



# Understanding the doctrine of ‘unequal yoke’ and the world of business ethics among Christians

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## Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of unequal yoke and its application in workplace environment. This paper fully discussed how Christians as believers should relate with unbelievers in workplace environment. For Christians to keep both physical and social distance from unbelievers may hinder Christians from implementing the objective of the Great Commission which is to spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to all nations. This paper further explains why Christians must participate in the business activities with unbelievers. Christians must work with unbelievers in the same work environment and use the same opportunity to evangelize to them, and win their souls. However, Christians must not participate with unbelievers in activities that negate the Christian doctrines which are against Christian beliefs and values.

**Keywords:** Unequal yoke, Christians, unbelievers, business activities and workplace environment.

## Introduction

Since the creation of the world, Christians have always been involved in business activities. In the Old Testament (Psalm 107:2) we saw how the Psalmists recorded what the children of Israel who returned from exile in Babylon were expected to do before they carry out their businesses activities. In Psalm 107 verses 22 – 23, it says “and let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing and they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters”.

In the New Testament, we saw how Jesus rebuked those he found in the temple who were selling oxen, sheep, doves and the changers of money. Jesus drove them out of the temple not because they were doing business but because the business was done inside the temple which was supposed to be a place of worship (John 2:13 – 15) and also (Matthew 21: 12 -13). With the coming of the early missionaries to Africa, they were also involved with both educational and health institutions which are still functional. In the same vein, many Christians today are also involved with the establishment of educational and health institutions in terms of business venture. As the society continues to exist and as Christians live in this society, they are bound to be involved with business activities that help the social system (society) to survive and flourish.

In light of this, an attempt will be made in this paper to examine how Christians should conduct themselves in the various business ventures with unbelievers; this is the purpose of this paper.



## **The Principle of Unequal Yoke**

The principle of unequal yoke is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 6: 14 which states “Be ye not yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and communion hath light with darkness”. In the Old Testament, right from days of the Patriarchs, particularly Abraham, till the time of the prophets emphatically discountenanced unequal yoke. The dispensation of grace clearly indicates that we must remain distinct from unbelievers. In this premises, the believer stands to God in a very special relationship. “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy GOD; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6)

The Christian is one chosen from the unholy mass to be particularly God’s property. He belongs to God in body, soul and spirit. He is a vessel of the Master’s use. His every power, life, relationship is to be governed by the word of God. In this special relationship, he has nothing to do with evil or sin. He must unite with others of precious faith to fight against evil and must be a light to the dark world around and savor to the savorless business and social conduct of this world. In this elevated position of honor and holiness, the believer is summoned to take up an attitude of non – conformity to unbelievers. This informed us why he is warned against unequal yoke on one hand and the upholding of Christian ethics on the other.

Unequal yoke is unholy intimate relationship that exists between the believer and unbeliever. Unequal yoke is generally seen in social relationship (marriage). For example, when a Christian man or lady who professes to be journeying heavenward goes to marry a sinner or one of a doubtful Christian claim either with the intention of leading him/ her to the Lord after their marriage or out of desperation or frustration for want of a lady or man agreeable with his or her marriage proposal, he or she has gone into unequal yoke.

A young Christian woman or man student or worker who has sinners for his or her best friends has gone into unequal yoke. When a Christian in a Bible believing and Christ exalting church secretly worships in occult churches or seeks “solace” from their prophets or prophetesses, he is into unequal yoke. A Christian’s partnership in business with non-Christian is also regarded as unequal yoke. The scripture warned us against the spirit of unequal yoke. Paul queried the Corinthian Christians; “what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14). This tells us Christians are not supposed to have more concourse with unholy men than is necessary. There can be no profitable fellowship, business or friendship between the Christian and the unbeliever as there can be no communion between light and darkness. As Jesus Christ cannot have concord with Belial, (a term occurring in the Hebrew Bible which later became personified as the devil in Jewish and Christian texts: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>) so a believer in Jesus cannot have concord with an unbeliever. In view of this, Christian and non-Christian are subject of not only two separate kingdoms but also two diametrically opposed kingdoms. Their modes of interaction are based on different principles and yet they live in one planet and they work in the same environment.

## **Christianity in Terms of Business Ethics and in relation to ‘unequal yoke’**

A historical understanding of Christianity shows that it arose out of the unique worldview as well as the ethical practices of Judaism. This Christian worldview was dominant in Europe prior to the period and era of the Enlightenment. This view holds that there are valid, non- empirical sources of knowledge about the nature of reality. In this premises, there is a general datum that there is a God who existed before the world existed and he is the ultimate origin of everything on earth and above. The basis of this worldview is found in scriptures and the culture that was born from the



early church (Daniels et al, 2000; Pearcey, 2004). The concept of modernism today represents the Post – Enlightenment philosophy of empiricism and human reason. This is in opposition to the Christian worldviews which is of the belief that there is more to our understanding the world than simple human reason and empiricism. Modernism is of the view that nothing exists outside the material world, which itself can be known and understood through the physical senses in conjunction with the scientific method.

This view negates and excludes all non-empirical ways of knowing. This shows that modernism rejects the possibility that there is more to the world than what we can directly access with our senses, or that there is a dimension of reality underlying what we can see that provides a source, purpose, and coherence beyond the physical events that we often observe. The principal focus of modernism is based or restricted to cause and effect relationships in a closed system (Daniels et al, 2000, Yaman, 2003, David Kim et. Al 2009). We can still recall that modernism has its origins in the Enlightenment, the age of reason, scientific discovery, and human autonomy (Veith, 1994). During this time of Enlightenment, the introduction to science was noted in Christian doctrine and the founding fathers of scientific thoughts embraced Christianity they were not separated from Christian doctrine and although they were not Christians, they worked with Christian in developing their scientific thoughts for example, early scientists such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Copernicus (1475-1543), Galile (1564-1642) and Kepler (1571-1630) worked with Christian beliefs and hold the view that God had created the Universe, and that man, by use of his reason could discover the mysteries of the Universe(Schaeffer 1968).

Unfortunately, from 1700 upward a group of scientists emerged who totally create a different line of thoughts and dissociates themselves from Christian's beliefs and values. This group of scientists developed knowledge by buildings the work on purely cause and effect, logic, observation and experimentation (Hunt 1991). Scientists in this group include scholar like Charles Darwin who argued that God was not even necessary to explain the creation. In describing the "Origin of species" in terms of the closed natural system of cause and effect, Charles Darwin separated himself from Christians and removed the concept of God from his equation of cause and effect. Darwin is of the view that science could now explain everything and not Christian beliefs. This modern thinking gave birth to the social sciences and management disciplines which heavily relay on cause and effect and empirical scientific methods to explain the world we live in and thus scholars now separated themselves from Christians. Over time, references to Christianity were removed from public arena such as schools and government. Religion was simply a matter of personal choice and, thus did not belong in public institution such as it is in South Africa today and my other country including academic institutions and large corporations which are considered to be objective, scientific, and value-free (Pearcy, 2009).

The above philosophy of modernism is currently being challenged by the post-modern worldview which questions whether we can know anything with certainty. (Daniels et al. 2000). It is interesting to know that postmodern thinking has become more dominant in our culture and academic, like Christianity, to explain the nature of reality knowledge, and morality. This is the new era where Christian cannot separate themselves from unbelievers. The tide is turning and Christians need to work with unbelievers and let them know that Christian ethics founded on scripture gives moral standards or a common platform that allow us to judge between right and wrong. In business situations, people must decide what they ought to do and what ethical principles to follow (David Kim et al 2009).

People must know that these principles are right and that it is reliable. Of course, this is not that an absolute moral law must be strictly followed given that the boundaries of moral law and its varied applications will always be discussed and subject to debate. However, according to Colson



and Pearcey (1999), the very idea of right and wrong makes sense only if there is a final standard by which we can make moral judgments.

In my personal observation, I suggest here that Christian must work with unbelievers so as to be able to convince them and let them know that much of what researches and business professionals seek as ethical standards and behavior are found in the scripture, for example, the Ten Commandments provides the foundation for many of today's laws governing business practice including truthfulness in business transactions, proper entitlement and fair dealings with one another. In addition to this, the life and teachings of Jesus provide moral guidance in business. The parable of the rich fool and the parable of the talents teach about proper management of possessions and diligence at work. The primary of love and service to other in respect of fairness is consistent with the goals of corporate social responsibility that is now taken very seriously by institutions and corporate business entity (Alkins, 2000). From the above discussion, it can be argued that one of the main tasks of Christians today is to work closely with unbelievers and make them to know that the scripture has much to say about human nature and behavior that is consistent with what we observe in ourselves and others. Considering challenges among business ethicists and business leaders to create a more ethical environment, ethics research from Christian perspectives is very likely to offer more insight that promote morality and better human relations in the workplace environment. In South Africa for instance, the king 3 report which attempts to address issue of good governance if carefully examined, all the essential elements in the report are found and well noted in the scripture. This buttress the fact that the essential elements of good governance are in the scripture.

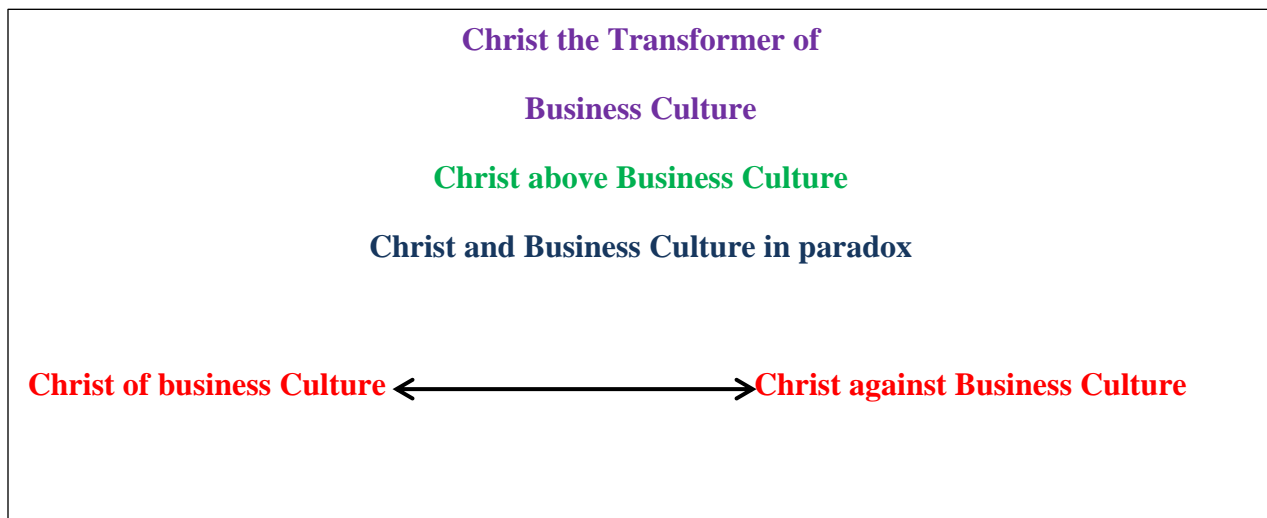
### Theoretical Consideration

The research work of H. Richard Niebuhr (1951) developed a theoretical typology in understanding the relationship between the concept of Christianity and business culture. The issues around his discourse revolve around the following;

- a) Christ against culture
- b) Christ of Culture
- c) Christ above culture
- d) Christ and culture
- e) Christ the transformer of culture

The typology of Richard Niebuhr is illustrated in Figure 1 below;

**Figure 1:** The Typological Framework of Richard Niebuhr Source: H. Richard Niebuhr: Christ and Culture: 1951





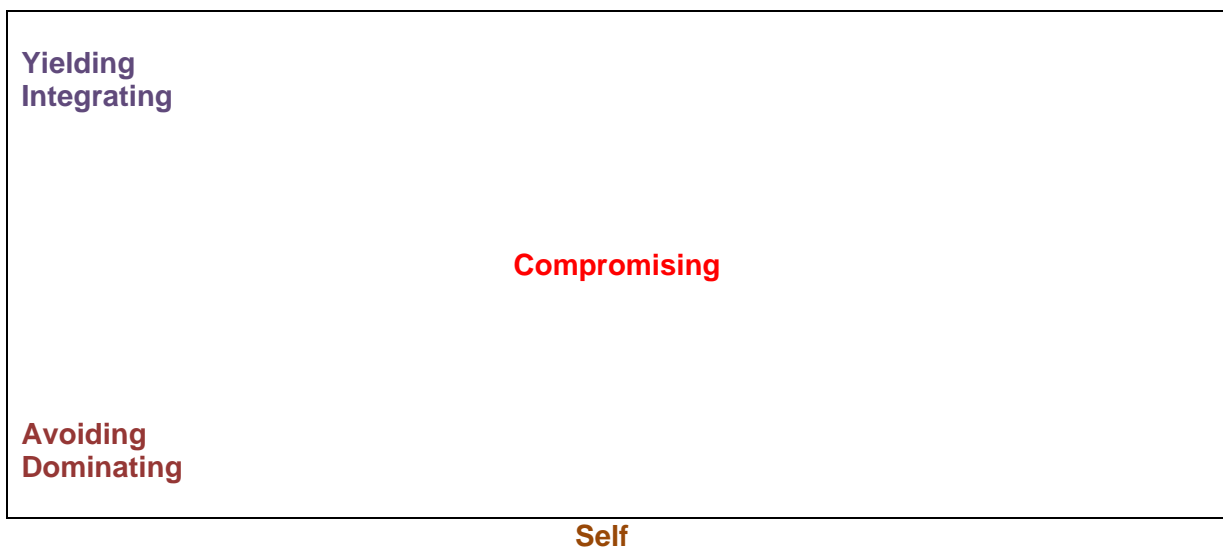
In the above figure 1, the concept of Christ of Business culture is an agreement between two Christian business individuals who transact business between themselves based on Christian doctrine. The concept of Christ against business culture is a situation where there is an unequal yoke, that is a Christian business fellow dealing with a non – Christian business and there is no agreement between the two of them on Christian doctrine and this is the opposite of Christ of Business culture where both are Christian and they both share the same Christian faith and beliefs.

The concept of Christ and Business Culture in paradox is polarity and tension. It shows a pattern in which Christian discipleship is experienced as living in an uneasy co-existence of two powerful conflicting forces. The theme of Christ above business culture is a synthesis and it shows a pattern in which Christian discipleship assimilates some elements of culture while maintaining its own distinctive agenda. The last theme which is Christ the transformer of Business culture reflects a pattern in which Christian discipleship intends a systematic transformation of culture towards Christian norms and values. Apart from the above typology by Richard Niebuhr, Lewicki, Saunders and Minton (2001) also developed a new negotiation style typology that can occur among Christians and non – Christians in business negotiations. The importance of this typology is that in business negotiation. Christians also battle in respect of their Christian faith and beliefs with non- Christian or unbelievers.

This typology of Lewicki et al. (2001) is also based on the earlier typology developed by Richard Niebuhr in 1951. According to Lewicki et al. (2001), they identified five types of themes of framework of negotiation styles. The first theme is dominating (also known as completing or contending), Yielding (also known as accommodating or obligating), Avoiding (also known as inaction), integrating (also known as collaborating or problem solving) and compromising. Dominating, compromising and yielding represent three positions along the path of distributive bargaining, understood as the win – lose mode in negotiation. In another perspective, avoiding, compromising and integrating the three positions along the path of integrative negotiation, understood as a path towards win – win.

The above five negotiation style is represented in Figure 2 below;

**Figure 2.** Negotiation Framework. Source: Lewicki et al (2001)





When we consider this negotiation style with that of Richard Niebuhrian Christ and Culture paradigm, the following themes correspondent to one another: Christ against culture corresponds to avoiding. Christ of culture corresponds to yielding. Christ above culture corresponds to integrating. Christ and culture in paradox corresponds to compromising. Christ the transformer of culture corresponds to dominating.

If we positioned this negotiation framework with that of Richard Niebuhr, a new typological framework is developed as shown in figure 3 below:

**Figure 3:** The new typological Framework Source: Lewicki et al (2001)



The rationale for discussing the above theoretical framework is that it gives us an insight into possible circumstances where unequal yoke could occur in business transaction. The discussion also reflect the practical experience Christians may have to consider when they deal with non – Christians in their daily business activities.

Having discussed the theoretical framework, we shall now examine the role of Christian working in corporate organizations and actively participating in business activity. The basic questions we want to examine here is; Should Christians isolate themselves from the world economic activities because of 2 Corinthians 6: 14 which states “be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness”.

### **Christianity and Business Activities**

For us to be able to analyze the above questions we have just raised, it is necessary for us to acknowledge the fact that Christians and business have different orientations and perspectives. In the first place, Christians seek a godly life, and the corporation or business entity seeks profits for its shareholders. In this premises there seems to be no bearing or common ground in this area. A Christian is expected to be very careful in the pursuits, companions and the use products so as to remain God – centred while a business person must also be careful among the choices so that the moral and the spiritual constraints of the Christian does not hinder or affect his or her





profit and the general benefits to his company. Both the Christian and the businessperson are hemmed in, one by the standards set by God, the other by the standards set by a capitalist economy and enforced by shareholders.

The above description is the parallelism between believers and unbelievers as stated in Corinthians 6 :14 which states that “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”. Unfortunately, this dualistic typology does not work in reality, mainly because life is more integrated than these pure types admit. For most Christians participate in the corporate world and many make decisions there. On the other hand, those Christians affected by the broad policy decisions made by those higher up the corporate body have to understand how to centre their own lives on God in the face of corporate decisions.

Essentially, competitive desires and Christ-likeness are integrally, irreconcilably contrasting. For example, the Bible condemns competition as an evil ailment to be lamented. Christians are viewed as fighting the evil effects of competition. Competition is in itself a proof of man’s fallen nature from God’s Grace. Christians should refrain from engaging in competition because Christians involved in competition will become involved in corruption and taint their loyalties to God. Competition is thus considered to be corrupting and contrary to God’s word. Others assert that Christianity and competition are well-suited and inclusively harmonizing. Competition thus promotes both spiritual growth and economic growth. Where they are involved in competition, Christians should experience approval from God which manifests as a blessing from our Creator who transforms competition. In such a stance, many practices such as winning-at-any-cost are unacceptable.

Philip J. Clements, the founder of the Center for Christian Business Ethics Today, relates a story to exemplify how Judeo-Christian principles make business run efficiently:

He once met with a group of businessmen in Africa, most of them Muslim, who complained of the corruption in their countries. So he shared with them Jesus’ parable of the talents, from the Book of Matthew, in which a master offers his servants some money for their use. When the master returns much later, two of the servants have made a profit and pay him back. They could have simply absconded with it. Mr. Clements’s point is that the kind of trust Jesus teaches is a precondition for an efficient marketplace. “The Roman Empire was more corrupt than your countries,” Mr. Clements said he told the Africans, yet within it, Christians could trust one another. “These principles are transcendent.

(Quoted in New York Times, Beliefs, August 2, 2013)

The Holy Bible does neither explicitly embrace competition nor does it judge it absolutely. Christians are prompted to constantly witness for Christ. Christians must comply with the law of the land, so that justice can be accomplished.

When considering income levels, we must remind ourselves that all people are part of God’s creation and have equal value in His eyes. God entrusts people with the skill to initiate or operate a business in a moral fashion. When Christians are involved in business, an ethical stance is non-negotiable. They should also strive to do what is best for all stakeholders in their community. A Christian oriented business must thus serve the micro and macro environment in ways which are in concert with Holy Scripture. No harm should be done to any stakeholder and especially the environment which should be preserved for future generations to enjoy.



In cases where there are partnerships, the partners should jointly chase after the common good which allows for the prosperity of the community and the individuals to be realized (DeFehr, 1982).

It is desirable to have a strong 'relational proximity' between Christian employers and employees and other stakeholders since the closer they are, the better. When this exists, the participants in the business can better understand one another's attitudes and behaviors. This should all then result in great trust, enhanced customer loyalty, and a happy environment in which teamwork plays a great role promoting a successful company. Currently, modern capitalism's essential flaw is that: "It promotes reward without responsibility, investment without involvement, and profit without participation" (Schulter, 2016).

### **Where should Christians work**

For many years, the question of where Christians should work has been subject to debate. For example in the ancient church, the question arose whether Christians should serve in the Army, where they are instructed to kill human beings (enemies) when need arises. In 1980's, the US Catholic Bishops re-opened this question and asked whether Christians may work in defense industries. Perhaps now is a time to ask what constitutes appropriate employment for Christians where they will not equally yoke with non – Christians. How may a Christian live and work in a morally complicated industry with Christian integrity?

Should Christians work in any industry regardless of the impact and consequences of the products marketed or the services provided to consumers. Should Christians work in business that portrays or benefit from the portrayal of violence? Or should they produce and market products that take advantage of market products weakness and manipulate consumers.

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to get a consensus response to the above questions among both believers and non – believers. Christians as believers will be mostly guided by their beliefs to determine where they should work while non – Christians (unbelievers) will be mostly influenced by the monetary values to be derived to determine where they work. Although the above differences exist between believers and non- believers, can Christians achieve their noble goal of winning souls for Christ (the great commission) by keeping both physical and social distances from unbelievers? The question at this juncture is, how will most Christians do not work closely with unbelievers to be able to convert them to Christianity? Experience has shown that and research in the Behavioral Sciences also support the view that to understand human behavior and to make them to conform you need to work very closely with them and motivate them to do what you want. This argument is supported by the school of Human Relations and the Sociological School of deviant behavior.

We can also extend this principle of Christians working in close proximity with unbelievers to the industry. Christians can help industry to develop moral quality assurance programmes and products. For example, adolescent girls have the attention of clothing and cosmetics manufacturers. Much of what is marketed is not in the girl's best interest, but the girls are unable to make wise choices. Could it make a difference if Christians work in such industry and use the opportunity to advise the industry and use what is morally good to be produced for those adolescent girls. If this is a difficult task for Christians to get industries, then the alternative is for Christians themselves to be the manufacturers and designers of such products and create a standard of modesty that would not manipulate girls and boys at this vulnerable age? Could Christians leaders influence such industry more widely? Considering the fact that there are parents who feel uneasy about current girls fashions, they rarely have the strength to resist





purchasing them. Christian designers themselves might be encouraged to offer an alternative to tight and half naked dresses. Christian designers themselves will not be afraid to create modest and tasteful clothing that they believe in the girls and society's long term best interest if they had the support of Christian consumers and others who share the same values.

In recent time, we have also observed that the Government of different countries has enacted various legislations to promote a high degree of accountability, transparency and fairness in workplace environment. The recent deception practice by high level executives at Enron and other corporations have also brought forth a cry for similar regulatory protection of investors, both large and small. However, this regulatory approach, while well intended may not be reliable in the end. An alternative to such uneven legal regulations imposed on reluctant manufacturers is for the manufacturers themselves as employers to give opportunity to Christians who have the necessary skills to work in their companies. The presence of this Christian is likely to minimize the dishonesty and irregularities facing the current operations. The Christian faith encourages them to be honest and also be able to be a co-operative team player.

The Christians themselves should also use any available opportunity to work in any company where the opportunity arise and transform the company through policy formulation that tally with Christian doctrine or by their conduct, give a better outlook to the company. With this strategy, Christians will be able to win souls and fulfill the scripture in respect of the "Great Commission". Jesus Christ himself while on earth made it clear to us that he has not come for the saved but he has come to save the sinners. Christians must work with unbelievers in the same work environment and use the same opportunity to evangelize to them, and win the souls. However, Christians must not participate with unbelievers in activities that negate the Christian doctrines which are against Christian beliefs and values.

## Conclusion

This paper essentially sought to highlight the meaning of unequal yoke and why Christians should work with unbelievers in work place environment. Christianity is a discovered religion and truth is based on absolutes. As Christians, business people require a philosophical framework which puts their relationship to God, to the physical world and also to our society into perspective. The researcher has argued that the idea of Christians keeping both physical and social distance from unbelievers will not help Christian to fulfill the mission of the "Great Commission" which is to spread the Gospel of Christ to all nations. Christians must use the opportunity in their workplace environment to save the lost (unbelievers) and also transform the workplace environment by their conduct also by their active participation in formulating company policies and strategy that fall within the scripture. Beyond this, Christian should also establish companies or industries and produce those things that have moral values and encourage business decisions to be informed by Christians resources. I recommend here that Christians who are well skilled and educated should staff the upper echelons of corporations and this will bring a change to the world of business. However, much empirical research is needed in this area in future.

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