

What About Obscene Profits?

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We have heard that Company A makes “obscene profits.” He is “filthy rich.” The rich are robbing the poor. Poppycock! Such bruited allegations are simply unverified expressions of *envy*. Some employers do exploit their workers, to be sure. But our real problem today is politicians who shamelessly foment envy, now endemic in America. Gullible voters are being whipsawed into accepting huge tax increases, with a cataclysmic loss of freedom.

Envy Unleashed

The depersonalized market place designed by Puritans still *restrains* envy; but it is under siege today. An orgy of envy playing out in Washington D.C. is viciously tarring leading businessmen as *exploiters* of their employees. Corporate CEOs are also being intimidated by guilt manipulators in the Administration, the Congress and the Press for their alleged excessive salaries. As we were earlier warned by David Chilton, “When envy is so pervasive in society, when it is positively encouraged by our leaders . . . we turn the envy back on ourselves and feel guilty [falsely] for what we possess.”¹

There is no such thing as *obscene profits* if the deal is freely made without force or fraud. So, Jacob’s purchase of two thirds of Isaac Enterprises with a pot of lentils, as recorded in Genesis, was absolutely fair. Being rich does not *ipso facto* make one an unclean sinner. Indeed, rich men have capital resources needed to create jobs. Even entry level jobs at a McDonalds require a significant capital investment. And, when we stop to think about it, poor men can be as mean and nasty as rich men despite limited means.

Getting Back To Work On Jacob’s Ladder

Western Industrial economies around the world are at best in a muddle. We need to revisit Genesis to rid our thinking of confusion about our Patriarch fathers including Jacob. Jacob is revealed in Genesis as an exemplar of the Work Ethic. He managed to prosper despite Laban’s exploitation, which began when Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah instead of Rachel and continued as he changed Jacob’s wages ten times.

Whoa now! Wasn’t that really a case of poetic justice? The deceiver was deceived. Wasn’t Jacob just getting his comeuppance? No! Justice defined by Biblical law requires witnesses and a judge; *due process*. Laban’s sons made *no case* against Jacob. They just *accused* Jacob of having “taken away *all* that was our father’s” (Genesis 31:1). They exaggerated, at best. Laban was shearing *his sheep* (Genesis 31:19) when Jacob folded his tents and “fled” with his flocks to Canaan (Genesis 31:17-21). They were just envious.

Genesis does record, however, a *quasi* court session that clears Jacob of wrong doing in his work for Laban. Laban’s servants and their relatives serving Jacob were poised to go to war when Jacob blew his stack. He asserted his own honesty and accused Laban of deceitfully changing his

wages ten times (Genesis 31:36-42).

Civil war was averted, in part because everyone knew that Jacob was telling the truth. But, it was God's "testimony" that was decisive. God warned Laban not to threaten or coax Jacob from going on to Canaan (Genesis 31:29). As Solomon later noted, "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7). Who are we to fuss with God and Israel his prince?

The Work Ethic

So what was the secret of Jacob's success? How did Jacob, who was "penny less" and with only his staff and clothes on his back, become charismatic head of Israel Industries (Genesis 32:10) in twenty years? How did he become the employer of up to five hundred men to care for some twenty thousand in livestock?²

Ah, but Jacob did have significant mental and spiritual capital. He was energized by God's promise at Bethel. He was destined to succeed in building up his own household business even under greedy Laban. "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:15).

Jacob had been the Master Shepherd of Isaac Enterprises. It is not a surprise that he *hit the ground running* at Padanaram. He rebuked lazy shepherds and singlehandedly removed a heavy well stone. "Water ye the sheep, and go and feed them" (Genesis 29:7). Laban knew that Isaac's loss was his gain. He immediately indentured Jacob for seven years promising him Rachel in marriage. Later, he tricked Jacob into marrying Leah and secured seven more years service from Jacob for Rachel (Genesis 29:15-30). A dishonest boss!

Under Jacob's management, Laban's livestock holdings "increased unto a multitude" during his fourteen year tenure (Genesis 30:30). So, Laban negotiated a deal that enabled Jacob to start building up his own herd three days separated from Laban's flocks (Genesis 30:31-36). But, Laban unilaterally changed terms of Jacob's contract ten times. Nevertheless, God blessed Jacob's selective breeding (Genesis 30:37-43). Jacob then began to hire the best of Laban's servants to assist his sons in the animal husbandry of Israel Industries.

Finally, Jacob's heated witness against Laban reveals the heart of his Work Ethic. "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Genesis 31:40). Any viable enterprise, large or small, still requires a man to tend to business day and night, at all times, except when taking time to observe our Creator's Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11).

Jacob ran his business in keeping with God's law, that he learned at the feet of Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-9). Thus, he was enabled to overcome his envious Esau and exploitive boss, Laban. He avoided frittering away his time by fretting over these evil doers (Psalm 37:1-20). Today, obsession with television "kills time" at a rate of up to twenty-eight hours a week.³ Let us then

learn from Abraham the only righteous way to “kill time” is by working it to death. It is time to push the “off button” on time shredders and get back to work.

Like Roman slaves, who largely populated the early Church, God’s people are still enlightened by Jacob’s Ladder, a pre-incarnate vision of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:51). Christ has promised to be with us also as we bear witness to the Gospel in our callings worldwide (Matthew 28:18-20). We are called once more to turn the world right side up with honest, hard work (Acts 17:6). In an envy-roiled economy, let us reclaim Jacob’s vision of hard work supplemented with the Lord’s tithe as set forth in our next snapshot of Jacob.

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1. David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators*, 1983, page 161.

2. See “Jacob’s Rise in Laban’s House” at somepilgrimsinprogress.com for explanation of these estimates.

3. See the Nielsen report at <http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>.