

THE BOTTOM LINE

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At a typical annual shareholders' meeting, the chairman of the board gives a lengthy welcome to the attendees, followed by a flattering introduction of himself and the board. After covering numerous points of order, he then launches into a protracted speech about the corporation's vision for the future. Through all of this, the stockholders in attendance anxiously await more useful information: whether the customer base is being expanded, how much money the corporation spent and will spend, and how much money the corporation made and will make. They are interested in the bottom line.

It is readily acknowledged that businesses exist to make money, and need customers to do so. But trouble is always closely behind whenever principles of the world dictate how one conducts himself in religion (consider **Acts 8:18-20**). Yet, so many churches are intentionally market-driven rather than spiritually led.

Church leaders are interested first and foremost in the same things in which corporate stockholders are interested: whether the customer base is being expanded (whether attendance is increasing), how much money has been spent and will be spent, and how much money has been brought in and will be brought in.

Rather than seeking to emulate the New Testament pattern that led to the Divine commendation of churches such as Thessalonica and Philadelphia (**1 Thessalonians 1; Revelation 3:8-10**), church leaders seek to emulate the paradigms of the financially successful, but repugnant to the Lord, Willow Creek and Saddleback Community Churches.

Christians certainly should be interested in preaching the Gospel to as many people as possible (**Mark 16:15**), stewardship of the Lord's resources (**Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 4:2**), and giving generously to the Lord (**2 Corinthians 9:13**). But when popularity and financial success are viewed as the church's ultimate goal, we are not measuring success by the Lord's standard.

Jesus said, "MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD" (**John 18:36**). The church, the kingdom Christ would and did establish (**Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9**), is not of worldly origin or nature. Nor is it intended to serve worldly interests, as the inspired apostle Paul wrote: "FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT MEAT AND DRINK; BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST" (**Romans 14:17**).

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Christ is certainly interested in a bottom line, but His bottom line is not the same as that of the worldly-minded. While standing at the Judgment Throne, we might try to be like the chairman of the board at a shareholders' meeting. We might desire to bring up various things: Our appreciation to God for all He gave us on earth, a rundown of all our many accomplishments on the earth, and a protracted speech about what we would do on earth if given more time. Jesus fore told: "MANY WILL SAY TO ME IN THAT DAY, LORD, LORD, HAVE WE NOT PROPHESED IN THY NAME? AND IN THY NAME HAVE CAST OUT DEVILS? AND IN THY NAME DONE MANY WONDERFUL WORKS?" (**Matthew 7:22**).

But the Judge on that day will not be interested in peripheral matters or unsubstantiated claims; He will wholly reject them and those who make them: "AND THEN WILL I PROFESS UNTO THEM, I NEVER KNEW YOU: DEPART FROM ME, YE THAT WORK INIQUITY" (**v. 23**).

He will be interested only in the bottom line: "NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN; BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN" (**v. 21**). The bottom line in religion, whether individually or collectively, and the bottom line in life is: Did you do what God said?