

Christian Ethics in Music Business:  
Our Foundation in a Moral Purpose

Emily R. Webb

MUS 470  
Senior Thesis  
Professor Mark S. Dorn  
Colorado Christian University  
December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015

This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Bachelor of Arts – Music Performance.

## Christian Ethics in Music Business: Our Foundation in a Moral Purpose

### INTRODUCTION

There is a popular quote on the internet world about the music business that goes something like this: “The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side.” This version of the quote is often wrongly attributed to journalist Hunter S. Thompson and was actually formed from a passage Thompson wrote in his book *Generation of Swine* about the television business.<sup>1</sup> Whatever its source, this quote still accurately conveys society’s view of the music industry as it has existed in the past century.

The music business has been around for decades. Previous to the industrial revolution of the industry that occurred in the early 1900s, music was not so much an industry as it was a personal career. However, when technology made the mass production and distribution of music possible, large corporations took over the music world, bringing a focus on money and power. Along with this new focus came a decrease in moral and ethical standards that still exists today. Because the music business now functions on worldly ethics and desires, some think that there is no way for Christian ethics and morality to function in the music industry. Indeed, there are certainly moral challenges to working in a field not based in Christian ideals. However, while it may seem challenging

---

<sup>1</sup> Hunter S. Thompson, *Gonzo Papers Vol. 2: Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s* (New York: Summit Books), 43.

to maintain ethics in a field where ethics are involved so little, it *is* possible. In fact, maintaining Christian ethics in the music business is not just *possible*; Christian ethics also make one *more successful* in the music industry. Furthermore, these Christian ethics are not merely a set of rules for one to follow but are rather a *moral purpose* with Biblical foundations that makes a person who they are and influences their life and decisions from the inside out. An in-depth look at several different topics is necessary to understand this concept: first, a look into the history of the music business; next, a definition of Christian ethics in their relation to business; and finally, how the music business and Christian ethics can be integrated successfully when one has a strong moral purpose.

## THE HISTORY OF THE MUSIC INDUSTRY AND ITS QUESTIONABLE MORALITY

Behind every great fortune lies a great crime.

- Honoré de Balzac

When Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877,<sup>2</sup> a brand new industry was born: selling recorded sound, specifically music. Manufacturing and selling music for playback began to become lucrative. The second significant invention that was extremely impactful in the music industry was the invention of radio in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> This allowed almost constant access to music. Other major inventions that have greatly affected the music industry were Compact Discs (CDs), MP3s, and most recently, internet streaming and internet radio.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2013), 493.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 620.

Radio and record labels were almost immediately two intertwined parts of the industry. In order for a record to sell, songs from the album had to be heard by the public, and the best way to achieve this was through radio. Getting air time for a song on the radio quickly became very competitive among record labels. This started one of the most widespread moral failings in the music industry that lasted for decades: an illegal practice termed “payola.” In his book all about the subject, *Payola in the Music Industry*, author Kerry Segrave defines payola as, “a term used to describe the music industry practice of paying people a sum of money to promote a particular piece of music – with the expectation that [this...] would lead to increased sales and profits.”<sup>4</sup> This was an immoral action because the people in charge of what songs got air time were supposed to remain unbiased and make selections based on the quality of this music and whether or not their audience would be interested. Payola started as early as the 1880s but became more prevalent with the Copyright Act in 1909.<sup>5</sup> The practice waned off and on for several decades until it peaked in the mid-century with the Alan Freed scandal. 1960s well-known disc jockey and television host Alan Freed was the first person in the industry to be legally charged with payola. The court was able to prove that Freed accepted \$2,500 in return for playing certain records. No laws against payola had even been made until this incident, which destroyed Freed’s career, resulting in his early death by alcohol at age 43.<sup>6</sup> This was not the end of payola, however. In the 70’s and 80’s, because payola was now so frowned

---

<sup>4</sup> Kerry Segrave, *Payola in the Music Industry: A History, 1880-1991* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1994), vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>6</sup> Fredric Dannen, *Hit Men: Power Brokers and Fast Money Inside the Music Business* (New York: Times Books, 1990), 43.

upon, disc jockeys and programmers began to be “paid” with vacations, cars, drugs, even prostitutes, instead of cash,<sup>7</sup> and the industry rode out several more major payola-related scandals.

Participating in payola was not the only questionable action made by powerful men in the record industry of the 1900s. Morris Levy, first owner of the famous Birdland jazz club and founder of Roulette Records, was made wealthy in his career not by his good business sense alone – he was heavily tied to the Mafia. In fact, the whole music industry worked quite frequently with the Mafia, knowingly allowing their involvement in artist management, booking, and distribution.<sup>8</sup> Several other top businessmen in the music industry also had questionable actions. Clive Davis of CBS Records was indicted with tax evasion in 1976<sup>9</sup>; famous artist manager Irving Azoff once sent a live boa constrictor to a colleague as a present<sup>10</sup>; Casablanca Records chief Neil Bogart ran his business on the morally-questionable motto “Whatever It Takes”<sup>11</sup>; and Goddard Lieberson was so worshipped by his employees that he signed his letters, “God,”<sup>12</sup> showing a hardly-unusual mindset held by these powerful men.

The more-recent history and current state of the music industry is plagued with moral questions about copyright legality with particular regard to online streaming, sharing, and downloading. The MP3, a method of compressing digital audio, was invented

---

<sup>7</sup> Segrave, *Payola*, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Dannen, *Hit Men*, 33-34.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

in the early 1990s, making it possible to send music over the Internet,<sup>13</sup> which forever changed the way the industry functioned. Unfortunately, with this new ease of transferring music came new copyright violation issues. Music could be uploaded to a website and then downloaded with no implications. Websites like Napster started solely to share music between users, which was wonderful for consumers but devastating for musicians, who were making no profit from their hard work. Furthermore, after these sharing websites were shut down for copyright violation, download sites such as The Pirate Bay were started, which allow users to download music and other media with almost no way of tracking who was taking advantage of this service. The most recent technological advancement in musical consumption is internet streaming through sites like Pandora and Spotify. Streaming music through these sites is legal, following all current copyright laws, yet still hardly pays musicians for their craft. In fact, many famous musicians will not allow their music on these sites because of the devaluation of their work.<sup>14</sup>

With the introduction of transferring and streaming music over the internet, record labels have decreased in power. It is now much easier for an artist to record, produce, and distribute his music with no help from a record company. The music business has taken a huge shift away from the way it functioned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now depends on the independent, such as smaller independent record labels, independent producers (not working for a specific label), and independent artists (not signed by a label). This decrease

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Tschmuck, *Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry* (Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 169.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Knopper, "Islands in the Stream: The 10 Biggest Holdouts in Digital Music," *Rolling Stone*, last modified January 2, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/artists-refuse-stream-music-20150102>

in record company power and importance has possibly decreased the immorality found in the powerful individuals who ran the industry. However, the unethically of the music business is now much subtler, found in the companies and individuals that take advantage of the ease in which music is accessed.

#### WHAT ARE CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN THEIR RELATION TO BUSINESS?

The subject of Christian ethics is a broad field, to say the least. There are entire books of behavioral rules and proverbs in the Biblical Old Testament alone. However, Christian ethics are not based in law or rules, even Biblical ones. Author Alexander Hill gives us an answer to the question of where to find ethics: “The foundation of Christian ethics [...] is not rules but the changeless character of God.”<sup>15</sup> This idea that ethics, or guidelines for behavior, come from God Himself is also stated by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: “Instead, we will speak the truth in love, *growing in every way more and more like Christ*, who is the head of His body, the church.”<sup>16</sup> So then, what better way to see the character of God than to look at His actions while living on Earth in our situation as the Son of God, Jesus Christ? With Christ as the living example of the way a Christian should live, the basis of ethics can be found in Him, His teachings, and His life. In the book *Christian Ethics*, author Otto Piper voices this point: “Jesus indicated that [H]e was [...] the realization of the purpose which God had with man. [...] Thus Christ disclosed the deepest mystery of ethics, viz. that in order to realize goodness man needed

---

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics in the Marketplace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Ephesians 4:15, New Living Translation, emphasis added.

to have his will illumined and strengthened by God as [H]e acted in history.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Christians can find a basis for their decisions and actions in the example of Christ, not in rules or laws.

During His time on Earth, Jesus was many times questioned by the Pharisees about Christian law. During one of these instances, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, and the Pharisees receive a very declarative response:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”<sup>18</sup>

As stated by Jesus Christ Himself, all Christian law is based off of these commandments. The first one, love God above all else, is indirectly related to the issue of how to behave in an ethical dilemma. Loving God first is a personal goal between a person and God; however, when a Christian has God as the center of his life, Christian love will show through him because of his relationship with The Father. This is where the second commandment comes in. Because of a personal relationship with God, one is capable of showing love to others. Showing love like this is the second commandment and is quite directly related to behavior in a workplace. All ethical decisions and actions can be related to this great commandment. The answer to an ethical question or dilemma may not be immediately clear even when keeping this commandment in mind, but if one is thinking of

---

<sup>17</sup> Otto A. Piper, *Christian Ethics* (Great Britain: Nelson, 1970), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 22:36-40, New International Version.

others primarily and not himself, he will be following God's perfect law and setting the situation up for successful resolution.

Previous to this command given to the Pharisees, in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, He gives a similar commandment: "So *in everything*, do to other what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."<sup>19</sup> The additional important part of this verse is the phrase "in everything." This means in all one does, he should follow this, including business management and decision making. In his book, *Lord of the Marketplace*, author Myron Rush emphasizes this point by saying, "In all places, with all people, we are consistently to apply this principle[.]"<sup>20</sup> This verse also reiterates the idea that living as Christ did is not based on rules or laws because this commandment is the sum of them all. The purpose of the Old Testament books on law were for the purpose of loving others. So again, our ethics should not be based on a set of rules but on God's character, especially His love.

So after determining that Jesus is the answer to ethical questions, and receiving such a declarative answer on how to treat people in all situations, how does this relate specifically to a business, especially music business, setting? Further discussion of what ethical qualities and actions look like is necessary. Jesus' ethics, along with the commandment to love others as one loves himself, can be applied to many different business situations through distinct characteristics a person following this commandment, and striving to live as God did, would be working to possess.

---

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 7:12, New International Version, emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> Myron Rush, *Lord of the Marketplace* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984), 94.

In his book specifically about Christian ethics in the business marketplace, Alexander Hill divides the character of God into three basic distinctions for us to base our actions from: holiness, justice, and love.<sup>21</sup> Hill's thesis is based on these three characteristics, and he summarizes it by saying, "[...]a business act is ethical if it reflects God's holy-just-loving character."<sup>22</sup> This gives Christians a good basis for ethical actions, but what exactly do each of these things entail, and how did Jesus show them in His time here on Earth?

Hill defines holiness as, "The concept of single-minded devotion to God and absolute ethical purity."<sup>23</sup> Notice that by holiness, Hill is not referring to being perfect or sinless; holiness is an undivided devotion to God above all else. Holiness is a heavily-discussed topic in the Bible. Hebrews 12:14 states: "Make every effort [...] to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."<sup>24</sup> And the Apostle Peter says, "But just as [H]e who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"<sup>25</sup> In his discussion of holiness and ethics, Hill splits the characteristic of holiness into four elements: zeal for God, purity, accountability, and humility.<sup>26</sup>

Zeal for God, and God alone, is important to a Christian's walk with God. In the greatest commandment mentioned above, the first half specifically demands that we are to love God with everything we are. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus states that "No one can serve two

---

<sup>21</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

<sup>24</sup> Hebrew 12:14, New International Version.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Peter 1:15-16, New International Version.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 23

masters.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus makes the point that our one master should be God, nothing else. Those in the business world should not let money, position, acclaim, or power become their priority; this is important to making moral decisions.

The second aspect of holiness, purity, refers to both ethical purity, or aversion to anything impure, and moral separation, which is when one purposefully separates himself from the impure.<sup>28</sup> Hill relates holiness as purity to business in three ways: purity in communication, purity in sexuality, and purity in purpose. Purity in communication requires a worker to be honest and clear in their language; purity in sexuality requires someone to avoid sexual immorality in the workplace, both by not seeking out sexual acts from others and by not responding to such behavior themselves; lastly, purity in purpose requires one to act with integrity no matter the situation.<sup>29</sup>

The next aspect of holiness is accountability. While it is not mentioned quite as obviously in the Bible as the overarching idea of holiness, accountability is discussed as judgment and with different Biblical characters being rewarded or punished for their behavior. Hill summarizes the importance of accountability by saying, “Accountability is built into the moral universe – all actions have consequences.”<sup>30</sup> Accountability and consequences also take place in the business world; in general, companies are rewarded for good ethical choices and punished for poor ones, through economic and decisional means.

The final aspect in our aim toward holiness is humility. Humility arises as we compare ourselves to the holiness of God and see how far we fall short of His standards. In

---

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 6:24, New International Version.

<sup>28</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

business, this looks like listening to others' opinions, building strong teams, and not being proud to admit one's mistakes.<sup>31</sup>

Holiness is certainly an aspect of God for humans to strive for, even though we will never be able to perfectly achieve His level of holiness. In our attempts to become holy, sometimes distortions and abuses of holiness arise that are not what God intends.<sup>32</sup> The first of these is legalism, or an over-focusing on following rules. In a business, a manager who only requires employees to follow all the rules and focuses on that completely ignores the human-side of business and alienates his staff. This results in the possibility of hurting his own company by instead of focusing on positive things, like a mission statement or strong teams, micromanaging his staff into becoming emotionally disconnected from and uncommitted to their jobs and employing company.<sup>33</sup> Judgment is another possible failing in the human attempt to be holy. People judge others, pointing out their mistakes, in order to justify themselves. By pointing out the "worse" sins of others, people who judge make themselves feel better about their own sins; however, this results in pride (the opposite of the holy aspect of humility) and alienation of other people.<sup>34</sup> In one of His sermons, Jesus commands us not to be judgmental, saying, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."<sup>35</sup> Finally, the third possible negative outcome of a person's quest for holiness is withdrawing from society. This withdrawal comes from the belief that the only way to remain holy in the world is to completely separate oneself from it. However, Jesus did not separate

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 7:1, New International Version.

Himself from the world when He lived among us; rather, He dined with the tax collectors and sinners. Hill ends his discussion of holiness by saying that the business world presents the perfect opportunity to test one's holiness and also to share the Lord with many who greatly need Him.<sup>36</sup>

Much is said about justice and fairness in the Bible. For instance, the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy not only deal specifically with the laws of living but actually serve as the entire basis for Jewish law: the Torah. The discussion of fairness and justice in the New Testament is stated differently than in lines of rules; it is focused more on concepts of God. One point that is made quite clear in both the Old Testament and New Testament is that God the Father is the ultimate King of justice who will judge the world according to His standards. There are several verses that make this clear. Revelation 19:11 says, "And I [the Apostle John] saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war."<sup>37</sup> James, the brother of Jesus, says in his writings, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?"<sup>38</sup> God is the one who ultimately decides justice, not us.

In their book *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, authors Chewning, Eby, and Roels define Biblical justice by stating: "Biblical justice refers to the ways relationships are structured so that there are no built-in disadvantages to any individual or group of people. [...] The Biblical command to do justice [...] is a call to do the right thing in the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 19:11, New American Standard Bible.

<sup>38</sup> James 4:12, New American Standard Bible.

right manner with the right motives.”<sup>39</sup> Two aspects of justice that Hill discusses in his book are that a decision-maker should evaluate all the evidence before making a decision and that every party should have a chance to speak their view of the facts before something is decided. Hill calls this concept “due process.”<sup>40</sup>

And just as He is unbiased, so we should be also, as stated in Ephesians 6:9: “And masters, do the same things to them [your slaves], and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”<sup>41</sup> And also in Acts 10:34: “Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality[.]’”<sup>42</sup> This concept of impartiality is an important one in the discussion of Christian ethics in business because of how it relates to decision-making. Hill points this out and also defines impartiality as “[forbidding] decision-makers from having preexisting biases or from reaping personal gain from their decisions.”<sup>43</sup> So, unlike the self-obsessed CEOs of the record industry, who made many decisions based on their own financial gain, or the many DJs who accepted personal payment to play records instead of remaining unbiased, we as Christians are to remain impartial. The other aspect of impartiality is social impartiality; that is, being completely unbiased of gender, race, social status, etc. This sounds like a political stance that may be taken in today’s society, but here it is meant only as a facet of decision-making and is upheld in the Bible, by Jesus Himself, and by other New Testament authors. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes,

---

<sup>39</sup> Richard C. Chewning, John W. Eby, and Shirley J. Roels, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ephesians 6:9, New American Standard Bible.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 10:34, New American Standard Bible.

<sup>43</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 36.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>44</sup> One should make decisions completely separated from race, status, gender, etc., unless one of these things is absolutely required by the job description, i.e. construction jobs that may need strong men, or an acting job that requires someone be of a certain race to fit the character.

A few other considerations on justice are substantial rights, that is, what exactly qualifies as a basic human right; secondly, merit, or the fairness of unequal distribution if it is earned; and lastly, contractual justice, which is fairness based on a contract between parties. Substantive rights are a subjective field of study; many disagree on what qualifies as a basic human right and what exactly the responsibility of a business is in this area. The Bible gives examples of godly people caring for the poor, but not necessarily the government or businesses doing this. In order for one to have good ethics, the area of substantive rights must be addressed, especially in fields which deal directly with health care, safety, etc.<sup>45</sup> Author Scott Waalkes emphasizes the interaction between justice and social responsibility by saying, “Living in just relationships that extend to the larger society helps us to re-embed business practices within a larger context of the common good.”<sup>46</sup>

Merit is the idea that when one works harder, he should be rewarded more, and when he works less, rewarded less. In Hill’s words, “Merit justifies unequal distribution in

---

<sup>44</sup> Galatians 3:28, New American Standard Bible.

<sup>45</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 38-40.

<sup>46</sup> Scott Waalkes, “Money or Business? A Case Study Virtue Ethics in Corporate Work,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 38, no. 1 (Fall, 2008): para. 48.

<http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://ezproxy.ccu.edu:2053/docview/201364302?accountid=10200>

many areas of life.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, if someone has truly earned something, even if it seems unfair, it follows the justice of merit. One must be careful to treat everyone the same in this area though, and, specifically as a business owner or manager, have clear policies regarding rewards so that everyone has opportunity.<sup>48</sup>

Contractual justice, based on a binding agreement, can be rather harsh in some situations but, thankfully, Christian ethics are not based entirely on contracts. Furthermore, contractual agreements should be made to increase what people can have responsibility for, rather than as cause for punishment when one does not fulfill responsibilities. Contractual justice should be positive, rather than negative.<sup>49</sup>

Justice is a part of Christian ethics, but it alone does not support a Christian lifestyle. Without the other two major characteristics of God, holiness and love, justice is too black and white, with no room for mercy. If one made every decision based solely on what is fair, he would not be acting with holiness or love towards others. Hill summarizes this idea by saying, “[Biblical justice calls] for a greater degree of flexibility and neighbor love than mere justice standing alone.”<sup>50</sup> God Himself does not let pure justice control His every decision. If He did, all humanity would be doomed to Hell. But the loving, merciful God paid our debt for us, which was not fair at all, wiping our sins away forever – the act known as salvation. Salvation is the basis of Christianity and is certainly based in justice but also in holiness and love. This is an important example of why justice needs the other two characteristics in order to behave as God desires.

---

<sup>47</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-43.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 44

The third element of Christian ethics, the one that was so necessary for human salvation, is love. Without God's characteristic of love, humanity would have been condemned by His holiness and justice, but because of His perfect love we are saved. We are also expected to have this kind of love for others in our quest to live as Jesus did. The kind of love we are to have in our ethical behavior can be divided into three parts: empathy, mercy, and self-sacrifice.<sup>51</sup>

Empathy is a broad term to define; author Daniel Batson summarizes what one means by empathy by defining it as: "[The] process whereby one person can come to know the internal state of another and can be motivated to respond with sensitive care."<sup>52</sup> Jesus showed much empathy during His life on Earth. For example, Jesus once came in contact with a widow who had just lost her only son. The Book of Luke says, "When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" Jesus then raised the woman's son from death and returned him to his mother.<sup>53</sup> Jesus also showed empathy for His chosen people as He lived among them, as told by Matthew: "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."<sup>54</sup> The apostle Peter commands Christians in his first book to act this way as well: "Finally, all of

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>52</sup> C. Daniel Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in Decety and Ickes (editors), *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 3-15.

<sup>53</sup> Luke 4:11-17, New International Version.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 9:35-36, New International Version.

you, be like-minded, *be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate* and humble.”<sup>55</sup>

Empathy is often a far-removed aspect of business capitalism, which relies on businesses working for their benefit. However, Christian empathy requires one to go beyond this and attempt to care for others: employees, hurting people around the world, perhaps even the environment.

The second aspect of love is mercy. Mercy was shown in God’s character when, instead of dooming us to pay for our transgressions, He withheld His judgment from us and took it upon Himself. Authors Chewning, Eby, and Roels talk of Jesus’ love and mercy by saying, “[Christ’s] real power was expressed in His love. He could have called down an army of angels to do His will, but He did not. That was not His approach, even though He had that power. Instead He used love.”<sup>56</sup> The author of Hebrews also tells of Jesus’ mercy: “For this reason, He had to be made like them [Abraham’s descendants], fully human in every way, in order that He might become a *merciful* and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.”<sup>57</sup> Hill summarizes this point by saying, “The basic Christian story – that Jesus died on a cross so that we might be forgiven – speaks reams about the merciful character of God and the lengths to which He will go to restore broken relationships.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in all our decisions, we should act as Christ did with mercy and do what we can to have healthy relationships by loving people. This is a challenge when mercy includes loving our enemies, or even people we just do not like. However, Jesus calls us to “[...]love your

---

<sup>55</sup> 1 Peter 3:8, New International Version, emphasis added.

<sup>56</sup> Chewning, Eby, and Roels, *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> Hebrews 2:17, New International Version, emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 50.

enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil *and* on the good, and sends rain on the just *and* on the unjust.”<sup>59</sup>

The third aspect of love is self-sacrifice, or giving up that what we have a right to in order to love someone else.<sup>60</sup> This may be one of the scariest aspects of ethics because this may include sacrificing our money, our belongings, our time, even our lives, as Jesus did for us, as said by the apostle John: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>61</sup> We must be prepared to give up whatever is necessary because He did, and God’s character is the model for our own. Ethical dilemmas can arise when one tries to find the line between what is fair for one to keep for himself and what he should give up, to which there may not be a black and white answer.

As with justice and holiness, love by itself cannot be the only factor in making ethical choices. Without justice and holiness, one may end up making decisions that hurt his employers to cover up for a friend, or help a family member instead of staying honest, because that seems to be the loving thing to do. There is also a certain amount of ambiguity in using only love to make decisions. Sometimes both choices would show love to someone; how is one to know who is more important and who should receive the love? Justice and holiness may not always give these answers, but combined with love, one has a better basis for making these kinds of decisions. A third danger of making decisions based

---

<sup>59</sup> Matthew 5:44-45, New King James Version, emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> John 15:13, New American Standard Bible.

solely on love is becoming what Hill calls a “doormat.”<sup>62</sup> This is when one takes loving so far that he no longer loves and respects himself. One should not give up his own dignity or integrity in order to love another. This idea is included in Jesus’ great commandment discussed above: “Love your neighbor *as yourself*.”<sup>63</sup>

Hill ends his section of defining Christian ethics by summarizing why one needs all three of the mentioned aspects – holiness, justice, and love – to live a moral life. Love without holiness results in allowing almost any action to be justified, from lying to an employer to even taking payola, as discussed above. Love without justice results in nepotism, favoritism, and only thinking about short-term impacts. Justice without love results in graceless lawfulness, wherein one ignores all personal factors and only follows rules and regulations.<sup>64</sup> It is clear that all three characteristics are needed to provide balance for making ethical decisions, and all three are discussed in the Bible as characteristics we are to possess.

## HOW CHRISTIAN ETHICS INCREASE SUCCESS IN THE MUSIC BUSINESS

I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money, and every other good, public as well as private.

- Socrates<sup>65</sup>

When some talk about success in business, they refer only to monetary success – making a fortune, having the ability to live a comfortable life, etc. However, success is a

---

<sup>62</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 22:39, New International Version, emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> Hill, *Just Business*, 55-56.

<sup>65</sup> William Damon, *The Moral Advantage* (San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2004), 42.

much broader concept than just making money. Jesus and the Biblical writers have several things to say about the importance of wealth to a Christian. The apostle Peter says in his first book, “These [trials] have come so that the proven *genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold*, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”<sup>66</sup> Here, Peter makes the point that faith will provide much longer-lasting and satisfying rewards than gold, which is limited. In the book of Luke, Jesus gives this warning: “And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’”<sup>67</sup> While money can be important and useful in life, it is certainly not of the highest importance, specifically to a Christian. In his book *The Moral Advantage*, author William Damon makes this same point about the broadness of success in his discussion of ethics and success, defining how people succeed as “how they can achieve their financial goals, build satisfying and enduring careers, make a positive difference in the world, and feel proud of the work they do and its contribution to society.”<sup>68</sup> Damon later goes on to elaborate even more on what is included in enduring business success, adding “providing something of worth to customers, supporting employees, serving the public interest,” and “building a beneficial enterprise that creates value for society” as components of success, while clarifying that “money is a means to a larger end rather than an end in itself.”<sup>69</sup> For his book, Damon interviewed a number of successful businessmen/–women to find out

---

<sup>66</sup> 1 Peter 1:7, New International Version, emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup> Luke 12:15, New King James Version.

<sup>68</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, xi.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

where their success came from.<sup>70</sup> One of the men Damon interviewed was Robert Greenleaf, who gave Damon this insight: “[R]eal success can be achieved only by aiming to accomplish a big and elevated purpose – one that goes beyond self-advancement and material gratification.”<sup>71</sup>

Material wealth is only one aspect of success in any area of business, including the music business. True success is based on much more, and, as Damon highlighted from his interview with Greenleaf, success is based on a moral purpose. Morality and ethics go beyond making a good decision when a dilemma comes up; ethics are a part of what makes a person – and what he is pursuing in life. Damon says, “The foundation of business success is a sense of moral purpose.”<sup>72</sup> Damon, who is not a Christian, notes that business people refer to an “‘inner voice’ that provides them with a moral compass.”<sup>73</sup> For Christians, this “inner voice” is understood to be the Holy Spirit of God who lives inside us. As discussed above, the basis of ethics – and our purpose – is to live as God intends by following His words and example.<sup>74</sup> Making ethical decisions is not based on circumstances but rather on this moral purpose of behaving as God does, with holiness, justice, and love. Therefore, when ethical dilemmas do arise, one does not have to be anxious over what is right or wrong, thinking through every action. Damon says, “When you keep the moral purpose of your work firmly in mind, ethical conduct comes easily and naturally, with little need for agonizing doubt or equivocation,”<sup>75</sup> and, “The surest way to

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>74</sup> See pages 7-8.

<sup>75</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 116.

determine the right ethical choice is to recall your moral purpose and choose acts that are consistent with that purpose.”<sup>76</sup> When this moral purpose is established, ethics become less about following rules and regulations day-to-day and become more a part of who one is, especially in the life of a Christian, who is called to dedicate himself fully to God, as said in the book of 1 Kings: “Let your heart therefore *be wholly devoted to the Lord our God*, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.”<sup>77</sup> Damon echoes this idea: “Real ethics cannot be understood as a disconnected set of rules. Ethical behavior is wholly embedded in a person’s larger sense of self and society.”<sup>78</sup>

A Christian’s moral purpose is based in the changeless character of God: in His holiness, justice, and love. So what does this look like in the broad sense of success in the music business? One form of success is financial success, and ethical behavior will help one be successful in this area, albeit maybe not in every situation. Ethics professor and author David Vogel says about the financial advantage of ethical firms, “A more responsibly [or ethically] managed firms [*sic*] will face fewer business risks than its less virtuous competitors: it will be more likely to avoid customer boycotts, be better able to obtain capital at a lower cost, and be in a better position to attract and retain committed employees and loyal customers.”<sup>79</sup> In his book discussing the success of Christian ethics in business, author Gabriel Abend quotes an address made by American lawyer Elbert H. Gary:

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>77</sup> 1 Kings 8:61, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> David Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005), 16-17.

While [financial] motives are not equally worthy with others, they are very practical and influential [...]. Ethical management bring additional profits to business. Sooner or later it pays in dollars and cents. Any man or concern that firmly establishes a reputation for honesty and fair dealing which is not questioned has a business asset of great pecuniary value and profit.<sup>80</sup>

As these authors state, an ethically-managed individual or company will eventually see monetary gain from the other benefits of ethical behavior, such as good relationships with people.

Healthy relationships are another area of success that Christian ethics improve in business. Damon says, “Every business is all about relationships.”<sup>81</sup> The music business, like most other areas of business, has a heavy reliance on people and relationships for one to function in the industry. An artist in the music industry will be working with other professionals such as a personal manager, attorneys, possibly a business manager, and an agency.<sup>82</sup> The recording artist or any of the people on his team may be dealing with a record company, which employs staff working in a number of different offices, such as sales, marketing, production, and international affairs.<sup>83</sup> A recording artist will also work closely with a producer and recording/mixing team, which he may hire himself or the record label may hire for him.<sup>84</sup> A songwriter will be frequently dealing with a

---

<sup>80</sup> Elbert H. Gary, *Address by Elbert H. Gary at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.*, (1922), quoted in Gabriel Abend, *The Moral Background* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 104.

<sup>81</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 113.

<sup>82</sup> Donald Passman, *All You Need to Know About the Music Business*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-120.

publisher/publishing company,<sup>85</sup> and a touring artist will be constantly in contact with fans, his team, and possibly a touring manager, a promoter, and a merchandiser.<sup>86</sup> Besides the artist, each member of an artist team will constantly be dealing with people; employees of a record label will be working within departments, working with artists, and even dealing with people internationally; a producer must work with different artists on a regular basis; a mixing team must get along with the producer; et cetera. With so many people with the potential to be involved in the career of just one artist, a complicated web of relationships is formed. Positively maintaining these relationships is a must for success, and ethical behavior is essential to good relationships.

In Damon's research of successful businessmen, he found that "many look to the age-old principle of the Golden Rule as their way to ensure that their behavior conforms to such standards as decency and honesty."<sup>87</sup> The Golden Rule is a Biblical concept, found in the books of Matthew and Luke.<sup>88</sup> Luke 6:31 says, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."<sup>89</sup> This verse echoes the idea of the Greatest Commandment to love other as ourselves, which is part of the basis of one's actions. So these businesspeople that Damon interviewed who mentioned the Golden Rule were using Christian ethics, whether they were aware of this or not. In his discussion of the Golden Rule, Damon talks about the aspect of taking the perspective of other people in order to understand where they are coming from. He also ties the Golden Rule to empathy, saying, "If perspective-taking is

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 339-362.

<sup>87</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Abdusalam A. Guseinov, "The Golden Rule of Morality," *Russian Studies In Philosophy* 52, no. 3 (Winter 2013-2014), 42.

<sup>89</sup> Luke 6:31, New International Version.

the ‘mind’ of the Golden Rule, empathy is its heart and soul.”<sup>90</sup> Empathy is directly tied to the characteristic of God that is love.<sup>91</sup> One of the main things that is acquired from the Golden Rule and empathy that aids in relationships is mutual trust. Damon interviewed Mike Markkula, co-founder of Apple Computer and Echelon Coporation, who talked extensively about the type of trust one needs with different people in business, ending his idea by saying, “If you don’t observe the Golden Rule, I don’t think you’ll be able to develop that kind of trust.”<sup>92</sup> One of the ways trust is developed is through honesty, as Damon states: “[H]onesty is a primary ethical standard for any person in business, as is a commitment to the Golden Rule, because these standards create the climax of trust required for lasting business relationships.”<sup>93</sup> Damon also goes into further detail of how empathy aids in relationships: “Using empathy, a leader becomes attuned to the needs of others, thereby opening up new possibilities for business success. There is no better way to gain the customer’s confidence than by making a concerted effort to thoroughly understand his or her wants and needs.”<sup>94</sup> So not only does the Golden Rule and empathy give strength to businessperson-to-businessperson relationships but also to businessperson-to-customer relationships. Having the ability to form and maintain good relationships with colleagues and customers will greatly help a person working in the music industry find success – financially, personally, and in having an enduring career.

---

<sup>90</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 89.

<sup>91</sup> See pages 17-18.

<sup>92</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 92-93.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

One final thing that having an ethical purpose as one's basis helps with in a career is creativity and imagination. This is especially important in the music business because it is based on the creation of music. In Damon's discussion of moral imagination and creativity, he is speaking about creative solutions and innovation for other types of business, but there is no reason his same concepts could not apply to imagination and creation in the music business. Many of the businesspeople Damon interviewed for his book were either Christian or religious in some way,<sup>95</sup> and, speaking of businesspeople, Damon says, "Their faith imbues their work with a sense of purpose that energizes their imaginations and enables them to take the risks necessary to explore new and unknown directions."<sup>96</sup> The Christian faith that is the foundation of a Christian's moral purpose can act in the same way for musicians, giving them purpose behind the music they write and boldness to explore new or different areas of music.

One last thing to consider about the question whether or not good ethics create more success in the music business is how unethical actions fare in the business world. The unethical act of payola has already been discussed above.<sup>97</sup> Payola can aid in reaching monetary goals, but not only did payola destroy careers, partaking in payola also robs a person of their integrity – defined by Damon as the integration of moral and business goals.<sup>98</sup> The power- and money-hungry record label CEO discussed above<sup>99</sup> were hated by their peers and the people working for them, leaving legacies of poor reputation. Damon

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>97</sup> See pages 3-4.

<sup>98</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> See pages 4-5.

gathered through his interviews with successful businesspeople that “any gains made by unethical behavior are risky and short-term at best.”<sup>100</sup> He also found that “unethical behavior places your other, nonmonetary goals at risk,”<sup>101</sup> goals like having a lasting career, making a difference in the world, positively contributing to society, and feeling pride in one’s work, all of which have a longer lasting effect than a short-term monetary gain.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

There are many real-world examples of how Christian ethics are functioning in the music business workplace. Many musicians that I know and work with are professing Christians who are making a successful living in music, and there are also notable internationally-known musicians who are Christians.

One example of an extremely famous and successful musician who is a Christian is Bono, the lead singer and frontman of the band U2. Bono, along with three other young Christian men, started U2 in Ireland in 1976, and by 1980, the band had already achieved international acclaim. In 2005, U2 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, showing just how successful the band is in music; additionally, they are still producing new music to ever proclaim their message.

U2 has a reputation not only for excellent music but also for their activist lyrics – written mostly by Bono – and message. The band professes to be Christian but does not

---

<sup>100</sup> Damon, *The Moral Advantage*, 112.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

write specifically Christian music; rather, they focus on portraying Christian messages through their music and also through how they live their lives. Bono has specifically put much effort into philanthropic work, especially organizations that work to aid the poor and sick in Africa. He has started four non-profit organizations to work in Africa and has donated to countless more. Bono has also participated in several benefit concerts and tours.

Through all his fame and worldly success, Bono has remained true to his Christian ethics and ideals. In one interview, Bono is asked the question of how he lives as both a rock musician and as a Christian, and he responds by affirming that there is indeed tension between these two worlds but that this tension aids in his music making. Rather than some Christian music, which he says lacks relatability because of its lack of tension, Bono wants his music to be relevant through his portrayal of tension, rather than through a false resolution of tension.<sup>102</sup>

Another way Bono's Christian faith impacts his work in the music industry is through his fame. He refers to his role of being a celebrity as a currency that he can use for the benefit of others, which is exactly what he does through his social work.<sup>103</sup> Along his influence in music, social work, and politics, Bono also maintains an active role in other business areas, specifically venture financing, where he also uses his Christian ethics for the good of others. Bono sees success as not just monetary but also as changing the world for better, which he makes obvious through his words and actions. He uses the moral purpose that he has found in his faith to guide him in how to use his music and his success

---

<sup>102</sup> YouTube Interview, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Kx3k2oZp18>.

<sup>103</sup> YouTube Interview, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz0pciXKUVw>.

for God's will. Bono is just one good example of how a musician can be successful in the music business while maintaining Christian ethic and ethical behaviors.

In my own career pursuits, I plan to work heavily in the music business as an artist manager and studio owner and will surely be challenged with many ethical dilemmas of my own throughout my life. These dilemmas will most likely be rarely resolvable through simple black and white ethical decision-making but rather will require thought-out responses based on the loving yet just character of God. For instance, in artist management, I will be dealing extensively with the personal lives of musicians. Musicians, like all humans, can be faced with temptation and can fall into sin. What will I do in a situation like this? I will never want to condone or support unethical or un-Christian behavior, but meanwhile I want to show God's love and refrain from judgment. Also, I will need to decide whether or not I will manage artists who are not Christians. Managing a Christian artist would allow me to keep him or her accountable in ways from the Bible that he/she agrees with, but how do I approach this with a musician who does not believe the same things as I do? The answers to these questions can be sought in God's character and Word through prayer and reading of the Bible. I will need to rely on the moral purpose I possess from my relationship and study of God and His character throughout my life to make sure that I am making decisions that honor and glorify Him.

My success in the music business will most likely rely less on my response to ethical dilemmas than on simply my day-to-day interactions with colleagues. In everything I do, and with everyone I meet, I want to show God's character, specifically His love. By treating people well, managing them and being managed by them with love and humility,

and by refraining from questionable conduct, I hope to influence people simply by showing them that I am different, in a positive way. I want every artist I manage to feel loved and valued for who they are, not for the ways they serve my success. I want every artist that records in my studio to feel the same, and every employee I might someday hire to feel important and know that I – and God – care for and love them. This is the biggest way that a Christian moral purpose and ethical direction will affect my own success. By living as best I can with God's holiness, justice, and especially love, I will glorify Him and also lift up others. I may or may not make a monetary fortune doing this, but I will measure my success rather by knowing I have made the right decisions and feeling proud of my work.

## CONCLUSION

The music business is an ever-changing industry that has shown a need for strong Christian ethics. Christian ethics are based not on a list of rules and regulations but rather on the changeless character of God and how Jesus Christ lived when He was among us. It seems challenging to believe that Christian ethics could support one making a career in the traditionally selfish and power-hungry field of music business. However, basing one's purpose and actions off of these characteristics of God has been shown to not only function in the business world but also to actually improve one's success, not necessarily always in monetary terms but in ways that add meaningful success to one's life.

## Bibliography

- Batson, C. Daniel. "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in Decety and Ickes (editors), *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.
- Bonds, Mark Evan. *A History of Music in Western Culture*. New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2013
- Chewning, Richard C., John W. Eby, and Shirley J. Roels. *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990.
- Damon, William. *The Moral Advantage*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2004.
- Dannen, Fredric. *Hit Men: Power Brokers and Fast Money Inside the Music Business*. New York: Times Books, 1990.
- Gary, Elbert H. *Address by Elbert H. Gary at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., (1922)*. Quoted in Gabriel Abend, *The Moral Background*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Guseinov, Abdusalam A. "The Golden Rule of Morality." *Russian Studies In Philosophy* 52, no. 3 (Winter 2013-2014): 39-55.
- Hill, Alexander. *Just Business: Christian Ethics in the Marketplace*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Knopper, Steve. "Islands in the Stream: The 10 Biggest Holdouts in Digital Music." *Rolling Stone*. Last modified January 2, 2015.  
<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/artists-refuse-stream-music-20150102>
- Loewe, Andreas. "God's Capellmeister: The Proclamation of Scripture in the Music of J.S. Bach" *Pacifica: Journal of the Melbourne College of Divinity* 24 no. 2. 06, 2011.  
<http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://ezproxy.ccu.edu:2053/docview/1011006525?accountid=10200>
- Passman, Donald. *All You Need to Know About the Music Business*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: Free Press, 2006.

Piper, Otto A. *Christian Ethics*. Great Britain: Nelson, 1970.

Rush, Myron. *Lord of the Marketplace*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1984.

Segrave, Kerry. *Payola in the Music Industry: A History, 1880-1991*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1994.

Thompson, Hunter S. *Gonzo Papers Vol. 2: Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s*. New York: Summit Books, 1988.

Tschmuck, Peter. *Creativity and Innovation in the Music Industry*. Netherlands: Springer, 2006.

Vogel, David. *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005.

Waalkes, Scott. "Money or Business? A Case Study Virtue Ethics in Corporate Work," *Christian Scholar's Review* 38, no. 1. Fall, 2008.  
<http://ezproxy.ccu.edu/login?url=http://ezproxy.ccu.edu:2053/docview/201364302?accountid=10200>