

Missionary Economist

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.

(Philippians 3:7, 8)

If you have ever wondered if the economic principles that govern business practices are compatible with the biblical principles that govern our personal practices, consider the fact that Paul uses an opportunity-cost argument in Philippians 3:7-8.

In economics, an opportunity cost is the value of an opportunity passed up, or foregone. For example, if your job pays \$30 per hour but you could get a job that would pay \$45 per hour for the same effort (and all other things being equal), then you are giving up (it is costing you) \$15 per hour to work for your current employer. That \$15 per hour is your opportunity cost.

If we define an economy as “a system that sets values for the utilisation of resources,” then it is obvious that Paul must be talking about another economy entirely, one that assigns different values to both resources and rewards – same stuff, different values.

Consider the words “profit,” “loss,” “garbage,” “gain” in Philippians 3:7-8. Paul is saying that there are many more things in this life that are profitable – they return more than they cost in human economy terms – but compared with alternative, “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus,” the profit came up short. Both returns are on the positive side of the ledger, but in God’s economy, there is a greater return for the same effort.

I am in the middle of a job search and am fortunate to have a choice between two good options. One option means more money, prestige and opportunities for more of both in the future, which I could certainly use to advance the cause of Christ, but it also means a more single-minded focus on my career for the next few years. The other option would still surpass my material needs but may produce a greater gain according to God’s value. Faced with a decision between two profitable options, it is a comfort to know that the Bible has advice for my economic decisions. As I consider Paul’s lesson in economics, I pray that God will reveal His greater value to me.

James 2:17 says that all good gifts come from God, even our jobs and the rewards it brings. Recognise the source of those gifts and seek to know what He would have you do with them. Remember that there’s an opportunity cost to pursuing the things of this world. God has a different economy. Hear it in the Sermon on the Mount. Read it in Paul’s letters. See it in Christ’s life. And experience it in your own.

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Point To Ponder

Recognise God’s economic measurement of your job and the rewards it brings.