

Principles of Economics, Part 6

Written by Calvin Fox

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Here are those Biblical Economic Principles, revealed in the Torah and given to Israel, which are to be practiced by the Covenant People of God Church) today:

Stewardship still comes first. The Creation or Cultural Mandate remains in effect and is to be taught and obeyed by the Church. It is understood that this still involves the care and cultivation of the entire earth and its resources- everything that sustains life and the economic processes that make that possible for all.

Sharing is to be the defining characteristic of life for all Christians. See 1 Timothy 6:17. Money and Profit are to be vigorously pursued, but motivated by Ministry, not self-gratification. Compare the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) with the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-14, 18)

The extended Family is particularly the provenance of sharing. 1 Timothy 5:3 Here is the heart, the source, the well spring from which sharing flows. Note: Christians must be activists on behalf of the family, especially the extended family. This means the family is the primary care giver of its members who might become homeless or destitute due to tragedy, crisis or oppression. We must be pro-natalist, pro-elderly, pro-life in every sense, across the generations. Thus would mean opposing trends in society, as well as government programs and legislation, that undermine extended and multi-generational families. I say "extended", because it is far closer to the Biblical Family than either the contemporary (any combination of two or more people of any age living together) or Victorian (the nuclear combination of a married Dad and Mom and their two ? children) definitions of family.

The local church is the major source of care for its members, for whom it is their family. Mark 10:28-30. The Church is responsible to care for its members (brothers and sisters in Christ, accountable to the Church and living under its discipline), separated from their birth families, who become homeless or destitute due to violence, exploitation, theft, etc or tragedy. See Hebrews 10:32-34 with Matthew 25:35-40; Acts 4:34-35 and 5:1-6; James 2:15; 1 John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 8:1 with 9:7 and 1 Cor.16:1 Galatians 6:10, et. al.

People who become poor due to their own personal (sinful or lazy) behavior are not the responsibility of family or church. 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 6-10

The Tithe serves as a "rule of thumb"- a Principle like all others. It gives a minimum standard for giving to support the Church and its poor members. If we reject the Principle of the Tithe because it is Old Testament (the Law) then we consistently can reject all the other Principles we have found there. If the argument is that the Tithe is legalistic and we live under grace, which is greater, then it follows that we must give far more than the Tithe to the Church and Poor.

We practice "gleaning" when we give the poor among us the opportunity to work on a quid pro quo basis for a portion of what the rest of us produce [products] and which we designate for this purpose. This applies primarily to businesses.

All of these are very practical, Scriptural ways of "loving our neighbor". All remind us (especially when we are resisting with excuses about not having enough to afford them) that God is the true owner of all we have and we can trust Him to provide, especially when we are using it in

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Ministry to others.

Work: Christians must model and teach the Biblical work ethic. We are to be pro-labor. We must be active in promoting and providing education, training and opportunities for employment and work for all people. Extensive knowledge, skills and appropriate technology (as well as systems of family and community support) are all essential for economic viability. All this is absolutely crucial and a major factor in the long term solution for poverty. If they are employers, Christians are to be sure their employees are treated and paid fairly, with safe and healthy work conditions and not oppressed or abused. Failure to treat employees in this way is considered by God to be very serious sin. If they are employees, Christians must promote policies within their workplace that will ensure all of this. Christians are to be politically active in seeking and enforcing legislation and laws to these ends. Oppression would include intentionally depriving (robbing) people of these necessities, eg- denying certain children access to good schools or denying certain adults access to training or employment or denying minority business owners the opportunity to bid on contracts. Such deprivation, often institutionalized, is a major cause of poverty in America.

Finally, we must consider the principle of Economic Growth. We have seen that this is to be expected and is a good thing. Christians tend to take this concept to extremes, either free market Capitalism or State controlled production and distribution, Socialism.

Biblically informed Christians will support "private property" and the ideal of free market Capitalism (as defined earlier), rather than collective or government ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods. There is no such thing as truly free market Capitalism. America has a mixed economy. It comes down to degrees and compromise; but, Biblical Christians will be very reluctant about supporting government interference in economic affairs beyond the amount necessary for Justice. They will resist coerced redistribution of economic wealth. (What that means in actual practice will be debated.)

God expects intentional effort to increase personal wealth. See the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), but there is no doubt that unlimited growth and the accumulation of wealth is a problem. Biblical Christians are realists about human nature and the evils which that can cause in any economy. The safeguards in the Law of God given to Israel, designed to prevent or at least limit the accumulation of wealth, private or corporate, when it comes at the cost of economic injustice, apply to Christians today. (Injustice, remember, is the violation of Biblical Economic Principles, e.g.-waste of natural resources or oppression of workers)

Christians should advocate laws and policies that respect everyone's right to Education, "Technical Know-How" and access to "Social Capital". They will promote dismantling all laws and policies that are designed to prevent anyone's acquisition of those assets. No one has the right to monopolize them or deny them to others. Christians will not take economic advantage (will not profit off) of others. This is a prohibition of usury and profit-gouging, not a prohibition of fair interest rates in a voluntary, contractual commercial transaction.

All the Principles laid out here apply to Christian owned business. Christians should actively seek to persuade the Boards, Stockholders, CEOs, CFOs and all levels of Management of

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Corporations and Businesses everywhere to conduct their business according to these principles (whether Christian or not). They will also continually and intentionally seek the regeneration of the hearts of all employers and employees, through sharing the Gospel.

These economic Principles need to be continually taught, in churches and elsewhere, to those who know Christ, with the intent that they will live by them as well as work for the re/formation or redemption of the economic system.

It must be clear. This is not a secular Vision. We are talking about the Kingdom of Christ. Furthermore, the Reign of Christ must precede and accompany the Realm of Christ. The latter can not be accomplished by coercion of any kind. We are not advocating Theocracy. The Realm requires the work of the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Its fulfillment on earth will not be realized until the second Advent of Christ. This is a call to the Church to live the Kingdom way regardless of the outcome- a call to be faithful to God in the midst of an ungodly society. Seeking to promote and live by these economic Principles (the Law) is our witness, fulfilling our vocation to be Light in the Dark and the Salt of the earth.