

The Christian in the Workplace: Christian Partnerships

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This is the second in a series on the believer in the workplace. In this article, our brother Jim Frazier comments on the very delicate and important issue of business partnerships among believers.

Christian Partnerships

No doubt some Christians gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ have had the opportunity to enter together into a business relationship. Certainly, much prayer and exercise before God is necessary. A business venture made with uncertainty is never His will for His people. Scriptural principles should always be the basis for our business activities and should be fully implemented as small corporations and partnerships function.

It hardly needs to be mentioned, but the unconverted have no place with believers in business ownerships; they should only be hired as employees (2 Cor 6:14.).

Three simple headings highlight our subject:

1. Motives for a joint Christian business
2. Method for the formation
3. Maintenance of business relationships

Motives

Spiritual maturity and judgment are needed when business growth and partnership are contemplated. If we are carnal and immature babes, we will encounter many problems (1 Cor 3:1). If our love for money demands more, our motive is wrong (1 Tim 6:10). If you feel a window of opportunity is open but have no peace about it before God, obviously it is not the mind of God. Our Father is able to meet our need and to keep opportunities open so that decisions do not need to be made with haste. Our God is consistent and will bring all things to pass for His glory and our blessing, if He has the unhindered privilege to work (James 1:17).

As Christians consider the possibility of joining in a business arrangement, the following questions should be considered: Will it be detrimental to God's assembly? Does it have the potential to hinder my fellowship with others if the business proves to be below the anticipated expectations? Again, you should be sure it is in agreement with your spouse and doesn't prove to be a great burden to the family because of the responsibility associated with it. Consideration should be given to the impact it may have on the intended business partner and his family as well. Finally, will it hinder my spiritual growth and development? If the above questions and others of which you may think cannot be answered favourably, then plans for business partnership should be dropped. Fellowship in God's assemblies and between assemblies is of infinite value. Who can measure the loss of such fellowship and friendships between believers? Who can fully assess losses in the family realm if its priorities are displaced by business responsibilities? One's personal usefulness in God's assembly and in God's things should always be maintained with God's help. Personal exercise, self-judgment and examination of motives before God should always give spiritual things a place of priority. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:33).

Method

Some who have desired to be in business partnership have approached it in a haphazard way it may have commenced with a casual talk about a possible consolidation of business interests or of one joining another who had no previous experience in a given business. Sorry to say, the motivating factor may have been the desire to promote ones own financial interests or to gain independence as a self employed individual in a Christian business partnership. Some businesses have started with a few verbal agreements and a hand shake, with little or nothing written and documented. The explanation for such an agreement would be that Christians should be able to trust each other, James 5:12. While this may be true, and in some cases has occurred without problems, we do well to remember that we are prone to forget and need to protect our partner from our own failures at times. It is little wonder that many of these arrangements end in problems, failure and hard feelings. There should be discussion and openness between potential business partners. As previously suggested, Christian principles should control at all times, and there needs to be prayer about the matter. There must also be discernment as to compatibility when it comes to the spirituality of the potential partner. There should be unity as to the direction that the business will take and an unfeigned honesty at all times by all concerned. At the end of 1 Cor 7:39 is the phrase, "in the Lord". While this pertains to Christian marriage, the same principle should be practiced in anticipation of a business relationship. All involved in the business should share a common interest in God's things and a willingness to guide the new concern in the fear of God (Col 3:17). After all, if problems develop in the business, it will cast a reflection on the assembly of which each partner forms a part, and will effect personal testimony as well.

If there is absolutely no doubt about the mind of God having been revealed as to the business being formed, then there should be an assembling of the bylaws that will govern the business in accord with the laws of various state and regulatory agencies.

Maintenance

No matter how positive a business may have been at the start, there will be times of testing ahead. However, if God is given His rightful place in all that pertains to the business, He will be honoured, and the Christians involved will know God's blessing. Laws by the government are given to be carried out in a formal way, but God's word and principles must take precedence. Christian dignity and integrity are a must; esteeming others above self is Christlike (Phil 2:3). There should be a sharing of responsibility and a care and concern for the partner that exceeds satisfaction for self. There should always be an openness and honesty with nothing needing to be concealed. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13).