

Too Big to Care? Power, Ethics and the Consumer



It probably happens to all of us, at some point. A company does something so outrageous, it makes us madder than (not-heaven)! And, what is worse? They don't care or they are able get away with it?

Fortunately, God cares about how people are treated in every area of our lives, and redresses unethical business practices.

Following is a brief case study about a troubling incident, a presentation on ethics, and where God is in all this.

Case Study:

Once upon a time, I used a cell phone with company X. A monthly-billed feature included access to making 911 calls. I live and work in a well-served area by cell phone towers and company X.

About 22 billing periods into our contract, there was a three-car accident, with apparent injuries, a few blocks from my home. I was the first person on the scene.

While talking with the drivers, I dialed 911. Nothing happened. I dialed again...and again and again and again. Nothing happened. No signal. Nothing. A school bus came and stopped. The driver called for help on his two-way radio (he had no cell phone, he told me). Mercifully, injuries proved to be minor, and emergency vehicles responded within minutes.

When I arrived in my office, I called company X about the failed 911 calls. "We have no explanation," was the response. I made a second call – same response.

I called head office, "what is your response to billing for service not provided?"

"There is no refund or adjustment on the billed feature."

"You broke our contract by not delivering a paid-for service."

"The contract is binding on the customer."

Round and round we went. Same responses. No adjustments. Nothing.

Ethics and Accountability:

In order to function at any level, people and institutions adopt core principles to manage what they do. These principles are called, ethics.

- Ethics asks: *to whom am I responsible and for what?*
- Christian ethics ask: *how am I responsible to God and for what I do?*

Christian ethics presupposes that we live in a moral universe, governed by God's laws. We are accountable to God for everything we do. Accountability includes our choice of our business ethics, and how they affect our shareholders, employees, suppliers, customers and publics. This consideration should include:

Sovereignty of God: Scripture declares that God is sovereign in Creation. Because this is God's world, we are accountable to God for everything we do. We are free to make choices, and teachings from Scripture and the Church inform us of consequences for what we decide.

Amorality: is the denial of God's values. Amorality's values are self-referenced. For example, if a company decides something is good according to its values, it proceeds with doing it. But, if its reference point is itself, it is challenging God.

Amorality can be attractive at the moment, as long as one gets away with it. That behavior, however, undermines trust, which is critical for attracting and maintaining customers. When trust is broken, customers leave. Prospective customers flee – no matter how small the field of competitors.

Justice: is a prominent theme in Scripture. It is a feature of God's sovereignty. God's justice establishes, defends and prospers the well being of all human beings – with special attention to the disadvantaged and helpless. It has laws (10 Commandments) and values (love God, love one another), which define God's expectations for humanity. There are consequences for violating God's justice – as corporate bone yards of failed, unethical companies remind us. The point is: God does not tolerate injustice!

Conclusion:

Company X will fail. It may take time, but it will fail.

Companies that behave like X will fail unless they change their values.

How we feel about God's values is irrelevant. This is God's world, and God's values will prevail.

So, the challenge for stockholders, boards of directors and managers, is: whose values will they live by? Are their companies too big to fail? No. No company is. Are they too big to care?...

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