

Empowering People in and for Marketplace Ministry

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As we all know, the vast majority of adults spend more time working at their jobs in the marketplace than any other social activity. To many, if not most of them, work is "work" - a toilsome tedious necessity that must be done to survive but often carries little of their hearts. It need not be so, but for many it will likely remain their reality.

Labour, as again we all know, is not a result of the "fall." Work is a holy, God-ordained activity. God declares it so and, by example, Adam engaged in it before his betrayal of God's command. The "curse" of work is more a result of man's ignorance, greed, and exploitation of his fellow human beings than anything else. Indeed, God intends that our labour, while sometimes a grind-it-out experience, be an expression of the marriage between our talents and interests and God's ordained, productive destiny for our lives. In a fallen world it is often not so.

To complicate this semi-tragic situation, far too few Christians have a biblical theology of work, business, or even destiny in the marketplace. This is just another way of saying we have few pastors or church leaders who see these truths let alone adequately teach on them. That is, of course, what this magazine and its contributing writers and staff are about - resonating God's truths in these areas that you, the readers, are responding to as well. The Holy Spirit is making a "sound," and we are mutually drawn to God's ark. Without question, wherever I go globally, the Christian world is beginning to arouse from its economic slumber.

Without trying to sound like "Old Man River," numbers of us have been heralding these things for many decades. Indeed, I self-consciously began my economic "re-education" process nearly twenty-five years ago as I held my university education at Berkeley up to the comparative light of God's Word. It has been an on-going journey which I do not expect to end in "arrival" or completion. In the late 1980s I journeyed to England with Dr. Rushdoony to lecture at Oxford on "Christian Economics," if there is such a thing. Upon completing my presentation, a graduate economic student came up to me and said, "If any of what you are saying is true, I need to totally re-think my economic assumptions." Yes. Quite so. Many of our leaders don't even know what the right questions are to begin the journey. How ironic it seems that we must often "know" before we can unlearn what is incorrect.

Yet we are at one grand beginning, and someday our Christian economists will be mature enough to never let another John Maynard Keynes rule the day without a sound global debate and generous swaying of public opinion. Let us bring it down a little from such projected, lofty heights and discuss instead what needs be done now to create such a future.

I propose that at least these three things must be done. Number one: We must target church leaders with this message and help business people to relate to their leaders properly in what will be a fairly uncomfortable time for many pastors. Number two: We need to train and mobilize business leaders in the local church to form

marketplace ministry councils which serve both the leaders of the local church and help equip their people in the areas of financial and stewardship skills. Number three: We need to continue to wisely network the business leaders and ministries to help us take a strategic, effective approach to the movement which is now emerging globally in this exciting arena. Communication-education tools such as *Business Reform* magazine and other organizations could play an important role in this process. Let us briefly explore all three of these propositions.

Church leaders are the "door to the flock" as Christ observed by analogy (John 10:1). We must honour God's authority structures in the local churches and work with them as the business sphere emerges. Having already gone through this process for more than a dozen years, I must caution you that, for some church leaders, the emergence of marketplace ministries is potentially threatening and, for the business folks the process is frustrating. Virtually every significant advancement of theological or practical ministry experience in church history was clothed in conflict, misunderstanding, and unnecessary tension. I personally do not expect the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry in the workplace (Eph. 4:8-16) to be significantly different. There will be tensions since many of those called to marketplace ministries feel like "second-class citizens" in their churches, and numbers of church leaders will feel that their authority, structures, and priorities are at risk if they recognize into parallel ministry the "men and women with the checkbooks."

For these reasons and many more, we need to proceed carefully and prayerfully, expecting misunderstanding and spiritual warfare and praying against it as we guard our hearts and attitudes. The "old guard and structures" are not by definition an enemy. They are brothers who have yet to see some things they must and will see, as the Holy Spirit takes Luther's "priesthood of all believers" into our 21st Century reality of the "ministry of all believers." That is what is happening. As the theology of the Kingdom of God clarifies and is truly sought first as Jesus commanded, all the ministries in Christ's army will have to be trained in order to saddle up and ride. A primary task is to help the current pastors see this and embrace the changes required on their parts to make it happen. As a leader who pastored for years and owned a business, I can tell you this for sure: We will need patience on both sides and mediators in the Spirit to facilitate the process. Whatever else we say, biblically responding to our church leaders is non-optional.

Secondly, in order to help fulfill the challenge we've already discussed, business leaders must put significant energy into serving the local church and its people and leaders by helping to build what I refer to as marketplace ministry councils in the local church. These councils can serve in many ways but here are some of the services we are advocating they perform and have seen to be initially successful:

1. Take responsibility to serve and advise the church leadership in financial and stewardship issues pertaining to the church.
2. Take responsibility to help advise church members on personal budgeting and debt reduction and eradication.

3. Relieve the pastors of taking offerings and tithing-related issues by assuming the lead in educating the congregation on the blessing of giving.
4. Assume teaching responsibility for the education of church members in biblical finance; job resumes and successful employment practices; career counseling for youth and adult members; and the biblical principles of stewardship and increase.
5. Form 360-degree business counseling input circles where members can have their businesses reviewed by the ministry council or create task forces for this purpose. The Asian communities in America make us look like fools because they already leverage their resources like this. Hello! Didn't we learn anything out of Acts 2:42-47 and the spirit of mutual empowerment both spiritually and practically? And I am not talking about either socialism or common ownership.
6. Give believers alternatives to investing in the stock markets or other structures where God must bless ten thousand unrighteous people to bless His own! When are Christians going to provide sound, accountable investment opportunities for their own?
7. Encourage the recycling velocity of money within the congregation by barter-service exchanges, etc., requiring that our services and products become superior to those of the world so that our mutuality is based on quality, not "charity for brethren who offer second-class services."
8. Form benevolence councils that help direct charitable efforts, education and skill empowerment into the surrounding community.
9. Network with marketplace ministries in other churches in your community, looking for ways to serve each other and strengthen both church unity and evangelistic outreach.

I could go on with other options we have seen and advocated but you get the idea. We business people say, "We're doers, not talkers." Here's a great opportunity to prove it.

Thirdly, numbers of you reading this brief article are called to really dig into these issues and get trained in a truly Christian worldview for business and economics. We can help and so can other ministries we recommend. We desperately need Christian businesses that go beyond simply pursuing honesty, paying their taxes, and keeping Playboy magazine out of the men's room. If we were on the job, so to speak, our economists would have blown John Maynard Keynes and his debt-driven fiat money system out of the water! But I digress.

Many of you need to seek Christian business networks and organizational-educational opportunities to help synergize with other Christian business leaders and groups emerging and responding to the Holy Spirit's move upon world economics and business. It's what the "fish" are feeding on in the world, and Jesus said He'd teach us to fish (Mat. 4:19). Let's get to it, ladies and gentlemen. The nets and fishing poles are right over there.