

CHURCH IGNORANCE OF BIBLE ECONOMICS

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It is interesting (and sad) to hear church people talking about being “separate from the world”, yet when it comes to economic matters, no obvious differences can be seen in the way they borrow money, use the banking system, guarantee debts, buy on Hire Purchase or Lay-by, and have mortgages. Indeed, there is little difference in the way they treat the poor; to them that is the responsibility of the church or the state. This is because church people are subject to doctrines that fail to promote economics in moral terms, and thus they handle their finances in the same way that the “world” does. When it comes to election time, their vote goes to the political party, which they believe will give them the best financial advantage.

It is safe to say that the Bible speaks to economic issues more than any other practical issue. Whole sections of the Law, the book of Proverbs and many of the parables of Jesus deal with economic matters, or have economic consequences. They tell us what our attitude should be toward wealth and how a Christian should handle his or her finances and property. The Bible contains principles about sharing within a group in the 2 Cor. 8:15 manner, *“As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack”*, but in this sort of area, it is important to note others outside of a given group are excluded.

Today, in any consideration of economic theory, few Christians ask, “what is a just price”, for instance. It obviously is no sin to *“buy and sell, and get gain”*-[James 4:13], and to trade as shown in the parable of the talents-[Luke 19], but as soon as sight is lost of whose wealth it is we are using, selfishness takes over. The “just price” becomes “what will the market stand”. Then we cease to operate within God’s boundaries.

The Bible teaches that there are two aspects to human nature. Firstly, we are created in the image of God and thus able to control the economic system. But secondly, human beings are sinful and thus tend towards greed and exploitation. This points to the need to protect individuals from human sinfulness in the economic system. So Christians should have a much more balanced view of economics, but they do not because they accept the fallacy of popular utopian economic theories, rather than the biblical non-theoretical position. They refuse to live under God’s economic laws and fail to take human sinfulness, or the Law of God, seriously.

When we look at programs like “World Vision”, we can witness Christians following Marxism/Humanism, believing that people will be changed from the outside in. Change the economic base, they say, and you will change human beings. This is one of the reasons why Marxism/Humanism is doomed to failure, because it does not take into account human sinfulness and the need for spiritual redemption. All humanistic agencies, such as New Age, World Government and most churches, do not separate “God’s people” from all others, as the Bible does. “Redemption” in the biblical sense can only apply to one people; the very meaning of the word determines this, as do bold limiting statements like Psalm 111:9, *“He sent redemption unto his people”* and Galatians 4:5, *“To redeem them that were under the law”*.

Both Testaments of the Bible tell of an economic position that God requires His people to take. Many will accept the Old Testament economic position applied within Israel, but few will see that this continues within the New Testament, and that the New Testament continues to separate God’s people from all others. It is not hard to see that when Jesus taught about giving and sharing, He was talking about His disciples doing this amongst themselves. The disciples were Israelites who believed. No other group was included in giving and sharing. This is a pattern that continues through the New Testament.

Acts 2:44 *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need”*

There was no sharing of possessions and goods outside of “all that believed”. There was no “World Vision” / “one world”-type action

When Paul said in Rom. 15:25: *“But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem”*, the distribution was made only to “saints”. From these examples, we can see that there is no form of universalism, in putting these things into practice.

In Biblical economics, principles are laid down about borrowing. In general Christians do the same as non-Christians when it comes to borrowing money. Christians may have heard of how God hates usury, but they still indulge. If they had the blessing they profess in their chorus sessions, they

would be applying, Deut. 28:12, "*The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow*". The New Testament words, "Owe no man any thing" are not accepted today.

Principles like, "*If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth*" are no longer taught and are seldom practiced. Please note the "*of thy brethren*" and "*thy poor brother*" limitation; this confirms the absence of any application outside of a defined group. Jesus did not teach anything different when He said, "*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again*". Jesus was again addressing His disciples, and His disciples only. Only then could, "*And so shall all men know that you are my disciples*", become visible.

Where Jesus says, "*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it*", could this possibly permit credit on usury?" Money to build must be available before starting. In today's world, doing something God's way might seem impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

The economic arena is the place where much of everyday life takes place, and because Christians are not taught on the subject, Christians have no idea how to begin to construct personal lives, government and an economy that liberates human potentiality and limits human sinfulness. Biblical economics flows on to matters such as private property rights, inheritance and the exchange of goods and services. If they had understanding, Christians could reject state-controlled or centrally controlled economies, which would concentrate power in the hands of a few sinful individuals. Instead, we could support an economic system that would disperse that power and protect us from greed and exploitation. Right teaching on economics could cause Christians to become "salt and light" in the community, where economic justice can best be achieved if each person is accountable for his own productivity. Justice can then flow to the poor, properly outside of the State's involvement.

There is, of course, an order to be followed. The prime solution is not to change the economic system first, but to change human nature with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Churches which believe beyond universal social action, that is, those who talk about personal salvation, seem to think that this is the sole object of their being, rather than conversion being the start of a journey where one receives an inheritance, which inheritance is fully entered into at the end of the journey. We read of, "*And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" In this matter of inheritance, Jesus followed with Biblical economics as it applied to this man's need, by saying, "*sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me*".

It is claimed that the Christian life is about relationships only, but James says, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*". Here again is an application of practical biblical economics.

So what do we find churches doing? Firstly, we find them borrowing money to build buildings and buy noise-making equipment. Church members pay (sometimes faithfully) tithes and offerings, but the collection does not go to "*the poor always ye have*" as Jesus says. Paul put it this way, "*Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do*"-[Gal. 2:10]. So where does much of the collection go? Much goes instead to a rich bank, in interest payments. Some may go to support an organisation with well paid administrators. To ease their conscience, churches have a food collection box for the poor. So the churches are afraid to lay the Word of God on the line, because people might be offended and leave the church. Then the church could not meet its mortgage commitments. Instead of conviction, churches try to become user-friendly using emotion and hype to blind the people, to keep up appearances and to try to keep money coming in. Many evils flow from this. Answer the question yourself, should we have fellowship with "*the unfruitful works of darkness*", or should we "*rather reprove them*"? But we cannot rightly reprove anyone unless we ourselves are subject to God's economy.