering the world, going out and creating, building, confronting, and discovering. The Christian virtues require one to turn inward, to return to ones roots, to confront one’s own weaknesses. Business virtues operate within an economically logical framework – reward for hard work, reaping what you sow, practice makes perfect. The eulogy virtues operate in a backwards economy – giving is better than receiving, you must surrender your desires to get what is truly good, whoever holds on to his life will lose it, but he who gives it up will find it (Luke 9:24) (Brooks, xi, xii). These frameworks are not diametrically opposed; in the New Testament Paul often adheres to the business virtue

framework, for example, chastising lazy Christians, telling them if they do not work, they do not eat (I Thessalonians 3:10). However, the danger is that one will get comfortable in the logical world of business virtues, and forget that a well-developed character also requires Christian virtues.

The human condition is to struggle to find an understanding between these two different mindsets – the way the world should work, and the way it actually works. It would be easy to neglect the Christian virtues and to spend one’s life developing the perfect business virtues, and many of the most “successful” businesspeople do. But doing so leads to a tragic result. Humans are immortal beings, and we know that the temporary things of this world will pass away. True success is not merely the accumulation of temporary things like wealth and status. Businessmen should be held up to a higher standard than mere moneymakers because they serve a necessary function for the well-being of society. True success in business is not about making money – it is about doing one’s job well.

In this thesis, I want to explore the fissure between the two types of virtues: Business and Christian. I want to look at three traits that are “virtues” in the business world and vices everywhere else: pride, ambition, and greed. I will explore why the stereotype of the wicked businessman exists, and whether or not it is actually necessary to focus all of one’s attention on the business virtues and neglect the Christian virtues to succeed in business. I will show that true success in business can only be achieved through the development of the Christian virtues in addition to the business virtues.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Pride

Pride is a sneaky vice. Everyone struggles with it and recognizes it in others, but it can be hard to identify in oneself. Self-respect is similar, and certainly a good thing. For example, self-respect can be appealed to in order to encourage good behavior, and wanting to earn the respect of others can inspire a person to work harder and be better. But, in general, Christian thought identifies pride as something to be avoided. Pride is the source of a multitude of problems, especially in the business world, as the writer of Proverbs points out, saying, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). But before we can explore its causes and effects in a business environment, we should explore its definition from a Christian context.

#### *C.S. Lewis’s Definition of Pride*

C.S. Lewis, in his book “Mere Christianity” devotes an entire chapter to the sin of pride. The chapter is appropriately entitled “The Great Sin.” Lewis claims that it is the most dangerous of all sins, calling it “the essential vice, the utmost evil.” Pride is unique because no man in the world is free from it, but many are not able to recognize it in themselves. Its existence blocks its own discovery - it takes humility to recognize pride in oneself. It is rare to hear a non-Christian accuse himself of being proud, and mean it in a negative way. But on the other hand, many non-Christians have no trouble seeing this

vice in others and despising them for it. Lewis notes that oftentimes, “the more we have [pride] ourselves, the more we dislike it in others” (103).

Pride is not only the ultimate sin, but also the original sin, and all other types of sin stem from it. According to Lewis, it is original because it is “how the devil became the devil,” and it is also what caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden. It is ultimate because pride is “the complete anti-God” state of mind (103). The main impetus behind pride is the quest for power, and because God is all powerful, pride is the attempt of man to usurp God’s power and declare himself the god of his own life. This is exactly what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, when they decided to make their own rules for which fruit they could and could not eat, ignoring the rules God set in place for their own good. They decided to compete with God for power.

One component of pride that makes it unique from other sins is that it is competitive by nature. One is never proud of being merely pretty or smart or rich, but prettier, smarter and richer than someone else. In this way, pride is not merely a person wanting himself to be better, but wanting others to be worse in comparison. There is nothing wrong with wanting to become a better person independent of others. God calls for man to strive for excellence in everything he does (Colossians 3:23). But when he measures his accomplishments in comparison with other people, he will desire them getting worse to the same degree that he desires himself getting better – then it is only the gap between one man’s achievement versus the other that matters, whether one goes up or the other goes down. Pride turns other people who are better off than you automatically into enemies and rivals. Pride naturally separates people, and undermines other goods like friendship and compassion.

The competitive nature of pride inevitably results in bitterness and enmity toward others. Instead of following the golden rule, and wanting good for others to the same extent that you want it for yourself, you actually do the opposite – you begin to desire and delight in the failures of others because it will make you look better in comparison. On the other hand, you hate the success of others because it makes you look worse. The recent film *The Big Short*, tells the story of several investors who managed to predict the 2007-2008 financial crisis and decided to short securities and made a lot of money. After the crisis, Michael Burry, one of the investors, offered to be interviewed by the government so that they could learn how he saw the crisis coming. Instead of taking him up on his offer, he was audited, his emails were seized, and he was investigated by the FBI. I would venture to say that the people in government whose job it was to detect and prevent financial crises took Burry's success as a personal affront to their pride because it made them look bad. They punished him by wasting his time and invading his privacy through a bunch of unnecessary investigations. The competitive nature of pride turns everyone into a potential threat. Other vices, like drunkenness, at least can bring people together in a spirit of brotherly love. But pride causes only enmity.

The other vices can also be competitive, but only by accident. C.S. Lewis uses the example of lust as an illustration of this point, saying “the sexual impulse may drive two men into competition if they both want the same girl,” but it is not necessary that it be the same girl – the sin of lust does not necessitate competition (104). Even greed does not require competition, though it may accidentally cause competition if there is not enough to go around. Things like greed and lust are often blamed for causing the most evil in the world, but often the heart of the problem is actually pride.

Greed may cause a man to want to make \$500,000 a year so that he can spend it on whatever luxuries he wants. However, greed comes from materialism. The main reason he wants the money is so he can have the things that the money buys. Pride on the other hand comes from lust for power. A prideful man does not want \$500,000 a year to buy luxuries, but rather to be more powerful than others who earn less; to be able to “move them about like toy soldiers” (104). A purely greedy man does not care about how much others have, or whether or not he has more in comparison. Greed is self-contained, whereas pride is competitive.

Pride is not caring at all what others think because they do not matter – you declare that others have no power, and their opinions are worth nothing. This makes pride different from vainglory, which Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung defines in her book “Glittering Vices,” to be “the excessive and disordered desire for recognition and approval from others” (60). The vainglorious man concerns himself only with the opinions of others, wanting to gain their applause and admiration. Real “black, diabolical pride” on the other hand is when you look down on others to such an extent that their opinions mean nothing to you. The only person you care about pleasing is yourself – certainly not God. In this way, pride and vainglory are on opposite ends of a scale. The virtuous point between the two, the golden mean, is wanting primarily to please God, not others, and not oneself.

Pride is the most “anti-God” of all the vices because it is impossible to have pride, and at the same time accept God as he is. The only way for mankind to understand God is in comparison to themselves – mankind is nothing, and God is immeasurably better than mankind in every way. Pride is what makes this hard to accept. As long as a man is

proud, he will misunderstand God. As C.S. Lewis puts it, “a proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you” (105).

Unfortunately, in the way most businesses operate both pride and vainglory are indirectly incentivized, and they are therefore perhaps the most common corporate sins. Promotions and raises in large corporations are not always based on doing one’s job well, but rather looking good in front of one’s superiors in order to gain their admiration. As God points out in 1 Samuel 16:7, “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” Appearance is given priority because one’s fate is controlled by the opinions of others, who are primarily concerned with appearance. Businesspeople are incentivized to both appear extremely self-confident and over-value and cater to the opinions of others in order to climb the corporate ladder.

### *The Humble Foundations of Business in America*

To explore the place of pride in the modern world of business, I will be using evidence from the book “Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers” by Robert Jackall, in which the author explores why, instead of good, traditional values, like “ability, talent, and dedicated service to an organization,” corporate success seems to depend more on “politics, adroit talk, luck, connections, and self-promotion.” I will also refer to David Brooks’ book “The Road to Character,” in which he talks about how the way that children today are conditioned to be more proud and less humble than past generations.

Originally, the spirit of business and capitalism in the US encouraged humility. Jackall uses Weber's work "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" as his starting point for outlining the progression of the spirit of business in America. According to Weber, one way that Protestantism differs from Catholicism is the notion of "calling". He claims that Catholics believe that the way to live a life that is pleasing to God is through "the pursuit of monastic asceticism" – separating oneself from the world. Protestants on the other hand, believe that the best way to please God is by appropriately integrating themselves in the world by fulfilling the "innerworldly duties which arise from the individual's station in life. This then becomes one's 'calling'" (29). A person can know that they are doing a good job at fulfilling their calling when God blesses them with material wealth. Therefore, worldly work, whether it be carpentry, husbandry, agriculture, or clerical, should be done for the glory of God, and the resulting riches from success at work are rewards for being a faithful servant. (For more on "calling," see Chapter 3.)

However, the "ideal type of the capitalist entrepreneur... shuns ostentation and unnecessary show, spurns the conscious enjoyment of his power, and is embarrassed by the outward signs of the social esteem in which he is held" (24). He is not vainglorious in that he practices his own sort of asceticism, getting no real pleasure out of the riches he has been blessed with or the admiration of others. Rather he only enjoys them only as signs that he is fulfilling his vocation. Further, he is not prideful in that he only takes pleasure in the knowledge that he is following the will of God, not his own will. Work becomes a form of worship, and the better and harder you work, the more you please God.

Humility is a key virtue in the Protestant-capitalist attitude toward work described by Weber, the attitude on which the foundation of capitalism in America was built. Weber looks at work in America being treated as a calling, which, according to A. J. Conyers, has a lot of religious implications. The notion of a person having a “calling” requires that there be some outside agent that is doing the calling, and that that agent commands enough authority to be listened to and heeded. Following a calling requires one to put aside one’s own plans and instead follow another’s summons. This requires admitting that someone else’s plan is better – someone else knows more. Admitting this is an act of humility. Callings are given individually and are different for everyone, so there is much less of a possibility of competition. Furthermore, Weber points out that the material gains that businessmen get when successful are to be treated with an attitude of humility, recognizing that they are gifts from the Lord, and not solely a result of human effort and, thus, source of pride.

According to Jackall, the connection between Protestantism and a strong work ethic helped build the American attitude towards business. The virtues held up by Protestantism, specifically hard work and humble renunciation of material gains, “provided both the economic and the moral foundations for modern capitalism” (Jackall, 7). Even when the popularity of religion began to dwindle in the US, the imperatives for things like hard work, humility, frugality and self-reliance remained ingrained in the capitalist spirit, along with the expectation that hard work will lead to rewards. We see it today in the notion of “The American Dream” – anyone who comes to America will find success as long as he works hard.

### *Problems with Vainglory*

The American capitalist spirit had a strong foundation in Christianity. However, Jackall argues that the bureaucratization of the corporation changed the virtues that are valued in a capitalistic society. Protestant virtues no longer line up with business virtues because of the way business has changed since Weber wrote “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” over 100 years ago. Now, workers are encouraged to be proud, vainglorious and humble in the wrong contexts and for the wrong reasons.

A key element of the bureaucratization that Jackall blames for this change in business virtues is the implementation of a hierarchical style of management that puts the CEO at the top of the corporate ladder. Whereas in the world of Weber, the ultimate authority was God, and the only way one could achieve economic success was by pleasing God, “in the bureaucratic world... one achieves economic salvation to the extent that one pleases and submits to new gods, that is, one’s bosses” (205). CEO’s have usurped God’s power - the power to dictate the fates of every employee. As a result, the main goal of the employees is to look good in front of the CEO. The CEO essentially becomes the new god that everyone answers to, which sometimes results in irrationality because, after all, the CEO is only human. Jackall gives examples of the irrationality of this goal of pleasing the CEO in “Moral Mazes” through anecdotes given by employees he interviews. One of the employees talks about how whenever the CEO of his corporation visited a plant, the “most significant order of business for local management is a fresh paint job,” even when it is exorbitantly expensive, and even if it is to the detriment of more important, less visible operations of the plant. Looking good in front of the CEO is the number one priority because the CEO is the one with all the power – the



power to give and the power to take away. Therefore, employees are encouraged to over-value the opinion of the CEO, which is vainglory.

This goal of pleasing the CEO creates a naturally competitive environment within the corporation. One way to make yourself look good is to make everyone else look worse. Workers are incentivized to “battle fiercely with one another to position themselves, their products, and their allies favorably in the eyes of ... the CEO” compared to everyone else. The hierarchy fuels the selfish ambition of motivated men and women who desire success, but since rewards are scarce, “bureaucracies necessarily pit people against each other and inevitably thwart the ambitions of some” (38). The battle for a promotion is a zero-sum game. The only way for you to win is for others to lose, so you desire their failure as much as you desire your own success.

In the context of a corporation, it can be easy for the Christian to fall into the vice of vainglory. When one must compete directly with coworkers who have no qualms valuing the opinions of the CEO as if he were God, it can be easy to lose perspective and get lost in the competition. Without even realizing it, one may start prioritizing the good opinion of his superiors in the company more than the good opinion of mankind’s ultimate superior, God.

### *Problems With Humility*

Being a “team-player” is a necessary part of being a good employee. One businessman that Jackall interviewed defined a team-player as “someone who sinks his personal ambition to the good of the company; someone who agrees to the consensus on a decision even though he might see things differently” (57). Sinking one’s personal

ambition and admitting that someone else may know better than you and therefore following their lead do not always indicate true humility. Humility is a virtue after all, and a golden mean on a scale between two vices. Of course it is possible to think too much of oneself – that is pride. But it is also possible to think too little of oneself – that is pusillanimity.

Humility is important, but it is not true humility unless it is combined with prudence, which helps one find the golden mean. As Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean ethics*, prudence, or practical wisdom, is a prerequisite for all the virtues. Virtues such as humility may be the correct end, but prudence is necessary to figure out the correct means to that end; not only what should be done, but how, where and when it should be done. (6:13). If a CEO is leading the company in a bad direction, being a “team-player” and just following the herd in such a situation is not a virtue. Humility, obedience and submission are only virtues insofar as they are prudent, and the one to which you are submitting is working toward the good.

### *Problems with Pride*

In addition to humility and vainglory, corporations also often appeal to and encourage man’s natural tendencies toward pride. The hierarchical system of managers consists of people obeying their superiors, while giving commands to their inferiors. It can be frustrating to be at the bottom of the corporate ladder because your only job is to constantly subordinate your own will and follow the orders of others. The further you manage to climb up the ladder, the fewer people you will have to answer to, the more power and control you gain over your own fate, and the more secure you feel. Slowly but

surely, instead of being subject to the wills of others, you get to assert your own will over others – you gain power, which is equated with success. The hierarchical system appeals to and depends on peoples’ natural desire for power, their pride, encouraging them to desire to assert their own wills above everyone else’s. The problem with this situation is that the most important and infallible will is not represented – God’s will.

This desire for power and self-lordship is evident not only in the business world, but in society in general. In “The Road to Character,” David Brooks cites several surveys taken by the Gallup Organization meant to measure pride. High school seniors were asked if they considered themselves very important people. In 1950, only 12% said yes, but in 2005 80% said yes. David Brooks talks about how, when he looked around society he “kept finding the same messages everywhere: You are special. Trust yourself. Be true to yourself... this is the gospel of self-trust.” This gospel is heard everywhere from children’s movies to commencement speeches. To prove his point, David Brooks quotes a commencement speech that Ellen DeGeneres gave in 2009: “My advice to you is to be true to yourself and everything will be fine.” Similarly, celebrity chef Mario Batali told graduates to follow “your own truth, expressed consistently by you.” Anna Quindlen, a New York Times journalist, advised people to “honor your character, your intellect, your inclinations, and, yes, your soul by listening to its clean clear voice instead of following the muddled messages of a timid world” (7).

These speeches are all saying the same thing: you are your own god. This is a swing away from vainglory, but a swing towards pride. The attempt to usurp God’s authority over our lives is the ultimate manifestation of pride. According to the evidence

of the Gallup poll, the gospel of self-trust, which is really the gospel of self-lordship, is pervading the modern mindset.

This gospel of self-trust comes from a failure to realize that humans, although made in the image of God, have since fallen, and are flawed. Humility is the ability to recognize that you do not know everything, and the willingness to figure out a way to deal with ignorance and limitation. It is recognizing the necessity of occasionally turning to someone else and asking for help, in the same way a young child turns to his parents for guidance because he knows that they know better than him, and want what is best for him.

In the corporate world, it is easy to get caught up in the competitive power struggle of your will versus the wills of those with whom you are competing for power. The only way to progress is to assert your will with full confidence – to know you are right and believe in yourself, which is following the gospel of self-trust. Because of the hierarchical and competitive nature of the business world, employees exist within a battle of wills. When in a battle of wills, humility and the willingness to recognize one's fallibility is a weakness, and will cause you to lose the battle, and never achieve success. One of the managers that Jackall interviewed in *Moral Mazes* claimed, "Persons who can present themselves well, who can sell themselves the best are the kind of people who get ahead... It's having a certain grace, charm, adroitness, and humor... [and being] very decisive" (61). To get ahead, in a word, one must be act as if one is infallible, even though no one is infallible.

### *Summary*

Pride is a very sneaky, very dangerous vice from which all other vices stem. It is the desire to be better than others, which is automatically competitive, and automatically makes everyone else an enemy; you desire their failure as well as your own success. Pride is the most anti-God of all vices because in order to acknowledge the nature of God, one must completely humble oneself and recognize one's low position in comparison to God's greatness. Pride prioritizes one's own opinion above all others, while vainglory, a similar vice, prioritizes the opinions of others. Both are attempts to usurp power and authority from God.

The spirit of capitalism in the US was founded on Protestant principles, and originally encouraged the virtue of humility. It recognized one's occupation as one's humble response to God's calling. It recognized material gain as gifts from God, and not the fruits of man's labor alone. However, with the bureaucratization of business in the US and the implementation of hierarchical systems of management, humility became a weakness and pride a strength. CEOs are the new gods of the corporation, and employees are encouraged to overvalue his opinion as they compete with one another in order to gain power for themselves. On the other hand, sometimes employees are required to be pusillanimous, completely subordinating their wills and being "team players" under the wills of others.

In a hierarchical system, the only way one can escape from under the authority of others is to gain authority over others by climbing up the corporate ladder. Businesses appeal to employees' natural desire for power, and therefore their pride. Business

becomes a battle of wills, and the key to winning the battle of wills is showing the most confidence in oneself, as if one is infallible. Humility in this environment is a weakness.

The same types of patterns show up in society. Today much more so than a few generations ago, people are encouraged to believe in and trust themselves. The problem is that no one is perfect, and sometimes our wills point us towards the wrong things. The only infallible will is God's will, but in the corporate world, employees are so caught up in the competition that they forget this.

Seeking the praise of ourselves or others leads only to a life of isolation, falsity and shallowness, and self-preoccupation (DeYoung, 77). Only when one values God's opinion over all others can one live the life one was created to live, fulfill one's purposes set forth by God, and find true success.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Ambition

In order to correctly understand the Christian view of ambition, it is necessary to first understand the Christian view of the related notion of vocation. In this chapter, I will explain what ambition is, and how it can transform into either a vice or a virtue by its connection to vocation. I will compare old and new definitions of the idea of vocation, and use the life of the Apostle Paul as an example of ambition made holy through connection with vocation. I will then examine how Christians should respond when they are not able to reach the goals to which their ambition drives them.

#### *The Definition of Ambition*

Ambition is different from the other vices covered in this paper because it is not inherently bad – it only has the potential to be bad. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the word’s earliest uses, it had a negative connotation, meaning “inordinate” desire to high position, being associated with pomp and vainglory. The modern dictionary definition still has a negative, selfish feel to it, defining ambition as an ardent desire to attain rank, influence or distinction. In its most neutral form, ambition is the drive to accomplish some goal. Whether or not the drive itself is a good thing or not depends the goal. If the goal is good, it tempers the amount of drive, keeping it from being too much, which becomes workoholism, or too little, which becomes sloth.

A habit among some Christians is to fear the potential destructive power of ambition to such an extent that they are tempted to denounce all ambition as evil. This notion creates a crossroads for the Christian: they can either refuse to pursue worldly gain and live a completely ambitionless life, or they can act no differently than non-Christians at work, advancing their goals without any consideration of the teachings of the Bible. Those who live by this dichotomy fail to recognize that they are only seeing the extreme cases. It is true that too much ambition leads to workaholism, a sin, but too little ambition leads to sloth, which is also a sin. Between these two vices, there is what Aristotle calls the golden mean – the proper amount of ambition.

The key to finding the golden mean and the correct goal of ambition is vocation. To truly understand how to approach and practice ambition correctly, Christians must first understand vocation. One's vocation is not synonymous with one's occupation; rather it is a way of life, regardless of one's occupation. Every Christian's vocation is to live a life that reflects Christ in whatever occupation he or she may have inside or outside the church, whether gardening, being a good mother or father, managing money, teaching, making music, being a spiritual leader, or simply being a good neighbor. Using one's God-given vocation as the fuel of one's ambition is what ensures that ambition does not become a vice. Being ambitious and doing one's utmost in one's calling, whatever it may be, is pleasing to God, and brings him glory.

### *The Changing Definition of Vocation*

A. J. Conyers talks about the changing definition of the word "vocation" throughout the years in his essay "The Meaning of Vocation." In the teachings of Origen



and Augustine and the early church, the term vocation included a call to every Christian to seek out and fulfill God's calling for their life, whether it led them to the church or marketplace. Later, during the monastic movement, its definition narrowed and came to be associated with only the role of those who work within the Church itself, like monks, nuns and priests. The Protestant movement sought to redefine vocation to once again apply to everyone who believed they were responding to a divine call, whether to work in the Church or outside of it. But the efforts of the Protestant movement ended up unintentionally swinging too far in that direction, and the new definition came to suggest that vocation only had to do with occupation, which paved the way for complete secularization of the term. Eventually, anyone could call one's job one's "vocation," whether or not they believed they were responding to a summons by God, and thus the term "vocation" served as a sanctifier and justifier of any occupation.

So, according to the old misunderstanding of the term "vocation," one can only have a vocation if one has been called to be a pastor or monk, and any occupation outside of the clergy is not God-sanctioned. According to the new misunderstanding, the term "vocation" is merely one's choice of occupation that does not have anything to do with a divine calling. Neither of these definitions is correct, and they only serve to make the reconciliation between so-called "practical" occupations like business and the life of faith even more difficult.

### *An Example of Sacred "Secular" Work*

Problems that arise from these dueling definitions of vocation are demonstrated in the life of William Wilberforce, an Englishman who was an active member in the House

of Commons in the late 1700's and early 1800's best known for being the leader in the fight to abolish slavery in England. Despite being raised in a Christian household, he ended up as worldly as all of his friends by the time he started attending Cambridge in 1776. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1780 at the age of 21. He later went on a tour of Europe, during which he was convicted of his sin and converted to Christianity. As soon as this great change took place in him, he began to consider dropping out of public life in order to be a minister, but his friend William Pitt, Britain's Prime Minister, and mentor John Newton, a former slave trader who is famous for having written the hymn "Amazing Grace," urged him to stay in Parliament and serve Christ there. Pitt told him, "Surely the principles as well as the practice of Christianity are simple and lead not to meditation only but to action" (The Private Papers of William Wilberforce, 1897, p. 13). Wilberforce, after a period of questioning, reached the conclusion that embracing the anti-slavery cause would be doing God's work to a greater extent than removing himself from public life to enter the clergy. He went on to be instrumental in the abolition of slavery in England, and is looked up to as one of the most admirable and influential public servants in history. If he believed that the only way he could serve God while on earth was to be a pastor, then slavery in England would have continued on much longer than it did, and he would not have ever accomplished the work that God had set before him to do – end slavery. Wilberforce found a way to combine his earthly drive for success with his religious conviction by responding to a holy calling not in the Church, but rather in the government. His life and all that he managed to accomplish is a great demonstration of how important it is for Christians to believe that the work of the kingdom does not only happen within the walls of the church, but

everywhere. Christian businesspeople should believe that they do God's work not only on Sundays, but on weekdays too, at their job. This should lead them to be even more ambitious than their secular coworkers because they are doing their work for God's glory, not just their own.

### *The Ancient Perspective*

The Ancient Greeks had slightly different beliefs about the role of secular work in the flourishing human life. They believed that the material world was evil and the invisible spiritual world was good. Therefore the ultimate way to live was a life of contemplation, which involved withdrawing and detaching from the material world and focusing only on the spiritual realm. Work was a necessary evil, to be gotten over with as quickly as possible to allow for more time to contemplate, which was the only worthwhile way to spend your time. Therefore anyone who had ambition and strived for success in their earthly pursuits was a fool.

The viewpoint of the Ancient Greeks greatly influenced the way that the Catholic Church defined vocation, as discussed earlier. The Catholic Church made the distinction between the "spiritual estate," which consisted of occupations within the church, and the "temporal estate," which consisted of all jobs focused on the material world. Martin Luther, in seeking to redefine vocation argued in his treatise "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," that every occupation that is pursued as a response to God's calling is a holy occupation, and none is more holy than another. Every job, from the CEO to the mom to the janitor to the pastor can do God's holy work on this earth. Therefore striving for success in any God-given earthly role is good and holy.

The world is not bad – in fact, when God made it, he kept saying over and over how good it was. The Greeks considered death to be a good thing because it liberated man from “the prison of physical life” (Keller, 39). Death is referred to as an enemy in the Bible because the created world is good. When Jesus rose from the dead, he did not just come back as a ghost, but as a physical person, with soul and body – God redeems both. Therefore, work in intimate contact with the physical world is just as important as spiritual work. Work that could be considered “secular” has just as much dignity and nobility as “sacred” work, when both types are done for the glory of God. Therefore, it is just as important that Christians do the best work they are capable of in their jobs outside of the church as inside. In the film “Chariots of Fire,” athlete Eric Liddell’s mentor informs him “You can praise the Lord by peeling a spud, if you peel it to perfection.”

Given that Christians work for a higher good than just our own, they should be the most driven and competent workers on the planet. Keller points out, “if the point of work is to serve and exalt ourselves, then our work inevitably becomes less about the work and more about us. Our aggressiveness will eventually become abuse, our drive will become burnout, and our self-sufficiency will become self-loathing” (57). However if we are working to serve and exalt something beyond only ourselves, then we have that much more reason to deploy our talent and vigor.

### *Christian Ambition in Practice*

Steven J. Law, who worked in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and was Deputy Secretary of Labor under President George W. Bush, wrote an article in which he uses the Apostle Paul as an example of how to reconcile human ambition with Godly

character. When Paul was still Saul, he was the central figure in the persecution of the early church. The goal that motivated his ambition was to wipe out all the Christians, which was obviously opposed to God's plan for his life.

At this point, it is important to make the distinction between ambition and zeal. Oftentimes, Christians discourage ambition because they believe it is driven only by selfishness, and consider zeal to be a sanctified version of ambition because it is focused on a greater, higher cause, oftentimes a religious one. But zeal is still subject to the same problems that ambition is – the wrong goal or the wrong amount. Saul was not persecuting the Church out of selfishness – he truly believed it was a dangerous cult, and he was doing it for the good of his people. Saul was not being selfishly ambitious; he was being overly zealous with the wrong goal, which goes to show that sometimes, even zeal “can turn into something brutal, self-justifying, and rapacious” (Law). Zeal is neither a guarantee of Godliness or even kindness.

The story of Saul's conversion appears in Acts 9. Saul was driven, and had the status of a rising star among the Pharisees, with no doubt a very promising career ahead of him. But as he was travelling to Damascus, intent on taking any he could find of those who belonged to The Way as prisoners to Jerusalem, he is confronted by Jesus. As usual, Jesus breaks all expectations, and instead of thundering and threatening in righteous anger, he asks a simple, plaintive question that only Saul can hear: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Jesus confronts Saul's ambition with the question: Why? What is motivating you? What are you really after? Furthermore, Jesus calls Saul by his name; “the revelation that begins to change us and change the path we are on is the simple fact that God knows us deeply and personally” (Law). He looks at the ambitious and

determined Saul who was on the wrong path as if he were a misguided sheep, wandering away from the flock into dangerous territory. In his own mind, Saul thinks that he is changing the world for the better by leading an important campaign to wipe out a threat to his culture and religion. But in reality, Saul was only injuring himself by fighting against the greater purposes of God.

Humans have such limited perspectives, it is no wonder that they often start down the wrong path thinking it is the right one, just as Saul did. It takes humility to turn around.

After God sends Saul to Ananias and his conversion is completed, he changes his name to Paul. Paul's outlook changes, but his drive and ambition remain with him. Throughout the New Testament, Paul is portrayed positively and admiringly as being "relentless, obstinate, confrontational, insistent, resolute and absolutely driven by the desire to preach the Gospel" and bring glory to God (Law). But Paul's new ambition differs slightly from how we usually see ambition in the world, because it is tempered by its end goal. Here are a few ways that Christian ambition differs from purely worldly ambition as demonstrated by Paul:

1. Paul remains ambitious within an intentional community of fellow believers, including peers like Peter and Barnabus, and younger disciples who he mentored, like Timothy and Titus. Paul's relationships were not always perfect: he fights with Peter in Antioch, is deserted by Mark in Pamphylia, and has a falling out with Barnabus. But friendship is vital for correct ambition because it helps to check its motivations. Ambition turns into a soul-destroyer when it is incorrectly motivated, but friends can be a source of encouragement, provocation, query, chastisement, support and prayer to keep one on the

right track. Pursuing our ambitions alone, we are subject to distorted priorities and values by our moral blind spots. Friends hold us accountable, and help keep us away from both workoholism and sloth.

2. Paul knew his final object: Christ. Paul was aware of not just the *what* of his actions, but the *why*. It is easy to get caught up in short-term goals: partnership, corner office, six-figure salary. Paul knew that a truly fulfilled life is not the result of earthly riches, but instead is life in accordance with the will of God alone, and he kept sight of this goal, speaking about it frequently in his letters. For example, in Philippians 3, Paul writes “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things... one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:8, 13-14). Paul kept his mind on his endgame: Christ, and not the intermediate steps to get there. Knowing the end goal that motivates ambitions allows one to find the golden mean. When ambition causes one to start veering away from Christ, it is improperly ordered.

3. Paul remained positive and hopeful throughout his letters until his death. He knew that even though he had failed on many counts in his earthly calling (many churches had fallen away or turned to Gnosticism or paganism, and many of his associates had abandoned him), his last letter to Timothy is still full of enthusiastic advice and encouragement and hope, acknowledging that, though he was now being poured out “like a drink offering,” he had “fought the good fight” and “kept the faith,” and looked forward to receiving the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Even though his

external circumstances were just about as bad as they could be, he had achieved his goals and was happy.

We can draw several lessons from Paul's story about how to pursue goals in a God-honoring way, and how to keep ambition from becoming a vice. The true danger of ambition is not aiming too high, but rather aiming too low. It is a waste to spend our God-given gifts of intelligence and ability on fleeting things like money, recognition, and respectability. We, just like Paul, need to aim higher: heavenward.

### *Work Done For God Is Not In Vain*

When Christians understand work, vocation and ambition correctly, they should be the most ambitious people in the world. Christians should strive to honor God through their work. Such a high goal makes them more prone to being disappointed when things do not turn out the way that they intended. Instead of just disappointing themselves, they feel they are disappointing God. These feelings are expressed beautifully in the book of Ecclesiastes. The author despairs, saying "I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 2:17). Eventually, all the work we do on this earth will be wiped away, which makes it seem pointless to even try to make a difference. The author of Ecclesiastes is looking to work as his salvation and means to eternal life, when in reality the work we do on this earth is merely an imperfect reflection of things to come.

J. R. R. Tolkien, who is famous for writing *The Lord of the Rings*, wrote a short story in 1964 entitled "Leaf by Niggle." It tells the story of a rather unremarkable man named Niggle who must go on an inevitable and necessary long journey that he is not



really looking forward to. Niggle is a painter by trade, but not very successful because his projects were always too large and ambitious for his skill. He had a vision for a large, beautiful painting that he wanted to finish before he had to leave on his long journey. Niggle's painting was to be of a tree, full of beautiful leaves and nesting birds, with winding roots and mountains in the background. But Niggle was "the sort of painter who can paint leaves better than trees," and would "spend a long time on a single leaf, trying to catch its shape, and its sheen, and the glistening of dewdrops on its edges," so naturally, he progressed rather slowly. In addition, he was truly kind-hearted, and easily felt guilty and selfish. He had a rather helpless and demanding neighbor named Parish who never appreciated or paid much attention to Niggle's work, but was always distracting him and asking for his help with things. As much as Niggle resented his kind heart, he could not help but assist Parish whenever he was called upon, although he did so begrudgingly.

Finally, one day, a carriage driver knocks on Niggle's door and tells him it is time to leave for the long journey. Niggle is caught off guard, and bursts into tears – his painting is nowhere near complete, and he has not even had time to pack. Nevertheless, he leaves in the carriage and takes a long train ride, eventually ending up in a beautiful country where, to his surprise, he discovers the tree he had spent so many hours trying to capture on his canvas, complete and perfect. "It's a gift!" he declares, "referring to his art, and also the result." He had finally realized his vision.

Meanwhile, back in the village where he came from, Niggle's partly finished painting had been torn apart and used to patch roofs. The only bit left was one little leaf on a corner of the canvas that ended up in the back corner of the museum in town,

entitled “Leaf by Niggle.” Eventually the museum burned down, and there was nothing left of Niggle’s hard work.

Many people can relate to Niggle’s struggles, especially perfectionists. We all have visions for how we want things to turn out, or how we imagine ways to create or improve the world through our vocations, but our visions are rarely, if ever fully realized. The simple truth is sometimes it is impossible to reach our goals, either because we do not have the skill, the opportunity, the time or the resources. And even the small bits of our visions that we managed to realize end up fading after we are gone. A very few innovators and creators have managed to make a lasting impact on the world – Einstein, Plato, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Hawking – but even their work will eventually fade, just like everything else in this world.

Those who put their hope in Christ, however, have a slightly different perspective. Our visions come from our hope and expectation of a future that we know will come to fruition. We do not labor in vain, as long as we labor for God’s kingdom, and in pursuit of his calling for our lives. Even if we never managed to finish more than a leaf or two during our time on earth, we will not become despondent, nor will we become proud, because we know that there is a tree in a reality truer than this one, and one day, we will see it.

### *Summary*

It can be hard to see the connection between “secular” work and the life of faith. A common misconception is that the only work that can be done for the glory of God is work within the church. However this notion is not true, and has its roots the philosophies

of Ancient Greece, which were later absorbed into the ideology of the Catholic Church. The Greeks believed that of the two realms, material and spiritual, the material was evil, and the spiritual good, so any work closely connected to the material realm, especially manual labor, was not as dignified or sacred as work done using only the mind.

Christians, on the other hand, believe in the salvation of both the physical and spiritual realms – of the body and soul. Therefore, no job is more “sacred” than another. They are all equally important, and should be pursued to the best of one’s ability, because, if it is God’s calling for one’s life, then one is doing it to the glory of God. William Wilberforce provides a great example of how it is possible to do “secular” work for God. Instead of devoting his life to the church, he chose instead to go into politics, and ended up doing great work for God’s kingdom in his efforts to abolish slavery in England.

The conversion and life of Apostle Paul provides a great illustration of how Christian ambition looks different from worldly ambition. Paul pursues his goal of spreading the Gospel within a community of fellow believers who help check him to make sure he does everything for God’s glory and not his own. Paul always kept his mind on his ultimate goal – following God’s will –, which prevented him from getting caught up in short-term, unimportant goals. He knew not just the *what* but the *why* of his actions. Paul also managed to remain hopeful and positive concerning his work, even when it did not turn out the way he wanted it to. J. R. R. Tolkien illustrates the reason for Paul’s eternal hope in the short story “Leaf By Niggle.” The work that Niggle did in his village never lived up to his vision, and was quickly destroyed once he had moved on to a new place. But in that new place – in heaven – Niggle saw his completed work, just as he imagined it. Christians should never be discouraged, even when we cannot reach our

goals, because we will one day see all our efforts come to fruition. That does not mean that the work we do while on this earth is pointless. Rather we do the best work that we are capable of on earth, because it allows us a glimpse of what is to come. All work done for the glory of God matters forever.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Greed

In this chapter, I will start out by defining greed. I will then examine the problem of greed in two different ways. I will first, with the help of the writings of Robert and Edward Skidelsky, explore greed's relationship with ancient and modern thought. Then I will examine greed's relationship with capitalism, including an analysis of the philosophies of Adam Smith and Ayn Rand.

#### *The Definition of Greed*

Although greed is usually considered its own type of sin separate from others like pride, lust, envy etc. really, it is a type of idolatry. Timothy Keller defines idolatry as “imagining and trusting anything to deliver the control, security, significance, satisfaction, and beauty that only the real God can give. It means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing” (128). The Apostle Paul calls greed idolatry in Colossians 3:5, saying “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexually immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” As we all know, the first commandment states, “You shall have no other Gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), and idolatry is breaking the first commandment. Many of the different types of sins – like lust, gluttony, and sloth – have idolatry as their root. You can rarely break any of the other commandments without also breaking the first.

Idolatry, in the words of Paul, belongs to man's "earthly nature." The way God states the first commandment, "I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me," implies that either he will be our God, or something else will. People naturally seek sources of purpose, identity, comfort, and salvation from death, often turning to things like security, money, power, reputation, or even good works for these things. But turning to anything besides God is idolatry.

Greed is the type of idolatry that looks to material things as a form of salvation or meaning. Greed turns wants into needs, and makes the value of a man's life measurable and comparable to others through physical possessions. Living in greed results in a life of permanent dissatisfaction because one's false "needs" are never-ending and therefore cannot be met.

### *Why Are We So Greedy?*

Where does greed come from? Why does greed seem to be a bigger problem today than it used to be? Robert and Edward Skidelsky's goal in their book "How Much Is Enough?: Money and the Good Life" is to trace the origins of the modern person's inability to be satisfied, no matter how many material goods they accumulate.

They start with a theory by the renowned economist, John Maynard Keynes, famous for developing Keynesian Economics during the Great Depression. In an essay published in 1930 called "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," Keynes predicted that, thanks to the constant improvement of technology, by the year 2030, work will have become so efficient that everyone will only have to work 15-hour weeks to meet everyone's needs. In the year 2016, mankind is not even close to reaching Keynes'

goal, working on average over 46 hours a week (McGregor), and it is probably safe to say that we will not reach it in the next 14 years. What did Keynes get wrong?

In his theory, Keynes big error is forgetting to distinguish wants from needs. He assumed they were easily separable. People have a measurable quantity of needs, and would dedicate resources to meeting needs first, and any resources leftover would go to satisfying wants. As long as needs were met, they would be satisfied. It is true that needs are, by nature, objective and finite, and can therefore be met. But wants, being purely psychic, can be infinitely expandable, and potentially never met (Skidelsky, 25). And, thanks to the comparative sin of pride (see chapter 2), as well as the pervasiveness and effectiveness of advertising, it is very easy for wants to expand.

There are several ways that wants can expand. Some goods are inherently scarce – there are only so many luxury condos at the best resort in the world, and there are only so many boxes at the best operas. Some goods are positional – bought only in order to “keep up with the Joneses.” Some are bought in order to show off one’s wealth, in a sort of social competition called “conspicuous consumption.” But the problem with using material goods as a way of “keeping score” is that you will never win; someone will always have more or seem to have more than you do. Making wealth an end in itself is a losing battle, only resulting in endless unmet desires and dissatisfaction (Skidelsky, 38-39).

Another cause of the endless expansion of wants is the methods of advertising used today. The purpose of advertising used to be to merely provide information to consumers so that they can better find products to meet their needs. Now, the goal is to alter consumers’ needs. Instead of providing information, advertising today seeks to

“create an atmosphere around the product, to enhance its glamour and allure, in short to make us want something we would otherwise not have thought of wanting,” nor thought we could purchase with money (Skidelsky, 2009). Advertising tricks you into thinking you are buying something beyond the material object you are actually receiving – status, friendship, happiness. These things are good and worthy of pursuit, but they cannot be obtained with money. When the objects that we purchase end up not meeting the needs we have for these good immaterial things, we simply try again with new material objects. William Cavanaugh claims that material possessions and brands have “come to represent freedom, status and love. Above all, they represent the aspiration to escape time and death by constantly seeking renewal in created things. Each new movement of desire promises the opportunity to start over” (48). In buying new things, we search for something we can only find in God, which has already been given us by Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross – escape from death. This is a prime example of idolatry, and makes it clear why we never seem to be able to satisfy our material needs – we think that they can give us things that only God can give us.

### *The Loss of the Good Life*

The Skidelsky’s spend a chapter exploring many different pre-modern philosophies concerning the purpose of life in different cultures ranging from Ancient Greece to Confucianism, to Taoism, to medieval Europe. Although very different, all these philosophies have at least two things in common: 1. Money is merely a tool to be used for the pursuit of the good life, and 2. There is one type of life that is intrinsically superior to all others, usually involving things like contemplation, religious purity,



education and public office, leisure, or finding joy in simple pleasures. The pursuit of money for its own sake is always an aberration (86).

Economics as a discipline developed as part of the empiricist revolt against Aristotelian ideas like the ones held by the ancient cultures, and it is the source of the modern problem of confusing needs and wants. One of the writers of the empiricist movement was John Locke, who said that “the philosophers of old did in vain inquire whether summum bonum consisted in riches, or bodily delights, or virtue, or contemplation: and they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found in apples, plums or nuts” (351). Instead of scrutinizing and shaping ones desires to be appropriately oriented towards the objectively accepted good things, the good life now consists of taking ones desires as givens and achieving them, whatever they may be. This gets rid of the distinction between needs and wants, as well as the possibility of ever having “enough.” In Aristotelian thought, “enough” means “enough for the good life,” which is a specific quantity because there is one type of good life that is the same for everyone. However, according to modern thought, “enough” means “enough to satisfy wants.” So the question “how much is enough?” can only be answered with the question “how much do you want?” Without any objective definition of the good life and “fomented by envy and boredom, wants multiply like the heads of the mythical Hydra” (94).

### *A Christian Vision of Enough*

Christianity gives man an objective definition of the good life – life in accordance with the will of God. Christians all have a clear path to follow. The Christian’s goal and

“the key to true freedom is not just following whatever desires we happen to have, but cultivating the right desires” (Cavanaugh, 11). Ultimately, Christians want their desires to match God’s desires for them. Christians have the ability to separate needs from wants because needs are clearly defined: Christians need only the resources necessary to follow God’s will for their life, which will be finite. With a clear purpose, we can answer the question “How much is enough.” The answer is: however much it takes for you to fulfill God’s purposes for you on this earth.

Christian businesspeople, therefore, do not need to make millions of dollars to fulfill their purpose as Christians. It does not take millions of dollars to love God, love one’s neighbor (Mark 12:30-31), rejoice always, pray continually or give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thes. 5:16-18). Millions of dollars may help, but it also may hinder.

*Adam Smith: The Twisted Roots of Rand*

Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, in 1776, before things like capitalism and communism had fully formed into complete ideologies. He recognizes the place of self-interest in the economic formula. He famously writes “it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages” (book 1, chapter 2). This idea sounds similar to the ideas of Ayn Rand except for one crucial difference – Smith says that we rely on others’ self-love, not greed. Self-interest, not selfishness.

C.S. Lewis talks about self-interest briefly in his book *The Problem of Pain*: “We are afraid that Heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be

disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to. There are rewards that do not sully motives” (145). Desiring heaven is not selfish. Self-interest does not make our motives impure.

God knows that we respond to incentives – in fact, he purposely designed us that way. He made it so that if our body is being damaged it hurts, so that we will not want to damage our bodies. He made it so that being with friends is fun and makes us happy, because friendship is a good thing. Self-interest, and more, self-love is not a sin. We act out of self-love when we do things like wash our hands, look both ways before we cross the street, pay our bills, and pray before bed. Even in the second most important commandment, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31), self-love is a prerequisite. If we do not know how to love ourselves and take care of ourselves properly, how can we ever hope to do the same for others?

Smith does not advise butchers and brewers to be more selfish. He simply says that, in a market economy, you would be better off appealing to others’ self-interest than their benevolence. Smith says “every man is, no doubt, by nature first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so” (The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part One, chap 2). Smith did not think that the more greedy we are the better the market will work. He believed that in a free market, “each of us can pursue ends within our narrow sphere of competence and concern – our ‘self-interest’ – and yet an order will emerge that vastly exceeds anyone’s deliberations.” We know our own needs better than anyone else’s, and the free market is a “higher-level order that exceeds the knowledge of any and all of us”

(Richards). The free market does a better job of making sure that everyone is taken care of than any human attempts to do so simply because humans are limited in our knowledge. We are better off just taking care of ourselves – acting in our own self-interest – and allowing the invisible hand of the market to take care of public good.

### *Ayn Rand's Vision*

Ayn Rand was not only one of the greatest proponents of capitalism of the last century, but also one of the most outspoken atheists. Christians often overlook the atheist parts of her philosophy, and use the rest of it to defend capitalism. The problem with Christians using Ayn Rand's arguments in defense of capitalism is that, in the philosophies of Rand, atheism and capitalism are codependent – one cannot exist without the other. Rand claims that it is impossible to be a Christian and a capitalist because “Capitalism and altruism are incompatible. They are philosophical opposites; they cannot co-exist in the same man or in the same society” (*Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, 195).

Rand closely associated Christian altruism with socialism – she seems to think they are essentially the same things, and that is why, she claims, Christians cannot be capitalists.

Rand's radical philosophies are usually considered to be products of her upbringing in Russia in the early 1900's, just before communism started to take over. She immigrated to the US upon reaching adulthood, but she had seen enough in her childhood and youth of the evils of communism for her staunch views against it to be fully formed. She became a well-known author and playwright, and continues to be popular to this day. As of 2009, some 30 million of Ayn Rand's books have been sold (Richards). There is no

denying how influential she has been in the discussions surrounding capitalism in the last century.

Rand's anti-socialist views pervade all of her writings, the most famous and the ultimate culmination of which being the epic novel *Atlas Shrugged*. *Atlas Shrugged* was published in 1957, and took Rand over 10 years to write. It is considered her seminal work, and it quickly became a sensation: in a poll conducted in the 1990's by the Library of Congress and the Book of the Month Club, *Atlas Shrugged* was the second most influential book after the Bible (Richards).

All of her books tell essentially the same story and promote the same morals, just with slight variations in characters and situations. In general, she claims that man is a "heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute" (*Atlas Shrugged*, appendix). The heroes of her stories are always highly intelligent, extremely hardworking, efficient, and creative, but also often accused of being cold, serious, and greedy. They are also always very rebellious, constantly questioning authority, and not afraid of breaking societal norms and rules where the rules are unjust. The villains are talkative, charming, fashionable, funny, and always expressing concern for the public welfare, but are also vapid, shallow, stupid, and cowardly.

*Atlas Shrugged* in particular tells the story the greatest minds of the world, composers, inventors, professors, scientists, industrialists, deciding to go on strike, forming a secret community completely separated from the rest of the world. They do this because of the political and emotional trends of the outside world slowly becoming more and more socialist, following the principle "from each according to his ability, to

each according to his need.” The men of talent and ability fear that, as more and more socialist laws are passed that entitle the useless and unproductive people to the ideas, achievements and profits of the productive ones, civilization will regress into a collection of beggars, and eventually collapse. They feel as though they are being punished for being successful while others are being rewarded for being lazy.

With all the men of ability gone from the world, all that is left is the lazy and needy, and without the elite men of the mind to prop them up, eventually, industry, economy, and basically everything collapse. The elite class that goes on strike, the men of reason and talent, are the proverbial Atlases that hold up the world, and when they go on strike, they shrug, and the world falls. They refuse to believe that others deserve the fruits of their labor based solely on their need. The secret community is led by the notorious John Galt, who famously states: “I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine,” (731). That’s Rand’s philosophy in a nutshell. Clearly, there is no room for altruism or mercy in her equation. Rather, just the opposite: the necessary factor and highest good is greed.

Rand was not subtle about her ideas about greed – she even wrote a book called “The Virtue of Selfishness.” Greed was the secret ingredient to the success of capitalism, and, for Rand, without being greedy you cannot be a capitalist.

The Christian view of greed is the exact opposite from Rand’s; greed, rather than being a virtue, is a corruptor. Luke 12:15 says to “be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” Matthew 6:24 says, “no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted

to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” There is no way for a Christian to justify greediness, which is definitively sinful.

Timothy Keller, in *Every Good Endeavour* explains how it is natural for humans to think in narrative. We each have an idea of the way the world should be, something evil that has thrown it off balance, and some good that will put it right. For Plato, the problem was the physical body and its weakness. For Marx, the problem was unjust economic systems. For Freud, it was unconscious conflicts between desire and conscience (157). Reading *Atlas Shrugged*, we get a glimpse into Ayn Rand’s personal narrative of the world. *Atlas Shrugged* is a fictional novel. Perhaps one can find ways that it reflects the real world, but many aspects of her world are exaggerated and manipulated for the purpose of making a point. It is important to remember that all the people and situations in the book came from Rand’s mind, a mind that, like every other mind, has biases and blind spots.

### *Rand’s Mistakes*

Greed is not necessary for capitalism to work, and there is strong evidence that capitalism does not necessarily promote greediness. In fact, according to the research of the Charities Aid Foundation, which studies trends in charity activity around the world, the US, a nation which prides itself on being very capitalist compared to other countries, is typically among the most generous countries in the world in terms of charitable giving. Greed is a part of human nature, and no type of economic system has the power to either create greed within people, or take it away. Greed will always exist.

Capitalism is an amoral tool, just like democracy. It has just as much ability to encourage righteous behavior as it does sinful behavior. The stereotypical greedy capitalist we all think of comes straight out of a Dickens novel – old, grumpy, miserly, and in the habit of hoarding all of his money under a mattress. There are a lot of real-world businesspeople that are Scrooges, but many other successful businesspeople act in the opposite way. Instead of worshipping their money as an end in itself, and holding it tightly in great fear of losing it, they use it as a tool for other ends; holding it loosely, ready to chase the next promising business venture or investment opportunity. They seek out and promote creativity, talent and intelligence. They have to constantly be anticipating and meeting needs and desires of others, essentially in a competition to be the most altruistic in their field. Capitalism can create Stooges, but it can also create generous entrepreneurial spirits. It is merely a channel through which both virtues and vices can be developed. Rand forgets that capitalism is amoral, and treats it as an ultimate good, and the salvation of mankind. Rand is committing idolatry.

Greed is not necessary for capitalism. Capitalism sets up incentives that encourage many types of both good and bad behavior. Capitalism should not be treated as an ideal, nor should it be treated as the source of all evil. The truth is that the only thing that we can blame for good is God working through mankind, and the only thing that we can blame for evil is mankind's fallen nature.

No economic system, whether capitalism or socialism, will work perfectly because they are all utopian – they do not fit the complex human condition. People will never be perfectly selfish, nor perfectly selfless. Mankind has good and bad tendencies.



Man was made in the image of God, and sometimes man does things to live up to that image, but man is also fallen, and sometimes does things that are sinful.

One distinct advantage of Capitalism is that it does not necessarily depend on anyone to act in a certain way. People have the freedom to give all their money to the poor, or they can make millions and never give away a cent. Both types of actions do not subvert the system – rather the system can take such actions and turn them to socially desirable outcomes. Capitalism adapts relatively well to the human condition. But no economic system exists that will save man from his sinful nature. In fact, nothing on earth exists that will save man from his sinful nature, and any attempt to find something that will is an act of idolatry. Mankind’s salvation has already come through Jesus Christ.

#### *Generosity: The Antidote to Greed*

The opposing virtue to the vice of greed is generosity. Generosity is not just a propensity to give things away freely. Rather it is recognizing the true value of material goods versus non-material goods – treasures on earth versus treasures in heaven. The things that we store up as our treasures while on this earth, including money, reputation, and status, do not last, and are therefore not that valuable. It makes no sense to collect these fleeting things as one’s treasures because, as Jesus points out in Matthew 6:19-21, treasures on earth may be destroyed by moths or vermin or stolen by thieves. It makes much more sense to gather heavenly treasures, which last forever, and are not vulnerable to damage to theft.

Because the generous person values his material wealth correctly, he is the only type of person that will find satisfaction in his wealth. He does not confuse wants with

needs because he knows he already has everything he needs in Christ – identity, comfort, guidance, security, and salvation from death. He therefore does not seek these things in material wealth, and is able to give it away freely because his needs are met in Christ.

### *Summary*

Greed is a form of idolatry. It is valuing earthly things too much, and looking to them to meet needs for intangible things, like identity and security, that only God can provide. Modern society struggles with greed because, unlike ancient cultures, we believe that every man should be able to define his own version of the good life, based on his own personal desires, which, thanks to advertising and pride, expand constantly.

Ayn Rand considered selfishness and greed to be virtues, and a necessary component to the success of capitalism, making Christianity and capitalism incompatible. Furthermore, she held up capitalism as the perfect economic system, and solution to all of man's problems. Adam Smith explains in *The Wealth of Nations* that only self-interest is necessary for capitalism to work, not selfishness. Self-interest is a natural and good part of human nature – God wants us to take care of ourselves. Furthermore, capitalism, like any other economic or political system, is a tool through which both good and bad people may find success. It does not create or rely on specific virtues or vices – it is amoral.

The Christian view defines the good life objectively as life in accordance with the will of God. Intangible needs, such as identity, security and salvation, have already been met through Christ's sacrifice. The Christian has no reason to be greedy – he has everything he needs. This allows him to be generous, valuing material wealth properly, and therefore holding it with loose hands.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

I believe it is a myth that success in business and success in life require two different sets of virtues. You do not have to be proud, greedy, and full of disordered ambition to succeed in business. Perhaps being those things will get you wealth and influence, but true business professionals know that wealth and influence are not accurate measures of success.

John Ruskin, an art critic and writer from the late 1800's, wrote about how odd he found it that the public believed that a "merchant's first object in all of his dealing must be ... to get as much for himself, and leave as little to his neighbor as possible" (177). On the contrary, Ruskin considered merchants to be one of "five great intellectual professions," each needed daily for a specific purpose:

- The soldier is needed to defend the nation,
- The pastor is needed to teach it,
- The physician to keep it in health,
- The lawyer to enforce justice in it, and
- The merchant to provide for it.

In the same way that no one considers the sole function of the clergyman to be to earn his salary (in fact, a clergyman would be condemned as mercenary if he even hinted at that notion), no one should consider the function of any of the professionals to be to make money, including the merchant. What all these professions have in common is that

they have necessary work to be done for the good of all people, irrespective of the money they may or may not make. The true professionals in any of these fields, even today, will assert that their purpose is first and foremost is to serve, not to be served.

Louis Brandeis, an American Supreme Court Justice in the early 1900's, says something along the same lines. He distinguishes a "profession" from other types of jobs by its characteristics. He claims that a profession:

- Requires "preliminary training intellectual in character... as distinguished from mere skill,"
- "Is an occupation which is pursued largely for others as opposed to one's self,"
- And "is an occupation in which the amount of financial return is not the accepted measure of success."

Brandeis goes on to say that in the recognized professions, as opposed to defining success by how much money is made, it is rather defined by "excellence of performance," which he specifies as including such tasks as serving the community, reducing waste, advancing methods and processes, improving products, improving the condition of employees, and promoting their learning and happiness, all the while maintaining right relations with both the customers and community (3-4). Businessmen have so many responsibilities to their employees, customers, communities and profession, that the purpose of making money becomes almost incidental, and only necessary for the company's continued survival. In the view of Brandeis and Ruskin, money is not the goal, it is simply a byproduct when everything else is done right.

John Ruskin and Louis Brandeis's conceptions of businesspeople are similar in that they both hold them up to a much higher standard than modern thought does.

Businesspeople cannot and should not only care about money because they serve a vitally important function – providing goods and services necessary for the continued survival and well-being of the nation. If businesspeople believe that the most important thing they can do is make money, then the end justifies the means, and morality necessarily falls by the wayside. The vital nature of the work businesspeople do requires that their end goal be work well done, not money. That is why it is so important to talk about and think about how to develop the proper virtues in the world of business.

In the preceding chapters, I explored three different vices: pride, greed and selfish ambition. I examined what the Christian view on these vices are, what it is about the business world that makes these particular vices so common, and how Christians in the business world should look at these vices in relation to their work. Below is a summary and final analysis of my findings:

### *Pride Vs. Humility*

Pride, the most anti-god of all sins, according to C.S. Lewis, often rears its head amongst employees because of the way businesses are set up as hierarchies. Employees are encouraged to adhere to the gospel of self-trust and self-lordship in the effort to climb the corporate ladder by asserting their will above everyone else's. On the other hand, sometimes they are also expected to completely abandon their wills and obedience to their superiors, even if it means acting against their own good sense. The struggle to obtain that next promotion ends up being one big battle of wills, where the virtue of humility becomes a weakness. This is likely why one rarely meets a truly humble businessman – he has been trained to be proud.

I argue that humility does not have to be a weakness in this setting, but rather, it can be a strength. The properly humble person is able and willing to recognize his own limitations and learn from others, and therefore, is constantly growing and improving. He is magnanimous enough to recognize his abilities, claim his deserts, and take charge when he is qualified to do so. But at the same time, he is honest with himself, and will relinquish authority and power to those better qualified. An employee who is not properly humble may damage the firm and his own career by biting off more than he can chew, making enemies out of his coworkers, cultivating an atmosphere of competition and enmity, or, on the other hand, not being magnanimous enough to accept proper and deserved power and responsibility. Despite the incentives resulting from the hierarchical style of management in most business, the properly humble employee is more likely to achieve success in the business world in the long run simply because his pride will not get in the way of him doing his job.

#### *Ambition Vs. Sloth Vs. Workoholism*

Christians are called to be meek and humble and selfless, but none of those traits are contrary to having ambition. If we see our occupations as our vocations given to us by God, then we are doing our job in order to bring glory to God, which is the biggest possible source of motivation to do our jobs well. Unlike the Catholics and Ancient Greeks, Protestants do not believe that physical reality is bad, and work is a necessary evil. Rather, Protestants believe that both our physical and spiritual selves have been redeemed by Jesus's sacrifice. Therefore any occupation that supports physical life here on earth, whether a chef, janitor, performer, accountant, or CEO, is a holy occupation

because it supports life on earth which God declared to be “good.” Ambition in any occupation taken as a calling from God is righteous ambition.

Ambition goes wrong when it has the wrong end goal, usually self-advancement. This can lead to either too much ambition – workoholism - or too little - sloth. Christians avoid falling into the possible traps of too much or too little ambition by operating within a community that will keep them accountable, and help constantly remind them that their motivation for working hard is bringing glory to God. It takes constant reminders and self-reflection, but ultimately, the man who works for the glory of God rather than his own glory will be that much more ambitious. He is working for something greater than himself. He is aiming higher.

### *Greed Vs. Generosity*

Greed is a manifestation of idolatry. Idolatry is putting one’s faith in anything other than Christ as one’s source of identity, salvation, eternal life, etc. Greedy people look to the material world for comfort and identity. Paul in 1 Timothy 6 talks about greed and the love of money, saying that it is the root of all kinds of evil because it supplants God, and attempts to replace him with things that are fleeting.

Of all the different vices, greed is the one most commonly associated with capitalism and big business. Indeed, many influential thought leaders like Ayn Rand believe that greed is necessary for capitalism. However, this idea is a distortion of Adam Smith’s explanation of capitalism, in which he identified self-interest to be the secret ingredient, not greed. Self-interest is not sinful. In fact, it is good and natural. The Bible tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, a command which first requires us to learn

how to rightly love ourselves. Smith does not say that the more selfish we are, the better capitalism will work, only that it is more reliable to depend upon others' self-interest to get what we want rather than their benevolence alone. We are more likely to strike a deal if we create a win-win situation than if we simply beg. Taking the system to an extreme, whether Rand's version of capitalism, or the opposite end of the spectrum, socialism, does not work because such systems do not match the human condition. Some people are greedy, and others are generous. Our current free market system allows for both – it matches the human condition.

The opposite of greed is generosity. The generous man recognizes that the things of this world are not a good source of comfort or identity because they are fleeting. He is still self-interested – he does not neglect his own needs. Rather he looks to God for the fulfillment of his needs, like identity, comfort and salvation, while giving his material wealth its proper value, and holding it loosely. The generous man will find satisfaction almost regardless of how much money he makes because his satisfaction is found in Christ, not wealth.

### *Success*

The sphere of business cultivates different virtues than the Christian sphere. However, business virtues alone do not lead to true success in the business world. Success for the businessman is not about making money – it is about doing one's job well. Using this proper definition of success, Christians should be the best business people, and the more one models one's life after the life of Jesus, as Christians are called



to do, the more success one will find. If you want to succeed in business, you should strive to be a good person rather than a good “businessperson.”

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