

Brief Study Guide

Christ and Business Culture

Chapter 1: Christians in the Marketplace

1. How would you summarize Chapter 1 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 1 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Describe a recent problem at work that challenged your faith. How did you respond? How has it affected you, positively or negatively?
4. Have you been a part of a Christian fellowship at church or at work? How has spending time with other Christians regularly in a small group affected you?
5. What is your experience in working with other Christians? Do you tend to hold Christians to a higher ethical standard than you do non-Christians? Why or why not?
6. What does being salt and light mean to you (Matthew 5:13-16)? In what ways can you be salt and light in your sphere of influence?

Do you feel alone or lost in your struggles at work? Can you benefit from interacting with other Christians who have gone through similar issues? Would you like to encourage others like yourself? They say a journey of a thousand miles begin with one step. Why not take a step towards God and his word now? There is no substitute for a quiet time of listening and responding to God. Even starting with a few minutes may draw you closer to him and his infinite wisdom.

- Reading: Romans 12:1-21 on offering to God what he has entrusted to us and loving others as he has loved us.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 2: H. Richard Niebuhr's Christ and Culture

1. How would you summarize Chapter 2 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 2 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Do you think you have a culture? Does your workplace? Does your church? In what way do you find your culture challenged by your witness to Christ?
4. How do you define business ethics? How do you think business ethics can be qualified as Christian?
5. When you think about the ethical challenges that you have encountered, did your response belong to more than one of the five types? Briefly describe a couple of examples in your experience that demonstrate different types of responses.
6. In John 14:6 Jesus declares, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Christian faith is not simply assent to a set of beliefs but it expresses authenticity of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. What does having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ mean to you?

Christian faith embodies a vibrant relationship with the Living God. He is God Almighty who is higher and stronger than we can ever imagine. Yet he is also Immanuel, God with us, who is closer than our brother or best friend. Christian ethics flows out of that dynamic connection to the ultimate source of all resources. Without that bond, we cannot have abundant life or lasting fruit. In this scenario, we can easily envision a picture of a vine and its branches.

- Reading: John 15:1-17 about the true vine and branches.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from Chapter 2?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 3: Christ and Business Culture

1. How would you summarize Chapter 3 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 3 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. How did you become a Christian? How would you describe your church life now?
4. What kind of work do you do? When you think about your faith and work, what challenges come to mind? Or what Christian concerns do you find challenging to apply at work?
5. Describe an ethical challenge in your work experience that includes: 1) the background of the incident, 2) your response, 3) the rationale behind your response and 4) the consequences of your response.
6. How would you classify the ethical challenge from Question 4 according to the five types in our new typology of Christ and business culture? How would classifying your response help in your decision-making when you face ethical challenges in the future?

From biblical times to today, it is not uncommon for the public to perceive merchants, traders or business people negatively. Perhaps it is their association with money-making – and the greed that most people assume motivates it – because those who buy and sell for profit are best known for seeking the most profit even when the transaction seems like a zero sum game. As we read in 1 Timothy 6:10, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, a warning that seems to reinforce the public’s negative view of business as usual. The central issue seems to be one of the heart. Are we as followers of Christ seeking God first and to please him in our work? Or do we trust wealth more than God?

- Reading: Matthew 6:19-34 on seeking first God’s kingdom;
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 4: Christian Business Ethics as Positive Science and Normative Reflection

1. How would you summarize Chapter 4 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 4 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Can you think of an incident in your experience where you felt caught or torn between what you would typically do at work and what you would have preferred to do as a Christian? What was the main issue and what was at stake?
4. Studying positive science, in short, helps us to determine typical responses based on the patterns of a data set. For example, doing business in China tends to generate responses under Type 1, Christ against Culture/ Avoiding or Type 4, Christ and Culture in Paradox/Compromising. On the other hand, working in a Christian corporate culture tends to generate responses under Type 5, Christ the Transformer of Culture/Dominating but not Type 2, Christ of Culture/Yielding.

How would you describe your experience of doing business in China or in an environment that is generally challenging to the Christian faith? In contrast, what is your experience of working in a Christian corporate culture or under a management that is generally supportive of Christian faith? Do your responses to ethical challenges under a positive or negative impact on Christian faith tend to follow the same patterns?

5. Normative reflection, on the other hand, helps us to understand why responses sometimes deviate from the typical pattern when Christians consider what they should do or ought to have done. Can you think of an incident while working in China business (or an environment that is challenging to Christian faith) or in a Christian corporate culture (or an environment that is supportive of Christian faith) where your response did not fit the typical patterns? What were the factors that led you to a different type of response?
6. When there is no specific direction in the Bible for a work situation that you face, how do you determine what Jesus would do? How does thinking about what Jesus would do shape the choices that you have actually made at work?

We have all been there. We want to do something that we should not do, or we do not want to do something that we should do. We can claim that our heart and mind cannot agree with one another, but eventually we end up choosing one way or the other.

When there are competing internal preferences, positive science and normative reflection help us to make more informed decisions. That is true, but what we as Christians ought to do may have more to do with our conversations with God than with our recourse to science or ethics alone. Simply put, Christians want to hear from God and prayer is crucial in the process. Not that God needs to know us or our situation, but that we need and want to know God more to align ourselves with his will for us.

- Reading: Matthew 6:5-15 on the Lord's Prayer.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 5: China Business – When the Dominant Culture is Challenging

1. How would you summarize Chapter 5 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 5 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. What is your view on working or doing business in China? Is it (or would it be) purely for work or business reasons? More than simply work or business? A calling from God?
4. In what ways do you think Christians can contribute to China's social and economic development?
5. Do you consider your work environment "clean" or "dirty"? Can business proceed without corrupting activities such as bribery, extortion or questionable forms of entertainment and other favors?
6. Through China business, some informants of our study proactively sought ways to share the gospel while others waited for opportunities to come to them first. What is your approach to witnessing at your workplace?

Doing business is already like fighting a battle in that all participants are usually competing for limited goods and resources. When the fight is stacked against you, as it is for followers of Christ who find themselves in an environment hostile to their faith and practice, then the struggle becomes even more daunting.

Ultimately what Christians are fighting against is not business, China, or any country, culture or peoples, for God so loves the world that he gave his only Son to save the world through him. Rather, Christians are called to join the spiritual battle against the devil's schemes; On our own, we are no match for the opposition, but in God's mighty power, we can stand firm; If we also remember that in God's economy, there is no lack but plenty for all, then we not only can stand but we also can stand with a grateful and generous heart.

- Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18 about putting on the armor of God.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 6: Christian Corporate Culture – When the Dominant Culture is Supportive

1. How would you summarize Chapter 6 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 6 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. What is your experience in working with a management or board that is predominately Christian or supportive of Christian values and practices? What might be some advantages and disadvantages of working in such a corporate culture?
4. Yielding to merits in the business culture that are compatible with Christian faith may not come across as distinctively Christian. In fact, some people tend to interpret such informants or their actions as negative in terms of Christian witness. What do you think? How would you answer the critics if you were in that situation? Could or should such misunderstandings be reduced?
5. In your experience, what enhance love and unity among Christians and consequently their witness to non-believers?
6. How does your identity at work affect your sense of self-worth as compared to your identity in Christ? How would you feel if you have no job or business card to give out vs. how would you feel about losing your identity in Christ?

For those of us who follow Christ, our hope is on the place that he is preparing for us in our Father's house. Meanwhile our family on earth offers only a glimpse of what we can expect our family to be like in heaven. On this side of eternity, we are always lacking, much like the foreigners, orphans and widows depicted in the Bible. When that day comes, however, we will truly be complete when we are in his presence with the entire family of God.

Nevertheless, we as God's children are not left without support while residing on earth. We have the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ on our pilgrimage. So it is not surprising that God would ordain our love for one another as a way for other people to come to know him and become a part of his blessed family too.

- Reading: 1 John 3:1-3; 16-24 on the children of God and on loving one another.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 7: Type 1 – Christ against Culture/Avoiding

1. How would you summarize Chapter 7 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 7 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. How did you choose your vocation? Did you choose it or did it choose you? Has it met your expectations? Is your work life satisfying? Please explain why.
4. What are some of your core values? What influences led to those values? Do you think you weigh risks and rewards in life differently than non-Christians that you know?
5. Can you think of a Type 1 incident from personal experience? What was the background of the incident, your response, the rationale behind it, and the consequences? With hindsight, would you have done anything differently?
6. What do you think about some Christians' priority of putting time with their loved ones before serving at church or working beyond the typical work week? How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

It is not surprising that Christians would not feel at home in the world as we know it because followers of Christ are not of the world just as Christ is not of it. But Jesus' prayer (John 17) is not for the Father to take his disciples out of the world but for him to protect them from the evil one. While Christians will encounter opposition and feel alienated in the world, they are sanctified by Christ, the Word, even as they are sent into the world to be his witnesses. It is one way of following in his footsteps.

Although life is often difficult in a culture dominated by anti-Christian sentiments, believers can take heart that Christ has already overcome the world by his resurrection. The sin that has marred the world has been paid for once and for all by Jesus' death on the cross; Moreover, Jesus has made a way for all, who are willing, to come to God; If you do not know the way, why not ask in Jesus' name?

- Reading: 1 Peter 2:9-12 on his chosen people and 1 John 2:15-17 on the person who does the will of God.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 8: Type 2 – Christ of Culture/Yielding

1. How would you summarize Chapter 8 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 8 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Can you think of a Type 2 incident from personal experience? What do you consider to be the benefits and pitfalls of this type of response?
4. What are some safeguards or accountability structures that could be beneficial in assessing the appropriateness of your Type 2 responses?
5. Do you think of your work as missions? What do you think about excelling at work (including the way you manage stress and relationships at your workplace) as a way to witness for Christ?
6. Besides the centurion who came to Jesus seeking a cure for his servant as a possible biblical model for Christians involved in Type 2 situations, can you think of another example from the Bible? How do these examples reflect Christian business ethics?

It is intriguing to contemplate why Jesus would choose to dwell in human flesh among the Jews rather than reconstruct the entire culture and inaugurate in a new kingdom then and there, the way we would typically envision kingdoms to be established. What we do know is that he did not come to abolish the Law of Moses. On the contrary, he came to fulfill it. Similarly, as citizens of the world, his followers are called to live under earthly authorities and rules. As Jesus has said before, “Give the Emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to God.” This is certainly another way of following Jesus.

- Reading: Ephesians 2:1-22 on being in Christ.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 9: Type 3 – Christ above Culture/Integrating

1. How would you summarize Chapter 9 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 9 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Can you give an example of a Type 3 response from your personal experience? What were the setting, ethical challenge and result?
4. In your example, did you have a clear priority of putting God first going into that situation? Were you aware of any shared goals between your faith and work? Did having a clear priority and shared goals lead you toward integration? Did your response pass the litmus test of being approved by both your Christian faith and your priorities at work? Do you consider the result to be a win-win solution to the challenge raised in your example?
5. If integration leads to a desirable outcome for Christian faith and business, then business executives should facilitate this type of response whenever possible. Have you encountered ethical challenges where it was not possible to respond this way? With hindsight, might there have been a way to make a Type 3 response feasible in that situation after all?
6. How do you feel about being openly Christian at your workplace? What might be some pros and cons of your position in witnessing for Christ?

While Jesus was on this earth busy with ministry, teaching in the synagogues, healing the sick and spending time with his disciples, he never veered from God's will; In fact, everything that he did was part of and led up to his central purpose and passion. Furthermore, his work and life were anchored in prayer and communion with God.

That is the kind of integration that his followers aspire to, then and now: To have our time at work, at home, at church and at large all in him, for him and of him. Jesus is our example and our advocate at the right hand of God.

- Reading: Read Colossians 1:15-23 about the supremacy of Christ.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 10: Type 4 – Christ and Culture in Paradox/Compromising

1. How would you summarize Chapter 10 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 10 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. How do you feel about the problem of “dirty hands” where good can be achieved, apparently, only by actively doing or passively cooperating in some evil? Do you think both direct and indirect involvement with making questionable payments, for example, are nevertheless dirty?
4. Professional scholars and teachers may teach that similar situations be treated in a similar manner. If cheating is wrong, then it is wrong in all similar cases. Theoretically, such an assessment makes sense and provides a helpful guideline. But can you think of a real life business situation where it is not quite that simple? What would help business practitioners to navigate possible exceptions to the rule?
5. Can you think of an example of a Type 4 response from your experience or from the experience of another Christian where compromising to an ethical challenge occurred for the sake of Christian witness or ministry? Consider the appropriateness of the response and the possibility of alternative responses. What do you find?
6. H. Richard Niebuhr described Christians who exhibit Type 4 behavior as “dualists” that echo Martin Luther’s description of the predicament of Christians who are both justified before God and yet also sinners at the same time. It is a rather uneasy situation that is far from ideal. Despite the compromises and tensions associated with this response, what good, from either a practical or spiritual perspective, can you identify in it?

In the marketplace, can followers of Christ truly stay away from those who are involved in corruption? Should they? Certainly they need discernment on how to love sinners and yet loathe the sin. Christians can recall how Jesus made himself available to the people around him and how he cared for the sick and met their physical as well as spiritual needs. Jesus also ate with tax collectors and reached out to Samaritans (considered unclean) and prostitutes. Are those who condemned these people themselves without sin? The answer is a resounding no. Everyone, including followers of Christ, has come short of the glory of God and has struggles with their sinful nature. Only Jesus is without sin and qualified to judge; only he can deliver us all.

- Reading: 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 on sharing God’s blessings with others.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 11: Type 5 – Christ the Transformer of Culture/Dominating

1. How would you summarize Chapter 11 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 11 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Does prayer make a difference in your work? How does your faith influence your work?
4. How do you define business success? How did you come to that definition? How has it affected your career?
5. In your experience, do Christians in management have a stereotypic image of coming across as either a pushover or overbearing? Do you see any differences between your management style as a Christian and what would be considered to be best managerial practices in general?
6. Many business executives would like to be a positive influence that extends beyond their department and corporation. Do you think transforming culture starts with one person, perhaps your own heart? In what ways can you extend that transformation to your community or those around you?

The same Jesus, who accepted the lowly and sustained the weak, also overturned the tables of money changers at the temple and without hesitation condemned the hypocrisy of the Jewish establishment operating there. While Jesus told his disciples to be gentle as doves, he also taught them to be as shrewd as serpents. Similarly, Christians need wisdom from above on when to let things go and when to take charge and exercise moral leadership.

As in biblical times, discipleship and transformation came from spending time with Jesus. In his word, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians today can follow the same path to divine wisdom. Based on the promise that he will come again to make all things new, Christians have all the more reason to be trained and prepared for that day.

- Reading: 2 Peter 3:3-14 on a new heaven and a new earth.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?

Chapter 12: Christ and Culture Revisited

1. How would you summarize Chapter 12 in a few sentences?
2. Name a key point from Chapter 12 and explain why it is significant to you.
3. Have you personally experienced the tension between righteousness and profitableness at work in the past? How did you reconcile or manage it?
4. How does knowing that there are five types of equally righteous responses with different implications for profitableness help you in your business decisions?
5. What are some insights from studying the book that you would like to share with other Christians in the marketplace?
6. What is next in your Christian business ethics journey? Are there changes that you would like to make in your spiritual walk or in your career?

Our life journey is like a marathon. Crossing the finish time is the goal but the process of getting there is likewise significant. We will pass through different landscapes and go through different stages, and there will no doubt be difficulties along the way. Come what may, however, the key to finishing is actually quite simple: never give up!

For Christians, the lovely thing about this race is that we can simply follow Christ. He is the way. We can also enjoy the companionship of God's children. Though the road may be narrow and even treacherous at times, we can rest assured that God has already provided "the way" for us to reach our ultimate destination.

- Reading: Hebrews 12:1-13 on perseverance in God.
- Reflection: What do you hear from God through these verses?
- Response: What do you take away from this chapter?
- Prayer: Praise, thanksgiving, confession and requests?