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By Rick Boxx

TOUGH BUSINESS IN A FALLEN WORLD

When Tom Phillips, the former CEO of Raytheon, passed away, his Wall Street Journal obituary included a story about a Harvard University undergraduate who posed an intriguing question. The student asked Mr. Phillips if he believed there was a contradiction between his Christian faith and running a huge corporation that manufactures missiles for warfare.

Mr. Phillips' response was both honest and carefully considered, observing the reality of the human condition. He said, "We would like it to be a world where armies and weapons were not necessary. But there is a basic greed in man. Man is flawed, I believe. And nations are flawed. We have to provide for a common defense."

Most of us do not work for companies that produce weapons for war. However, finding ourselves in a profession – or employed in industries – that necessarily must address the "flaws in man," as Mr. Phillips termed it, can present challenges when uncomfortable decisions must be made.

Persons working in law enforcement, for instance, every day deal with the darkest sides of humanity. Attorneys may be called upon to represent not only victims of criminal activity, but also the perpetrators of crimes. The pharmaceutical industry provides important medical treatment for many people, but in some cases the drugs produced prove extremely harmful when misused or abused. Sometimes physicians and nurses must make difficult choices when there are no simple solutions. Even educators can face major challenges.

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Perhaps your job at times presents circumstances that test your values and convictions. Does this mean when we arrive at an ethical crossroads, we must give up or take the path of least resistance? If we are followers of Jesus Christ, we might even be tempted to wonder, “God, why did you call me to this profession?”

While the Bible does not promise easy answers to every ethical dilemma, the Lord does call us to serve Him – and others – in many difficult realms. For instance, *1 Corinthians 7:17 teaches, “Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.”*

Just as in biblical times Christ’s disciples found themselves engaged in often challenging lines of work, we too must seek God’s wisdom, guidance and grace in carrying out difficult responsibilities. I believe that in His desire to redeem a fallen world – people who have strayed far from God’s design – He necessarily places some people in tough industries. If we can accept this as His will for us, what else can we do to perform our tasks and make hard decisions in ways that please Him? Here are some guidelines He provides in the Scriptures:

Ask for wisdom. Hopefully it does not happen often, but when challenging circumstances require complex decisions, we should ask God to provide the wisdom we need to do what is best. *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).*

Seek wise counsel. We should find people with wisdom, individuals we can consult with when difficult situations confront us. *“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure” (Proverbs 11:14).*

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Pray for strength. When the culture around us says we should act contrary to our convictions, God can provide the needed resources to resist the temptation to yield. *“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:29-31).*

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Have you ever worked in circumstances that seemed in opposition to your values and convictions? Perhaps you presently have a job that at times put you in potentially compromising situations? If so, what has this been like – and how do (or did) you handle them?
2. Do you believe we should always hold to our convictions, those principles that define our faith? Or are there times when we just have to live with seeming contradictions? Explain your answer.
3. How easy is it for you to pray and seek God's wisdom when simple answers seem beyond your reach? What is it like to pray in such a way?
4. Can you think of a time when you didn't feel as if you had the strength to take a difficult stand against something you were being asked to do? How did you deal with that? Did God supply the needed strength at this time – or another time when you confronted challenging circumstances?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 3:13-15, 15:22, 19:20, 20:18; Psalm 84:11-12, 118:14

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