

### **What Evangelicals Can Learn From a Certain Jewish Capitalist**

*You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone (James 2:24).*

Does the Bible say anything about how employers should to treat their employees? In James 5:15, the “rich people” are judged for failing to pay proper wages “to the workmen who mowed [their] fields.” Contextualizing it to our time, it may be analogous to multinational capitalists taking advantage of cheap labor in the Two-Third world where the workers toil in substandard factories for a pittance. I am sure this is one of several grievances that have motivated the Occupy Wall Street protesters who detest the excesses of capitalism. Certainly the system can always improve, but it is only as good as the people who run it. The case in point is what happened on one cold December night about 10 years ago in an economically depressed area called Methuen, Massachusetts. Three buildings of the Madlen Mills, a textile manufacturer employing 2,400 people, burned down. One employee, having witnessed the burning mill with his son who also worked there, said, “Years of our lives seemed gone.” The son simply said, “Dad, we just lost our jobs.” Little did they know, however, that this worst day was about to lead to the best days--all because of one man, the owner of the company Aaron Feuerstein. After assessing the damage, he had more than 1,000 employees gathered in a high school gym to make an announcement. The factory owner, who had already given out \$275 in Christmas bonuses, told them his intention to rebuild on the rubble. Meanwhile, he promised to pay their full salaries for the next 30 days (perhaps longer) at an average of \$12.50 an hour (one of the highest textile wages at the time), costing him \$1.5 million a week. More importantly, he promised to restart operations in 3 weeks and within 3 months to be fully operational. To make this possible, he purchased 15 new machines.

Spiritually, that’s what Christ has done for us, isn’t it? He did not abandon us when our lives have been burnt down by sin! Christ made the commitment to raise us again from the rubbles of our sins, so he did the only that thing that could’ve accomplished that. While Feuerstein generously gave up his wealth, Christ gave up his own life so that we might live. So, as his followers, how are we going to reflect Christ’s example particularly in the market place? In our pursuit of becoming professionals, proprietors, and executives, learn from this man whose faith (a devout Jew) shaped the way he operated his business. Don’t forget, as Feuerstein apparently hasn’t, that Leviticus 19:18, which says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” is more than saying to the needy, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” (Jam. 2:16). Echoing the same sentiment, the Apostle John declared: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 Jn. 3:17-18).

But one unfortunate reality of the so-called evangelical faith is shying away from emphasizing the importance of work lest one is accused of teaching some type of work based salvation. But when Ephesians 2:8-9<sup>a</sup> (“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works”) and James 2:17 (“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead”) are juxtaposed, we arrive at what Martin Luther declared: “We are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone.” What does it mean? A genuine faith always produces work! Feuerstein’s example is quite intimidating, I am sure, but do not let that defer us in being more generous toward those around us who are struggling. It may be a small thing, such as buying groceries for the poor, donating the old car to a worthy charity, or financially supporting missionaries. In this New Year, let’s work, in his grace!

### **Further Reflection**

Acts 20:35 says: “In everything I (Paul) did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more **blessed** to give than to receive.’”

1. What are some reasons we do not give? Not all reasons (i.e., excuses) are equally invalid so list what you think are valid as well as the invalid ones.
2. I think that the so-called valid reasons are good for a time (e.g., paying off debts, saving for something important, etc.), but if we continue to not give, then, those become just excuses for being stingy. Think about ways to become more generous toward others. Here is one: maybe you need to cut out frivolous spending. What are some other ways?
3. In what sense is it more blessed to give than to receive? What blessing is Paul talking about?

### **Bible Reading**

Wednesday    Proverbs 27 & Judges 21

Thursday      Proverbs 28-29