

How Biblical Teaching Encourages Business and Profit-Seeking

By Alexandria Milot

In a broken society that seems blinded by investments and income, it is hard to understand why God still commends our efforts in making profits. Most Christians can recall the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan cared for a Jewish man, sacrificing his own wealth to help him, and expected nothing in return (Luke 10:25-37). We see this as the ultimate example of how to help others and how to use the resources that have been given to us. However, there are many examples throughout the Bible where God reveals to us his support of profit-seeking individuals and businesses.

Despite the good work done through non-profit organizations, good works can still be done by companies that aim to profit off their product or service. Before looking further into what God says about profit, one must understand its definition. Profit is defined as selling a product or service for more than the total cost for producing the product or providing the service. Profits are usually a good measure of whether a business is successful within its industry. When profits are high, investors are more likely to take an interest in a business.

As Christians we do not only care about what the world thinks about our business, but also about how God judges our actions and motives. Some people believe aiming to profit in a business venture is a self-centered practice. Profit-seeking can be viewed in a negative light simply because it benefits the individual more than the surrounding community. However, key examples are given to us by Jesus through his parables. The parables teach the importance of using our money wisely and gaining a profit, which eventually leads to a greater reward.

One example is the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-20). A man leaves for a journey. He gives money to his servants and entrusts them with his property. When the man returns, he finds two of his servants have multiplied their shares, but one servant has fearfully buried his talent. The man praises and rewards his “good and faithful” servants because they had made a profit from the resources they had been initially given (Matthew 25:23). Not only does God commend profit seeking, but he refers to it as a “good and faithful” act.

Earning a profit may be seen as the exploitation of others by someone who does not believe that for-profit companies are encouraged by God. Making a wrongful profit and taking advantage of consumers is certainly a practice of some, however not every company aims to do so. God calls Christians to multiply their resources and help others by providing necessary products and services, but also to wisely use their profits in turn to benefit employees and the community.

When a profit-seeking company is not corrupted by monopoly or dishonest behavior, it can be used to reflect many attributes of Christ. Such attributes include the love of others, compassion, wisdom, and vision for the future. Just as the wife in Proverbs 31 cares for her household, maidens, and the needy with the profit she makes from selling goods to merchants; profit-seeking companies and individuals are called to use their resources and profits to show God’s love and grace to the world. The world that is desperately in need of God’s grace and love.

The parable in Matthew, the Good Samaritan in Luke, and the wife referenced in Proverbs are only three examples God gives to us through his Word about business and profit-seeking. God has not given individuals and businesses financial opportunities like making a profit, so that we may bury or hide them (Matthew 25). Instead He asks us to find ways to love and help others (Luke 10). Not every profit-seeking company is perfect. Many are corrupted in various ways. As Christians we do not need to conform to business practices tainted by greed and sin to be considered successful.

As long as our eyes are set on Christ and our motives are rooted in love and wisdom, profit-seeking businesses are able to make important contributions to the community and beyond. This is exactly what God has called us to do through his word as it is written in 1 Timothy: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19, ESV).