

***Living In The Kingdom Economy:
A Roadmap for Christian Economic Activity in the Modern World***

As Christians committed to the Lordship of the risen Jesus, membership in His church, and the authority of the Bible we affirm that Christ calls us to live faithfully in anticipation of His coming kingdom. We further affirm that this call to faithful, kingdom living comes primarily through God's Word and extends to every area of our lives, not least our economic lives.

The Source of Our Economic Lives: God's Gift

1. We believe that the foundation of all economic life comes down to the fact that:
 - a. God created and owns EVERYTHING
 - b. God has entrusted humans, made in His image, to steward his creation through WORK.
 - c. Thus WORK is the privilege and obligation of every human being, and the primary purpose of every human's work is the flourishing of humanity and the created world in line with God's purposes.

Confession and Commitment: The Church's Response to God's Economic Gifts

1. We acknowledge that Christians, committed to the authority of Christ and the Bible may nevertheless disagree as to what sorts of ***political*** arrangements best create the opportunity for economic flourishing. While some Christians will take a more positive position in relation to the state, others may believe that human sin has more deeply corrupted the state. This will result in different perspectives on ***political*** arrangements.
2. We maintain that this political disagreement is secondary to the primary discussion about ***what God's Word requires of God's church*** in terms of their individual and corporate economic lives.
3. We therefore commit to take responsibility for hearing afresh the Bible's challenges for our economic lives.
4. We further commit to relinquish our idols of wealth, materialism, individualism, and political ideologies (whether market-based, centrist, socialist, or otherwise).

Anchors in the Storm: 5 Biblical Anchors to Guide the Church Forward

1. As such we identify the following 5 Biblical Anchors. These anchors are not economic blueprints, but rather guides to keep our economic activity grounded. The ship can move some distance in many different directions while remaining anchored, but it cannot be swept out to sea. We believe the following are Biblical, have the potential to anchor our creative economic imaginations and actions in God's world, and are practical, applicable guidelines for real behavior.
 - a. ***God, Not Mammon: The Idolatry Anchor-*** Idolatry is an economic issue. Israel followed after Baal because they thought that Baal could make the crops grow and keep the cows from getting sick. God's answer through Elijah was that it is God who cares for the crops and the cows, and that Baal is powerless to create wealth, security, or satisfaction (1 Kgs 16ff). Jesus clearly taught that literal money can become an idol of our worship (Matt 6:24), and commanded his disciples to worship God alone, recognizing the inability of Money, like Baal, to provide meaning or security. Jesus also recognized that the way to turn our hearts from the idolatry of money is to change our practices with money; thus he commanded his people "to lay up treasures in heaven," for where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (Matt 6:19-21). Paul commands Timothy to avoid idolatrous "love of money" which is "a root of all evil," "plunges men to ruin and destruction," and has caused people to

“wander from the faith” (1 Tim 6). **Christians must give up their idols of money, wealth, and possessions, and anchor their economic activity in a commitment to worship and trust God alone.**

- b. *No Poor Among You: The Equity Anchor*- The Bible uplifts economic relationships that are relatively (though not absolutely) equitable. Manna falls so that “the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered less did not have too little,” (Exo 16:17) and God divided the Promised Land equally among all Israelite families. Laws requiring the release of all Israelite slaves and the return to property at the Jubilee (Lev 25) ensured that relative equity was maintained, and militated against a permanently rich and permanently poor class in the faith community. God comes in judgment against those who violate this equitable distribution (1 Kings 21:20-24; Isa 5:8-10). The early church embodied this Jubilee attitude towards property and the result was that “there were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34-35). For Paul, sacrificial giving by the better-off to create more equality isn’t so that “others should be eased” while the wealthier burdened, “but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality” (2 Cor 8:13-14). **Christians must anchor their economic activity in a commitment to pursue a more equitable community in terms of wages and ownership, reducing multi-generational poverty through sacrificial generosity.**
- c. *One Table, One Baptism, No Distinction: The Community Anchor*- Although the Western world has put economics on the throne, making economic calculus the primary factor in decision making, the Bible calls Christians to order their economic lives towards a community in which every person can experience truly human flourishing. So the Sabbath laws are designed to allow “your brother” to remain in the land (Lev 25:35), the most vulnerable share in the feast with the wealthiest in the Deut 26 tithe-meal, and the Lord’s Supper has the power to support kingdom economies (Acts 2:42ff), but is worthless if practiced in a way that shames the needy (1 Cor 11:17ff). Paul puts his social capital behind restoring a run-away slave because the slave and master are brothers in the Lord (the book of Philemon), and James condemns the kind of class distinctions within the church that erode the very meaning of the good news of the kingdom itself (James 2:1-7). **Christians must anchor their economic activity in a commitment to honor relationships with all God’s people, and to seek the flourishing of all God’s people as a priority greater than individual financial earning or accumulation.**
- d. *Work and Wages, Gleaning and Giving: The Good Jobs Anchor*- Centrist economies put their hope in good planning. Capitalist economies put their hope in individuals pursuing their self-interest. Kingdom economies are founded on God’s people sacrificially and strategically sharing and stewarding God’s gifts. The Gleaning Laws (Lev 19:9-10) commanded the Israelite small-business owner to accept lower profits and create jobs for the poor (who could collect from the edges of the owner’s field) which did not benefit the company. And as this example illustrates, the church’s sacrificial efforts for the poor should normally occur through opportunities for work. The Bible consistently holds up work as the normal and appropriate way for people to provide for themselves (2 Thess 3:10-13; 1 Thess 4:11ff), and, counter to both ancient and contemporary cultures, recognizes the dignity of manual labor (Exo 31:1-11; Paul’s tent making), even referring to slaves as actually working for Christ Himself (Col 3:22-25). The Year of Jubilee (Lev 25) required a redistribution of business

assets (fields) to Israelite families that had become landless in order to create opportunities for jobs and assets at the expense of those who had worked hard to acquire them.¹ In Paul's call to the church to give sacrificially (2 Cor 8:9), he reminded them of Jesus, who, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." And the early church was willing to liquidate their income-producing assets to provide for their communities (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35). The Bible also consistently raises the issue of just wages, recognizing that many employers then and now do not pay fair wages. So, for instance, the owner is presumed guilty and the slave innocent if a slave runs away (Deut 23:15-16) and James prophesies hell-fire judgment on those who held back their workers' wages by fraud and "lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence" (James 5:5-6). Wages should be paid fairly and on time (Deut 24:14-15), and the prophets declare judgment on those who oppress through poor wages (Mal 3:5; Jer 22:13). Further, the above Thessalonian passages demonstrate a connection between working and eating or providing for one's family, thus indicating that God's design is that jobs provide enough for the worker's basic needs. ***Christians must anchor their economic activity in sacrificial generosity that empowers the poor to have access to jobs with just and fair wages.***

- e. *The Heavens Declare the Glory: The Creation Care Anchor-* If God's gift of creation is the foundation of our economic life, then the care of creation is one of the primary purposes of our economic activity and one of the primary ethical concerns in evaluating our economic practices. Humanity's original job centered on working and keeping the garden (Gen 2:18), and after the Fall, God speaks up for the rights of both land and animals. So God declares that the land also will have a Sabbath rest (Lev 25:4), that the ox has a right to eat of the fruits of the land while engaged in agricultural production (Deut 25:4), and that a righteous man cares for the needs of his animals (Prov 12:10). At a deeper level, the entire Bible witnesses to God's own delight in creation and constant provision for it (Prov 8; Psa 104; the final chapters of Job). The Bible calls creation itself to respond in worship (Psa 19), and both Isaiah and Revelation reveal that the entire goal of creation is a resurrected creation in which all creation worships and glorifies the Creator (Rev 5:13). And indeed, the creation groans in its present suffering as it waits for this final resurrection, a resurrection which is bound up with the resurrection of the children of God (Rom 8:21ff). To summarize, God loves the creation, cares for the creation, includes the resurrection of creation in His redemptive purposes, and redeems humans in their vocation to care for and steward creation towards creation's own flourishing. ***Christians must anchor their economic activity in a commitment to honor the land and other living creatures as gifts to be cared for and stewarded, recognizing creation's fundamental role in glorifying God in the new heavens and new earth, and embracing economic practices that avoid harming creation and pursue the flourishing of creation.***

Biblical Anchors In Our World Today

¹ Many argue against the language of redistribution, because the families were simply returning to their allotted portions. In this way, it is clear that the Jubilee does not look like much of the "redistribution" that occurs in a modern society through taxation and other mechanisms. Nevertheless, the fields were redistributed to the original owners, and we believe this language appropriately captures the sacrifice and counter-cultural mechanism of the Jubilee.

1. Entering God's kingdom through salvation by faith in Jesus means that as Christians we have also been baptized into God's kingdom economy. Of course this does not mean that we magically find ourselves outside of the city, state, or nation's economic systems. But it does mean that our imaginations and actions suddenly come under new economic management, and that as the Church we begin to embody Kingdom Economics from within the world's economic systems. We play by different rules in order to win a different game. What follows are some mustard-seed sized examples of a few ways that the church could begin to live lives anchored in God's economy today.
 - a. Christian business owners, managers, HR workers, and employees in general should look for ways to increase opportunities for JOBS and OWNERSHIP for the poor. This could look like:
 - i. Community Investment Banks and Venture Capital Banks targeting low-income entrepreneurs.
 - ii. Entrepreneurship and job training.
 - iii. Business owners and decision-makers choosing LABOR-INTENSIVE methods of production over CAPITAL-INTENSIVE methods of production, even if it costs the business money.
 - iv. Choosing to limit the differences between the compensation of employees at the bottom from those at the top.
 - v. Starting worker-owner cooperatives and employee stock ownership/profit-sharing models.
 - vi. Choosing to pay hard-to-hire people at home and in the workplace (ex-felons, those with disabilities, the elderly, etc), and creating businesses specifically to create employment for hard-to-hire demographics.
 - vii. Working with churches and non-profits to create jobs for everyone willing to work.
 - b. Christians should pursue higher wages for lower-level employees by accepting lower wages for themselves, and accept lower wages as part of Christian vocation and stewardship where necessary.
 - c. Christians should work to reduce multi-generational extreme wealth and poverty, even if it means regular voluntary redistribution of assets *a la* the Jubilee (this includes creating greater access to quality education as one of the most important assets of our time, and sacrificial giving of multi-generational wealth, including inheritances, in order to pursue God's economy rather than our own ever-increasing security).
 - d. Christians should work to create a more socially-conscious, family-supportive, and balanced approach to work in general, rejecting the Western disease of workaholism, and pursuing corporate approaches to work that accept lower wages and prestige in return for healthier, more cohesive communities.
 - e. Christians should work towards creation's flourishing, either by reducing negative environmental impacts or promoting positive environmental shifts. This includes paying attention to creational norms and working "with the grain" of God's world.
2. There is no limit to the potential application of these Biblical Anchors to our economic lives. If we allow God's Word to shape us by His Spirit, we will truly be the economic salt and light of our economically broken world. The above ideas are but small, tentative starts; we joyfully look forward to the day when the whole Church is motivated by God's economic vision, committed to God's economic activity, and participating in God's sacrificial generosity.

How Will They Hear?: Getting the Anchors Into The Church

1. If we are even close to correct about the Bible's call on Christ's people, this calls for a major shift in the way we talk about business, finance, jobs, wages, economics, and career. This shift should be pursued by in several ways:
 - a. All of us must pray and lead others in prayer, repenting of our economic failures and calling on the Spirit to fill each of us with the wisdom and courage for the economic tasks ahead.
 - b. Pastors must preach on these issues. The Word of God needs to be lifted up and allowed to speak to our economic lives in all of its complexity.
 - c. Churches must disciple all of their congregations in these issues, and particularly those who have power and influence in the market place.
 - d. Christian colleges and seminaries must begin equipping their students to think about business and economics in light of the Biblical Anchors. Business and Economics departments need rigorous, academic work to understand economic and business models that embody the anchors above, preparing students to run cooperative businesses, manage community investment funds, and missionally pursue job creation.
 - e. Churches should consider their budgets and spending in terms of how to pursue these anchors, including "gleaning" work programs and investment in mission-oriented businesses and non-profits.
 - f. The vocation of entrepreneur and business person needs to be acknowledged as a legitimate and essential way to live out the Christian faith *if done in a way consistent with the biblical witness to kingdom economics.*

Rejecting Scarcity, Embracing Abundance

Many will shrink back from all of this, arguing that there is not enough to go around, that we cannot afford these steps. Let us hope not, since the commands of God are absolute and God has called His people to be martyrs before! Nevertheless we maintain that the problem is not scarcity but a lack of creativity, not a lack of resources, but a deficit of commitment and willingness to sacrifice. God has called His people to live in His kingdom, and that kingdom has an economy. We believe that economy can be glimpsed through the Anchors above, that this economy is coming with Christ at His return, and that by His Spirit we can begin to live into it today. This then is not only an economic or ecclesial task, but an evangelistic one as well. Let us meditate on God's Word, seek to embody these Biblical Anchors, and take up our crosses and follow Christ in the marketplace. Maybe then it will be said of us, as it was said of some of the original Christians concerning their economic experiments, that "the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved."