

“Economics in a Fallen World” (Genesis 3:17-19)

Lord's Day Sermon 2/14/21

One thing I have seen repeatedly, and saints have seen through the ages is that the Word of God is both timeless and timely. That is, His word reaches throughout all ages, is not changed, and has no need of change, yet, it is always relevant to the everyday questions of men. It is always fresh and applicable, without bending to fit the changing tides of cultural norms.

We see this especially so when we bring the Word of God to bear on a practical discipline such as economics. Now, I'm not going to set myself forward as an expert in the field of economics, but what I am going to set forward is the Word of God, that gives us “more understanding than all [our] teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.” Psalm 119:99.

The Word of God does not give us the exhaustive details of economics (although it gives us much) or make us experts in this field without further study, but what it does give us the foundational worldview that allows us to make sense of economics, and apart from which there is no way to make the science intelligible. Let me explain.

What is Economics?

But first, what is economics? According to the revered economist, Thomas Sowell, “Economics is the study of the use of scarce resources which have alternative uses.” Another definition tells us that, “Economics is the branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth.” Economics affect us every day. Personal and social economic decisions have a dramatic impact on our living conditions, freedom, quality of life, health, and much more.

Creation

What does Genesis teach us about economics? Let's turn to Genesis chapter 1, verse 1:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”

Believe it or not, this verse lays the foundation of economics. Not only that, it lays a very different foundation than any other worldview. The biblical foundation for economics laid down in Genesis 1:1 is categorically different than all opposing worldviews. How?

All pagan worldviews, including modern humanism/atheism posit an evolving universe with no existence outside of itself. In contrast, Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God...” God existed before His creation and made all things out of nothing. He is different than the universe He created “ex nihilo” (out of nothing).

Let's look at several passages:

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” ~ Hebrews 11:3

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” ~ Psalm 33:6

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” ~ Colossians 1:15-17

But, what does this have to do with economics? The philosopher/theologian Cornelius Van Til had this to say,

“According to Scripture, God has created the “universe.” God has created time and space. God has created all the “facts” of science. God has created the human mind. In this human mind God has laid the laws of thought according to which it is to operate. In the facts of science God has laid the laws of being according to which they function. In other words, the impress of God’s plan is upon his whole creation.”

The biblical worldview is the only to set forward the consistent rational for transcendental law – that is God not the same as His creation, and is over His creation, so therefore His law “transcends” His creation. God’s law and wisdom transcends His world, and He upholds all things. Law is not the product of evolution or human decision but comes from and is upheld by God who is beyond the creation. In contrast, all other worldviews are “creation bound.” They provide no basis for law outside and over the creation and present an evolving universe and evolving law. We can see this in a current economic fad, whose proponents believe that as a sophisticated nation we’ve reached an evolutionary leap forward, one which allows us to borrow and inflate uninhibited without serious negative consequences (check the headlines recently).

First, in creation we see the foundation for all science, not just the science of economics. Secondly, we see man, created in the image of God, given the economic task of dominion,

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” ~ Genesis 2:26-31

The first and most important fact about man is that he is an image bearer, made in the image of God. Man is unique. Worldviews that instead set forward man’s functional/utilitarian role above that of his inherent dignity, or even deny his God-given dignity, end in disaster. Evolution has no “imago Dei”, and as a result directly influenced the vast death tolls of the 20th century under brutal regimes. When man is seen as an economic unit, rather than being made in the image of God, the results are tragic.

The second basic fact about man is his dominion task. Worldviews, even purportedly Christian worldviews, that undermine or diminish this fact end not only in irrelevance, but frustration and ultimately sin. The Christian man is called to work, stewardship, dominion, and cultural relevance. Surprisingly, even the hermit cannot escape dominion, economy, and economizing. He stills has to produce, trade, and economize in order to survive.

Fall

“And to Adam he said,

‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.” ~ Genesis 3:17-19

Economies and economizing were inherently needed before the Fall. Even with the pre-Fall abundance of resources and idyllic conditions, man was called to procreate, work, and cultivate. Given the finite nature of man, i.e. that man only has so much time in a day, can only be one place at once, he would need to gather, store, plan, and trade in order to establish higher levels of cultivation. Economics to one extent or another would have been operative in a pre-Fall world.

With that said, let’s not fool ourselves, economics is even more important post-Fall. We now face a hostile world, great scarcity, and backbreaking work in order to make progress. Technology, cultural advancement and economic development can alleviate the effects of the Fall, but not eliminate them.

In addition to the added need to wisely use scarce resources (economics), another factor has come into play: Man’s sin nature.

Fallen man not only downplays the need for dominion, he also seeks to play God over others and exercises ungodly dominion (whether as individuals, tribes, or political bodies). His covetousness and envy causes him to blame others for his lot, and causes him to try to find a way around the biblical command, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” ~ II Thessalonians 3:10

We will address this more when we get to the tower of Babel, but all attempts to build utopia apart from the God appointed means end in radical dystopia. Christ has laid out the path to the reformation of all things in the Great Commission. The Gospel is the transformative power needed to bring rebellious man into harmony with God, and through this impact the world. Man’s problem is fundamentally ethical and moral, not economic. Any attempt to bypass man’s ethical rebellion against God and yet resolve his post-Fall problems is an affront to Christ and doomed to failure. And yes, I’ve just described the bulk of politics both ancient and modern.

Only by turning to Christ, His word, and then becoming ambassadors of this Gospel and word will true healing be affected in this world. All else is a false illusion, and worse, treason against the King of the world.

A quick warning: What’s as bad as no social involvement on the part of Christians, is social involvement by with no clear, careful understanding of the text of Scripture. Our involvement and action needs to be

carefully Scripture grounded.

Common Questions with Short Answers

Q: Is it better to be “poor for the Lord”?

A: This view takes numerous warnings against the dangers of wealth and the love of wealth, and ignores the numerous texts talking about the godly use of wealth. There is no one size fits all answer to whether it is better to be poor or rich. Generally speaking God often brings blessings of all sort, but there are many periods of history in which godly Christians have seen nothing but persecution, poverty, and upheaval.

Paul admonishes, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” (Ephesians 4:28) So long as we don’t worship it, it is a good, wholesome goal for Christians to have extra to give to others.

Q: Is Marxism and wealth redistribution “biblical”?

A: All biblical charity is voluntary. Anything other than voluntary charity is theft. The redistribution of wealth violates the commands “thou shalt not steal” and “thou shalt not covet.” It elevates one sphere, the sword, to a messianic role never condoned by Scripture, often producing huge waste, ineffectiveness, and destruction both to the recipients, and the society. Paul tells us, “If any man will not labor, let him not eat.” Outside of other extenuating circumstances (significant mental/physical handicaps, etc.) biblical charity refuses aid to habitual deadbeats. Socialism/Marxism denies basic laws of economics, and ultimately suffers the consequences.

Q: What is the health, wealth, and prosperity “gospel”? Is it biblical?

A: The “prosperity gospel” promises that Christ came to secure healing and perfect prosperity for all of His children, and it is only our lack of faith that causes us not to enjoy these blessings. This view ends up on the other side of the fence, unable to account for those faithful saints who lived in poverty, were persecuted, and died, not due to a lack of faith, but due to God’s sovereign plan for their lives.

Q: Can nations endlessly make more “money” without any limitations or repercussions?

A: Inflating the money supply, especially with unbacked fiat currency, always leads to inflation. God warns against this inflation of the money supply...

“How the faithful city
has become a whore,
she who was full of justice!
Righteousness lodged in her,
but now murderers.
Your silver has become dross,
your best wine mixed with water.” ~ Isaiah 1:21-22

The latest fad is to reject these creation norms, with the mindset that perhaps we’ve evolved to a higher level, in which sophisticated nations can bypass God’s laws. The reality is that we don’t break God’s law, it breaks us. Inflation is theft and a hidden tax.

Practical Application:

1. We need to be familiar with at least basic economics. A population who is not familiar with basic economic principles is easily sold disastrous but good sounding ideas, whether from pulpit (social justice, etc.) or the state (rent controls, minimum wage laws, etc). These catastrophic ideas sound good but are ultimately disastrous.

2. We need to “economize.” We only have so many hours in a day, and so much energy. We can easily end up a mile wide and an inch deep. We should be self-conscious about “economizing” the following:

- Time
- Effort
- Finances
- Relationships
- Spiritual growth

In the various areas of my life, what is the best use of my time and energy? Where should I focus? What will produce the greatest impact for the kingdom of God? What will detract from effectiveness?

3. Let’s marvel in Christ. Paul tells us in Colossians that “in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” We can not truly know the world around us, unless we start with the fear of the Lord. Sure, unbelievers can drive cars and be mathematicians, but they will never be able to fully account for these things on a fundamental level or explain an intelligible universe apart from starting with Christ. Our Savior is beautiful. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The laws of the universe aren’t impersonal things, but flow from, are upheld and sustained by the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Let this lead us to greater worship of Christ!

Please reach out if you have any questions after reading this sermon/article. I’d be happy to sit down and open the Word of God with you! If you’d like to join us to hear sermons like this in person, you can join us Sundays 2pm at 701 S Seward Meridian Pkwy, Wasilla. We’d love to have you join us!